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Preserve the Reserve, Industry-backed Bill Undercuts Surface Values of America's Greatest Unknown Treasures

WASHINGTON – The House Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources meets today to hear testimony on H.R. 2150, “*The National Petroleum Reserve Alaska Access Act*.” The bill attempts to redefine the Reserve and undercut the amazing surface values of these public lands. What’s more, the bill is full of empty promises, as the U.S. Geological Survey has determined that any oil production in the Reserve is at least 10-20 years off – this bill provides only rhetoric, and no real solutions to American’s pain at the pump.

Statement by Cindy Shogan, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

“Representative Doc Hastings’ (R-WA) legislation, H.R. 2150 - *The National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska Act*, is full of empty promises. It is just another drilling bill in a string of industry-backed Republican-backed bills, providing only rhetoric when real solutions are needed to resolve American’s pain at the pump. Instead of solely focusing on drilling the Reserve – one of America’s greatest unknown treasures – we should also be ensuring that the special places within the Reserve are granted the strongest possible protections.

The proposed legislation redefines the purpose of the Reserve and undercuts the protection of surface values which, along with responsible oil and gas development, is a congressional mandate in the Reserve. Spanning 23.5 million acres across the western North Slope of Alaska, the Reserve is the largest single unit of public lands in the nation. The Reserve harbors rich vital wild lands and wildlife such as the Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd, millions of migratory birds, grizzly bears, threatened polar bears, walrus, wolves, endangered beluga whales and more.

The legislation echoes the same call for annual leases that President Obama already has committed to hold, and seeks to expedite drilling through risky shortcuts. The Obama Administration is already doing what is needed to allow reasonable access to oil and gas resources within the Reserve. Despite the rhetoric, and the legislation’s requirement for more study of the Reserve’s oil and gas potential, the United States Geological Survey in May 2011 found that the Reserve’s oil potential is far less than originally thought – about 90 percent less. Representative Hastings approach is both unnecessary and short-sighted.

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