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President Obama transmits Arctic Refuge Wilderness recommendation to Congress

WASHINGTON – Today, President Obama and his administration signed the Record of Decision for the Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This finalizes the decision to recommend to Congress that 12.28 million acres of the Arctic Refuge and its biologically sensitive Coastal Plain be designated as Wilderness.

The Obama administration made history to [make a Wilderness recommendation for the Refuge's Coastal Plain, included as](#) part of its preferred alternative in its final Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) and Wilderness Review. This is the first Wilderness recommendation for a refuge transmitted to Congress since the 1970s.

Since its creation, support for the Arctic Refuge has been diverse and nationwide. During the public comment period for the CCP, the Fish and Wildlife Service received more than 1 million comments in support of Wilderness for the Arctic Refuge and in opposition to oil and gas exploration and development. For thousands of years, the Gwich'in people have regarded the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge as "Izhik Gwat'san Gwandaii Goodlit" or "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins," because it has been the most frequently used birthing and nursery grounds for the migratory Porcupine Caribou Herd. This caribou herd is the foundation for the social, economic and spiritual fabric of the lives of the Gwich'in people.

This recommendation is a critical step toward a congressional Wilderness designation and establishes the Obama administration's support for Wilderness protection for the Coastal Plain, which reverses the Reagan administration position in favor of oil and gas development. The next step is for Congress to pass Wilderness legislation.

Quote by the Gwich'in Steering Committee:

“Thank you Secretary Jewell and President Obama for taking this important step towards protecting forever Izhik Gwat'san Gwandaii Goodlit, the Sacred Place where the Life Begins, the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the caribou birthplace and the heart of the Gwich'in way of life.” – **Sarah James, Chair, Gwich'in Steering Committee**

Quote by The Episcopal Church:

“The Episcopal Church commends President Obama for recommending Wilderness for the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Church supports permanent protection for the Coastal Plain both to care for God's creation and to safeguard the subsistence rights of our Gwich'in brothers and sisters, the majority of whom are Episcopalian. We thank the President for being a champion of wilderness protection and human rights, and call on Congress to heed the President's judicious recommendation.” – **Alexander D. Baumgarten, Director of Government Relations for The Episcopal Church**

Quotes by conservation groups:

“Today, the Obama administration has taken the next step in achieving Wilderness for the Arctic Refuge and its sensitive Coastal Plain. The Obama administration and the American people have spoken. Now, it is time for Congress to act and protect this special place for future generations,” said **Cindy Shogan, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League.**

“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 **Jim Adams, Audubon Alaska Policy Director.** “The decision to recommend wilderness designation for the Arctic Refuge coastal plain is a great step toward protection that many Americans have long supported.”

“We're pleased to see President Obama courageously follow through on his commitment to protect the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge,” said **Defenders of Wildlife President and CEO Jamie Rappaport Clark.** “The Arctic Refuge is the crown jewel of the National Wildlife Refuge System. It is far too important to the caribou, polar bear, migratory birds and myriad other species that depend on it to leave it vulnerable to oil interests and politicians who refuse to see its incredible value. It's time to take the final step and protect the coastal plain from destructive drilling forever.”

“We applaud President Obama and Secretary Jewell for acting to recommend Wilderness designation to permanently protect the incomparable Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, including the irreplaceable values of its Coastal Plain. For more than 50 years, The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has done an outstanding job of managing the Arctic Refuge to protect its magnificent wildlife, habitat, and wilderness values. The American people have clearly expressed their desires for such protection, and we urge the Congress to adopt this recommendation to permanently protect this special place for present and future generations. On behalf of the many volunteers who work closely with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, we strongly endorse this action of the Obama administration,” said **David C. Raskin, President of the Friends of the Alaska National Wildlife Refuges.**

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is an American treasure worthy of our highest level of protection. Thanks to President Obama’s leadership, we are one step closer to giving the Arctic Refuge and its pristine Coastal Plain the permanent protection it so richly deserves. We call on Congress to ignore Big Oil’s demands that we sacrifice this spectacular landscape and instead preserve it for future generations as wilderness,” said **Tiernan Sittenfeld, Senior Vice President for Government Affairs at the League of Conservation Voters.**

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the last places on earth where we can witness nature and wildlife unblemished by human encroachment,” said **David Houghton, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association.** “The Arctic coastal plain is invaluable and worthy of the wilderness protections President Obama has recommended. Now it's up to Congress to permanently designate it as wilderness so that future generations may benefit from this legacy.”

“The Arctic refuge’s vast and pristine coastal plain is a national treasure worthy of the highest protection available. Thankfully, the Obama administration remains focused on securing an important wilderness designation for this special place. But backed by its allies in Congress, Big Oil is seeking to derail this process. Every step of the way, we will continue to fight for wilderness protection for the Arctic refuge,” said **Niel Lawrence, Alaska Director at the Natural Resources Defense Council.**

“As Alaskans, we thank the President and Secretary Jewell for their Wilderness recommendation of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and its coastal plain. The Arctic Refuge is undeniably one of America’s last truly wild places and the cultural and subsistence values of this place cannot be overstated. We therefore urge Congress to permanently protect this place—now and for generations to come,” said **Elisabeth Dabney, Executive Director, Northern Alaska Environmental Center.**

“For more than half a century Americans from all walks of life have advocated for the protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and its coastal plain. The time has come to permanently protect the wonder of the region for Native cultures, wildlife, and anyone seeking to experience one of America's last great wild places,” said **Alli Harvey, Alaska representative for Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign.**

“The Arctic Refuge is one of America’s last great wild landscapes, and crucial to the survival of Alaska’s Gwich’in people,” said **Jamie Williams, president of The Wilderness Society.** “Polar bears, caribou and other iconic species thrive here, and we are thrilled the Obama administration has taken this step to preserve the refuge. Some places are simply too special to drill.”

Photographs of the Arctic Refuge can be found and downloaded here:

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq/12294203834/in/set-72157640473619805>

<https://www.flickr.com/photos/usfwshq/8229599099/in/set-72157632133106560>

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