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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

May 14, 2011

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Environmentalists and President Obama Agree, Respect for Sensitive Areas in America's Arctic Are Our First Priority

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

“We completely concur with President Obama’s weekly announcement to move forward with responsible and safe domestic oil production, while respecting sensitive areas. But, developing in Alaska is a huge unknown – Americans have always wanted to protect our nation’s treasure, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; there is no proven way to clean up an oil spill in the Arctic Ocean’s extreme conditions, which is often called ‘the least understood area in the world’; and, and every President since Jimmy Carter has recognized special places worth protecting within the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska.

America’s Arctic Ocean is a national treasure. Home to many of our nation’s most beloved wildlife species – polar bears, walrus, ice seals, bowhead whales, beluga whales and more – these Arctic waters are the “garden” for the Inupiat people of Alaska’s Arctic coast. This fragile and abundant marine environment is under great stress from the impacts of climate change – the Arctic is projected to be free of summer sea-ice by 2030. With so much at stake, the federal government must not allow a headlong rush into risky drilling in America’s Arctic Ocean.

We have been leasing to nowhere in the Reserve. 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. Some places within the Reserve are simply too special to drill. Instead of risking these treasures, U.S. Department of Interior should work to ensure the strongest possible protections for special places within the Reserve.

For our energy needs, we need to focus beyond oil and gas development. Let’s start today to create better choices for the future.”

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