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Nearly 1 million people demand Arctic Refuge stay off-limits to oil drilling

Businesses, scientists and 74 members of Congress submit letters in support of Arctic Refuge

WASHINGTON – As Big Oil’s cronies in Congress continue their attack on our nation’s greatest wilderness icon, nearly one million people asked the Obama administration to ensure that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge be protected for future generations.

Today marks the end of the public comment period on the draft of an unprecedented management plan for the Arctic Refuge (Comprehensive Conservation Plan or CCP) – that includes, for the first time in history, a recommendation for Wilderness designation for the Refuge’s embattled Coastal Plain. More than 850,000 people submitted comments to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service asking that the Coastal Plain, also known as the Refuge’s biological heart, be kept off-limits from oil and gas development.

In addition, 74 members of Congress from both the Senate and the House submitted a letter in support of protecting the Arctic Refuge. Other communities to lend their support include faith communities, scientists, birders, 210 businesses and organizations in all 50 states, 75 Alaska-based businesses and more than 1,000 outdoor industry businesses.

“For 50 years, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has stood as a symbol of our nation’s wild soul. And for 50 years, Americans have stood up to the money and might of Big Oil to demand that this vast, wilderness remain off-limits,” said Cindy Shogan, Executive Director of Alaska Wilderness League. **“Today, with nearly 1 million people speaking loud and clear, we can see that this support has never wavered. No matter what Big Oil and its cronies in Congress throw at us, Americans will always demand that this one special place remain untouched as an enduring reminder of our nation’s wilderness legacy. I can only hope that the Obama administration will heed this call and recommend Wilderness designation for the Arctic Refuge’s Coastal Plain.”**

Meanwhile, in the House of Representatives, Rep. Don Young (R-AK) and Rep. Doc Hastings (R-WA) are pushing the same-old, tired Arctic Refuge drilling bill. This time, Arctic Refuge drilling is being heralded as the answer to our nation’s unemployment crisis – despite the fact that the top five largest oil companies have actually cut their work force by 11,200 employees in the past five years, with more domestic oil and gas production now than at any other time in our history.



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“For the past 30 years, Arctic Refuge drilling has been trotted out as a false solution to a litany of our nation’s woes,” Shogan noted. “This latest example just shows how out of touch Rep. Young and others are with the rest of America. Nearly 1 million people, including many Alaskans, have spoken. A wild, untouched Arctic Refuge is a vital piece of our natural heritage.”

The Arctic Refuge is the only national wildlife refuge established specifically to preserve wilderness values. 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. In addition, the people of the Gwich’in Nation call this area “the sacred place where life begins.”

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