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ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE *DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE * FRIENDS OF ALASKA
NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES * GWICH'IN STEERING COMMITTEE * LEAGUE OF
CONSERVATION VOTERS * NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY * NATURAL RESOURCES
DEFENSE COUNCIL * NORTHERN ALASKA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER *SIERRA CLUB *
THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY

Fish and Wildlife Service Considers Wilderness for Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain

WASHINGTON - With today's release of a draft revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) made an important decision to formally consider Wilderness for the crucial Coastal Plain area – the biological heart of our nation's wilderness icon. As part of this plan, a full Wilderness Review was done for the Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain for the first time ever - presenting a historic opportunity to protect the Arctic Refuge for future generations.

The 50-year old Arctic Refuge is the only national wildlife refuge established specifically to preserve wilderness values. Its Coastal Plain is a vital part of the larger ecosystem that is home to some of America's iconic wildlife species - including whales, seals, wolves, polar bears, grizzly bears, muskoxen and caribou. In addition, nearly 200 bird species from six continents depend on the Arctic Refuge, including birds that migrate to every state in America.

The Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain functions as the critical birthing grounds for polar bears, many bird species and the internationally important Porcupine Caribou herd. For this reason the people of the Gwich'in Nation call this area "the sacred place where life begins." For the Gwich'in, protecting the Coastal Plain, a vital piece of their traditional way of life and culture which has been based on the Porcupine Caribou herd for thousands of years, is a human rights issue.

"We are co-managers of the Arctic Refuge because we live there. As a co-manager, I would say that the Coastal Plain should be designated as Wilderness," said Sarah James, chair of the Gwich'in Steering Committee. "The Coastal Plain is the most important part of the Arctic Refuge. It is the birthplace for the caribou and many life forms. It is the only place where the polar bear is being protected now. It's very important to protect these special places permanently."

The Arctic Refuge is currently the only portion of Alaska's North Slope that is legislatively closed to oil and gas leasing, exploration, and development. Year after year, millions of Americans have reaffirmed their support for the protection of one of our nation's last great wilderness places. Throughout the 90-day public comment period, Americans everywhere will ask the US Fish &



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Wildlife Service to recommend Wilderness designation for the Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain to protect its unique wilderness, wildlife, and subsistence values.

As mandated by law, FWS must develop a CCP for every national wildlife refuge by 2012, and revise existing plans every 15 years. The last Arctic Refuge plan was done in 1988. The Arctic Refuge's revised CCP process began in the spring of 2010 and is expected to be finished by the spring of 2012. For more information on the process visit: <http://arctic.fws.gov/ccp.htm>.

QUOTES:

“On the heels of the 50th anniversary of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, this is a culmination of the unwavering support the American public has shown for the protection of one of our last great wilderness places,” said Cindy Shogan, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League. “The Arctic Refuge is a place that must be protected into the future as it has been through the ages - as a wilderness for our children to experience and pass on to future generations.”

“This plan with its first-ever full Wilderness Review for the Coastal Plain provides a great opportunity to fulfill the vision of Alaskans who helped found the Arctic Refuge 50-years ago and many Alaskans today who are continuing to work ensure that the unique wildlife, wilderness, and subsistence values of the Arctic Refuge are protected for future generations,” said Pamela A. Miller, Arctic Program Director, Northern Alaska Environmental Center (907-441-2407)

The Arctic Refuge is a national treasure that we must pass on, unspoiled, to future generations. Making the right decision on this Comprehensive Conservation Plan will set the course for Arctic Refuge management and we must act now to protect these valuable lands and waters. We are encouraged that the Fish and Wildlife Service is considering Wilderness recommendations for the coastal plain, the biological heart of the Arctic Refuge. For decades Americans from all walks of life have asked for permanent protection for these critical lands and waters and now they have the opportunity to move this one step closer to reality,” said Dan Ritzman, Alaska Regional Director, Sierra Club.

“The Arctic Refuge is one of the country’s most treasured, pristine places, and as of yet remains unspoiled by widespread industrial scale oil and gas operations,” said Jamie Rappaport Clark, executive vice president of Defenders of Wildlife. “The Fish and Wildlife Service should seize the opportunity to strengthen protection for the refuge and its diversity of wildlife against the threat of Big Oil and pursue a wilderness recommendation.”

“Migratory birds that nest in the Arctic Refuge are a tangible link between the backyards of people across the United States and the Refuge,” said Taldi Walter, National Audubon Society. “By including Wilderness Review for the Coastal Plain, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is taking an important first step for protection many Americans have long supported.”

“The Coastal Plain is the biological heart of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and should be permanently protected,” said Alex Taurel, Legislative Representative, League of Conservation



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Voters. “We are pleased that the Fish and Wildlife Service is considering a wilderness recommendation for a place that so clearly merits protection for the benefit of future generations.”

“This CCP with its Wilderness review presents a historic opportunity for our nation to resoundingly affirm the legacies of Teddy Roosevelt and the Muries by ensuring that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge remains wild and untrammelled by industrial development and human impacts. This ‘Last Great Wilderness’ must be protected for its values today so that it may serve as a beacon to inspire future generations to demand responsible stewardship of our diminishing natural treasures,” said David Raskin, President, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges.

“This is the biological heart of the whole Arctic Refuge,” said Chuck Clusen, Alaska project director for the Natural Resources Defense Council, which has fought for 35 years to protect the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge. “It is critical to protect this most sensitive area, which is a birthing ground for caribou, polar bears and many other species.”

“Since President Eisenhower established the Arctic Refuge in 1960, our nation has acted to embrace the bold wilderness vision of the refuge’s founders and to protect it from oil and gas interests. In the face of climate change and a renewed push to develop the Arctic for oil and gas, our country’s leaders should support the wishes of Americans by taking the necessary steps to permanently protect the Arctic Refuge’s coastal plain - a globally significant, vital homeland and birthing ground for millions of birds, polar bears and caribou, as well as a critical subsistence resource,” said Nicole Whittington-Evans, Alaska Director, The Wilderness Society.

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