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Congressional Budget Deal Saves No Money at the Expense of our Wild Lands

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

“U.S. Congress should be embarrassed – last night’s Continuing Resolution blocks critical funding for the U.S. Department of Interior’s (DOI) Wild Lands policy and opens up some of the nation’s most high-value wilderness areas to development. Much of the land in Alaska under the DOI’s authority has not been inventoried for wilderness characteristics; in fact, a statewide inventory has never been conducted.

This is an irresponsible act by U.S. Congress to block DOI from implementing its mission – to evaluate and ensure protections for our most wild places. This budget deal saves no money at the expense of risking some of our nation’s most treasured natural resources, like the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve) and Bristol Bay. The Reserve contains some of our nation's most treasured natural resources – millions of acres of wilderness-quality lands with critical habitat for millions of migratory birds, as well as grizzly bears, Western Caribou Arctic Herd, threatened polar bears, walrus, wolves, and endangered beluga whales. Bristol Bay is our nation’s largest wild salmon fishery. Last year Secretary of Interior Salazar said that some places, referring to Bristol Bay, are “simply too special to drill” and disallowed drilling near the waters of Bristol Bay. Instead of risking these treasures, U.S. Congress should work to ensure the strongest possible protections for special places for the Reserve and Bristol Bay.”

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