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Contact: Emilie Surrusco
202-544-5205 or emilie@alaskawild.org

Arctic Refuge drilling offered as a false solution to our nation's real problems

WASHINGTON – The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will be the topic of two hearings in the House Natural Resources Committee today. The first hearing, at 9:30 a.m. before the Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources, will address four bills – including one that opens our nation's greatest wilderness icon to drilling. Peter Van Tuyn, an Alaska conservationist and outside counsel for Alaska Wilderness League, will testify about how drilling in the Arctic Refuge is “not a meaningful solution to economic or energy challenges facing the United States, and serves as a distraction to real solutions.”

The second hearing, a “Rule 11” hearing at 2 p.m. before the full committee, will give the Democratic minority an opportunity to talk about how the Arctic Refuge is a natural treasure that should be protected for future generations. Douglas Brinkley, noted historian and author of several books including most recently, “The Quiet World,” which chronicles the fight to protect the Arctic Refuge, will testify, along with Sarah James, chair of the Gwich'in Steering Committee, who advocate on behalf of the Gwich'in people to protect the Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain, or the “sacred place where life begins.”

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

“Earlier this week, nearly 1 million Americans spoke loud and clear, the Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain must be protected for future generations. Yet today, we see House Republicans trotting out the same old tired drilling bill that we have seen over and over for the past 30 years, offering it up yet again as a false solution to real crises our nation is facing. For example, House Republicans' claims that drilling in the Arctic Refuge would generate significant job growth are utterly baseless. In fact, if you look at Big Oil's track record in recent years, you will see that the top five largest oil companies have actually cut their work force by 11,200 employees in the past five years -- despite the fact that this country is producing more oil and gas now than at any other time in our history, and they are making record profits.

Once and for all, Big Oil's cronies in Congress must stop using the Arctic Refuge as their favorite political hot potato. The American people deserve real solutions.

For 50 years, the Arctic Refuge has endured as a symbol of our nation's wild past, present and future. The Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain, also known as its biological heart, is crucial to the survival of hundreds of species of birds, polar bears, musk oxen, the Porcupine Caribou herd – and the people of the Gwich'in Nation. Opening this sacred space to drilling would not only destroy a vital, thriving wildlife habitat, but it also would strike an arrow at the heart of our nation's wilderness soul. We owe it to future generations – leave this one, wild place untouched.”

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www.AlaskaWild.org

122 C St NW, Ste 240, Washington, DC 20001 * Tel: 202-544-5205 * Fax: 202-544-5197