

ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE * FRIENDS OF ALASKA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES * NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY * NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL * NORTHERN ALASKA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER * REPUBLICANS FOR ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION * SIERRA CLUB * THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY* TRUSTEES FOR ALASKA

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: June 8, 2010

CONTACT: Emilie Surrusco, Alaska Wilderness League, 202-544-5205
David Raskin, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, 907-235-0514
Taldi Walter, National Audubon Society, 202-861-2242
Eric Young, NRDC, 202-289-2373
Pamela Miller, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, 907-452-5021
Dave Jenkins, Republicans for Environmental Protection, 703-785-9570
Dan Ritzman, Sierra Club, 907-276-4044
Neil Shader, The Wilderness Society, 202-429-3941
Trish Rolfe, Trustees for Alaska, 907-276-4244

Millions of Americans Join Call to Protect Arctic Refuge

WASHINGTON – On behalf of the more than 10 million Americans they represent, over 30 organizations submitted comments on the future of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge yesterday, urging the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to recommend wilderness designation for all 19 million acres of this unique, wild place as part of a mandated federal review process.

Following is a statement from the above-listed organizations:

“We are proud to represent the millions of Americans who are speaking out today in support of one of our nation’s greatest natural treasures. The future of the Arctic Refuge has been debated for far too long. As we celebrate the 50th anniversary of this iconic place, we are confident that FWS’s Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) will bring us one step closer to wilderness designation for the entire Arctic Refuge - including the Coastal Plain, also known as the Refuge’s biological heart.

The Arctic Refuge is the only national wildlife refuge established specifically to preserve wilderness values. Its Coastal Plain is a vital part of a larger ecosystem that is home to some of America’s most iconic wildlife species, including wolves, polar bears, grizzly bears, muskoxen and caribou. In addition, numerous bird species from six continents depend on the Arctic Refuge, including birds that migrate to every state in America.

The Gwich’in people have lived in the Arctic region for thousands of years. They regard the Coastal Plain as “The Sacred Place Where Life Begins” because it has been the most frequently-used birthing and nursery grounds for the migratory Porcupine Caribou Herd on which their culture depends.

For decades the oil industry has sought to destroy this unique wilderness refuge, despite the fact that it represents the only place on Alaska's North Slope that is legislatively closed to development. The tragic BP spill in the Gulf of Mexico has dramatically shown that oil drilling is a dangerous, dirty business. With more than 400 spills annually on average on Alaska's North Slope, onshore drilling is no safer or cleaner than drilling in our nation's offshore areas. Some places are too special to sacrifice merely to increase the bloated profits of the oil industry. The Arctic Refuge is a national treasure that we must pass on, undiminished, to future generations."

For more information on the CCP process visit <http://arctic.fws.gov/ccp.htm>

For a full list of organizations that submitted comments urging wilderness designation for the Arctic Refuge, contact Emilie Surrusco at 202-544-5205 or emilie@alaskawild.org