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Unnecessary and Risky Industry-backed Bill to Drill the Reserve Moves Forward in Congress

WASHINGTON – The House Natural Resources Committee met today to markup H.R. 2150, “The National Petroleum Reserve Alaska Access Act.” The bill which redefines the Reserve to cash in for its scant oil supply, while disregarding the amazing surface values of these public lands, passed through committee today.

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

“Representative Doc Hastings (R-WA) approach to ‘solve’ American’s pain at the pump is risky, short-sighted, and a waste of taxpayer money. Expediting drilling through risky shortcuts in the National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska does not provide a solution to the rising cost of gas and undercuts the protection of surface values which, along with responsible oil and gas development, is a congressional mandate in the Reserve.

What’s more, President Obama has already committed to hold annual lease sales in the Reserve and 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.

Instead of solely focusing on drilling the Reserve and extracting its scant resources, we should preserve the Reserve and ensure that the special places within the Reserve are granted the strongest possible protections. 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.

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