

**ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE \* GWICH'IN STEERING COMMITTEE \*  
THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY**

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**Sens. Murkowski, Begich Bill: Dirty, Destructive and Distracting**

WASHINGTON - Rather than join the effort to lead our country toward a clean energy future, Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Sen. Mark Begich (D-AK) today introduced a bill that serves as a distraction from the new administration's energy priorities. This bill is the latest in a long string of attempts by the Alaska delegation to open up the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development.

"We are disappointed because we would rather work with Sens. Murkowski and Begich on a comprehensive Arctic climate and energy plan," said Eleanor Huffines, Alaska Director for The Wilderness Society.

"This bill is nothing more than an attempt to distract us from the real issue – the out of control leasing and development that's been going on for the past eight years in America's Arctic," said Kristen Miller, Government Affairs Director at Alaska Wilderness League. "The region is already under immense stress from the impacts of climate change and there are now close to 100 million acres open for oil and gas development. For eight years, the Bush administration paid no heed to huge gaps in science and potential impacts to this fragile, unique ecosystem. Yet, instead of addressing these important issues, Sens. Murkowski and Begich introduce a dead-on-arrival piece of legislation that aims to keep Congress stuck in the same stale debate."

Oil and gas development requires roads, air strips, gravel mines, pipelines and seismic surveys. And despite industry's claims, oil companies in Alaska have never drilled a horizontal distance for a production well over three miles and rarely over one mile.

"Sen. Murkowski isn't clear where she gets her facts supporting this bill. For example she provides no reference for her claim that 700,000 jobs would be created. This may have come from a long discredited study funded and released by the American Petroleum Institute," said Miller. "It's undisputed that investment today in renewable and alternative energy will result in a huge number of long-term sustainable jobs."

Alaska's North Slope tells the real story of oil and gas development with an average of 453 spills annually since 1996, according to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation. In 2006, British Petroleum's corrosion problems at Prudhoe Bay caused the largest oil spill in North Slope history – 200,000 gallons of crude oil. Already in 2009, two

major spills have released more than 100,000 gallons of crude oil and contaminated waste water onto Alaska's North Slope. Oil development remains a risky and dirty business, in spite of any lessons we may have learned from the Exxon Valdez oil spill, which unleashed 11 million barrels of oil into Prince William Sound 20 years ago this March.

"After publicly admonishing BP's negligent oversight over the last decade on Alaska's North Slope, Sen. Murkowski knows better than anyone that now is not the time to be pushing for new drilling," said Huffines. "The fact of the matter is that environmentally devastating practices are still business as usual on the North Slope."

The Arctic Refuge is one of the last true wilderness areas left in the United States. It contains valuable habitat for 250 species of wildlife – including caribou, polar bears, grizzly bears and migrating birds. The wildlife is a central food source for the people of the Gwich'in Nation. The Porcupine Caribou Herd has sustained the Gwich'in for over 20,000 years. The herd is dependant on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge for the calving and nursery for their offspring. Protecting the calving and nursery grounds is a human rights issue for the Gwich'in people.

"For every barrel of oil that could be developed from the Arctic Refuge, 17 barrels have already been saved through conservation," said Luci Beach, Executive Director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee. "The coastal plain is one of the last small pieces of the North Slope that's legislatively closed to leasing. Why should we be the generation that must consume everything, and leave nothing for future generations?"

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