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Alaska Wilderness League Touts Salazar's Support for Wild Alaska

Conservation Group Urges Senate to Confirm Colorado Senator as Secretary of Interior

Statement from Cindy Shogan, executive director of Alaska Wilderness League:

“The Alaska Wilderness League urges the Senate to confirm Senator Ken Salazar (D-CO) as Secretary of the Interior. If confirmed, Sen. Salazar has proven that he will honor his mandate to be a true steward of our public lands and waters.

Sen. Salazar has been a champion for America's wilderness. Throughout his career as an elected official, his record shows that he believes in preserving Alaska's wild places for future generations. As a senator, he opposed opening Alaska's iconic Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling. The Department of Interior (DOI) plays a vital role in shaping the future of Alaska—69 percent of Alaska's lands are managed by the federal government. Only Nevada has a larger percentage of public land. With Salazar at Interior's helm, we can all feel renewed hope for Alaska's wild future.

For eight years, many Americans felt they were in constant battle with the Bush administration over protecting and preserving many of our national treasures. Americans wanted public lands in public hands, yet the Bush DOI seemed intent on putting the fate of our lands in private hands. We watched with dismay as commercial interests were put ahead of the public interest and as scandalous behavior replaced responsible management—from Minerals Management Service (MMS) officials being literally in bed with the oil industry to Fish and Wildlife Service leaders altering and suppressing scientific findings.

In Alaska, the DOI pushed full-steam ahead with industrial development without a thought to the impacts on the wildlife and people who depend on Alaska's pristine, untouched wilderness places. In the Arctic Ocean, the Bush administration's MMS increased the waters leased for oil and gas exploitation by 848 percent, even as the impacts from development on several endangered and threatened species remain undetermined. And the fate of 20 million acres of public lands in areas such as Bristol Bay hang in the balance—a stroke of the pen away from being fed to the oil and gas industry.

Together with a Congress and president-elect committed to developing a comprehensive energy strategy, Salazar could play a key role in ensuring that preserving our nation's public lands legacy is an integral part of our energy future. We urge him to direct the various DOI agencies to act quickly to put a hold on the aggressive new development plans pushed through by the Bush administration in Alaska, and develop a public lands management strategy that takes a precautionary approach to further development. We look forward to working with Sen. Salazar to ensure that Alaska's wild national treasures are preserved for generations to come.”

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