

**ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE \* CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY \* DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE \*  
GWICH'IN STEERING COMMITTEE \* NORTHERN ALASKA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER \* RESISTING  
ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION ON INDIGENOUS LANDS \* SIERRA CLUB \* THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY**

**Court victory for wilderness in the Arctic Refuge**  
*State's latest effort to explore for oil and gas ruled illegal*

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE:**

**ANCHORAGE, ALASKA** (July 21, 2015) – Confirming once again that the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is off limits to oil and gas exploration, the U.S. District Court today rejected the state's effort, initiated by former Gov. Sean Parnell, to conduct harmful seismic exploration in the important caribou calving habitat.

The 19.2 million-acre Arctic Refuge is America's largest tract of pristine, wild land, and invaluable habitat for caribou, polar bears, wolves, fish and migratory birds, among other species. The 1.5 million-acre coastal plain is the biological heart of the Arctic Refuge. Its subsistence resources have sustained Alaska Native people for thousands of years.

Conservation groups are hailing the ruling as a victory for the Arctic Refuge, and pointing out that it is time for the state to accept that seismic testing is forbidden under the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

After its drilling proposal was repeatedly rejected by the U.S. Department of the Interior, the state asked a federal court to overturn DOI's decision and allow seismic exploration on the fragile coastal plain, which is called "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins" by the Gwich'in people who rely on the Arctic Refuge's caribou for their food and cultural survival.

Organizations dedicated to protecting the Arctic Refuge intervened in the case to protect the coastal plain. Those groups say the court's ruling should serve as a signal to Congress that it is time to permanently protect the coastal plain by designating it as wilderness.

The conservation groups were represented by Trustees for Alaska, a nonprofit, public interest law firm; Besseney and Van Tuyn, LLC; and the Natural Resources Defense Council.

**Quotes:**

"We hope that this puts an end once and for all to this lawsuit brought by the state of Alaska," said **Cindy Shogan, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League**. "Preserving the Arctic Refuge sustains life. Birds flock here to nest from every state in the union and six continents and it is the only place in the world where grizzly, black and polar bears all live together. This decision proves that it is the right time for Congress to end this fight once and for all and finally designate the Coastal Plain as Wilderness."

"This ruling shuts down the state's ill-advised campaign to industrialize the place where life begins for the Porcupine Caribou Herd and for many of America's polar bears," said **Rebecca Noblin, Alaska director for the Center for Biological Diversity**. "Now it's time for Congress to permanently protect the Arctic Refuge in all its richness and diversity before it's destroyed for short-term profit."

"The Arctic Refuge is a priceless natural treasure. There is simply no justification for turning its coastal plain into an industrial oil field," said **Jamie Rappaport Clark, president and CEO of Defenders of**

**Wildlife.** “Thanks to this decision, caribou, polar bears, migratory birds and many other species will continue to live and raise their young in this refuge, a place like nowhere else on earth. It’s our responsibility as stewards of our nation’s wildlife heritage to protect the Arctic Refuge, and this ruling is truly a victory for the crown jewel of the National Wildlife Refuge System.”

“This is a great decision for the Gwich’in people. The Gwich’in are caribou people; caribou are our food, our song, our dance, our clothing, our culture. This is a human rights issue,” said **Sarah James, chairperson of the Gwich’in Steering Committee.** “The birthplace of the caribou must be protected for future generations. Oil exploration and development would hurt the caribou and threaten the Gwich’in way of life. Today’s decision helps protect that. But we need to permanently protect this place we call “*Izhik Gwat’san Gwandaii Goodlit*” or ‘the Sacred Place Where Life Begins.’”

“The coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a national treasure and today’s decision to keep it off limits to any exploratory activity is a victory for those that call this place home and depend on it for their cultural way of life,” said **Elisabeth Dabney, executive director of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center.** “We can now more fully focus on a congressional wilderness designation to permanently protect one of America’s last most treasured landscapes.”

“I am Inupiat and live in Kaktovik. The coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge is an important place for subsistence hunting and fishing. Oil and gas exploration on the coastal plain would harm our culture and keep us from our subsistence areas,” said **Robert Thompson, chairman of the Board of Directors of Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands.** “Today’s decision helps to protect the areas we use. Now it’s time to permanently protect the coastal plain as wilderness so we can continue our subsistence and our culture for generations to come. The coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is less than 5 percent of Alaska’s North Slope and the only area that can be saved for all future generations. While it is important to my people to save the area, all future generations can enjoy it if it is designated wilderness.”

“Some places are too special to drill, and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of them. Leaving these dirty fuels in the ground is the best option for the wildlife of the refuge's coastal plain, the people that rely on them, and everyone in Alaska and across the country who treasures them,” said **Alli Harvey, Alaska representative for the Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign.**

“The Court’s ruling is excellent news for the Arctic Refuge, the Gwich’in people, and all Americans who care about our last great wild places,” said **Nicole Whittington-Evans, Alaska regional director for The Wilderness Society.** “The coastal plain is clearly off-limits under ANILCA. We hope Congress will act soon to permanently protect the coastal plain as wilderness.”

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