

**ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE * CONSERVATION LANDS FOUNDATION * NORTHERN ALASKA
ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER * SIERRA CLUB * THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY**

For Immediate Release

Wednesday, November 18th, 2015

Obama administration holds oil and gas lease sale within National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska
Lease sale should have been postponed pending completion of the BLM Regional Mitigation Strategy

Anchorage, AK – Today the Bureau of Land Management holds its [12th lease sale within the National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska](#) (Western Arctic) since 1999, which became annual sales under President Obama’s directive in 2011. Today’s sale will offer 143 tracts covering 1.5 million acres ([map](#)).

The Western Arctic is our nation’s largest parcel of public lands at nearly 23 million acres—about the size of Indiana. It is home to millions of acres of wilderness-quality lands and critical habitat for both the Western Arctic and Teshekpuk Caribou Herds, as well as millions of migratory birds, grizzly bears, threatened polar bears, walrus, endangered beluga whales and more. There are five designated “Special Areas” within the Western Arctic recognized for their exceptional wildlife, ecological, and subsistence values, including Teshekpuk Lake, Kasegaluk Lagoon, the Colville River, the Utukok River Uplands and Peard Bay Special Areas.

Statements from conservation groups:

“Two years ago the Obama administration finalized a balanced management plan for the Reserve that recognized its outstanding habitat values and the vital role of subsistence to local communities,” said **Kristen Miller, Conservation Director at Alaska Wilderness League**. “Leasing new lands in the Reserve should be on hold until BLM completes the process of creating a mitigation strategy for the region that addresses concerns over development and ensures that needed protections for the five key Special Areas within the Reserve remain intact.”

“Over 11 million acres in the Western Arctic are designated for their outstanding wildlife, cultural, and subsistence values for Americans near and far,” said **Lindsey Hajduk, Alaska Program Director for Conservation Lands Foundation**. “Before offering new leases, BLM should have completed its ongoing Regional Mitigation Strategy public process to ensure development concerns are addressed to uphold the integrity of wildlife, subsistence, and conservation values especially within designated subsistence-use areas and Special Areas.”

“This lease sale should not have been held prior to the completion of a Regional Mitigation Strategy for the western Arctic reserve,” said **Nicole Whittington-Evans, Alaska regional director for The Wilderness Society**. “This sale will complicate the completion and ultimate success of the RMS, which we hope will provide greater certainty and predictability for the oil industry, as well as for conservation and subsistence interests.”

"The important Special Areas of the Western Arctic should be permanently protected as the future of the Western Arctic changes, due to climate change and development," said **Jessica Girard, Program Director for Northern Alaska Environmental Center**. "The Western Arctic is a world-class landscape that supports millions of migratory birds, large caribou herds and more, which is why it is critically important to local Alaskan communities and Americans alike. Postponing this lease sale could have ensured protections would be formalized before opening the door to new development."

"Before we lease new areas for oil development we should ensure that the special places in America's Western Arctic are permanently protected," said **Alli Harvey, Alaska Representative for Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign**. "With the Arctic warming at twice the rate as the rest of the world, it is vital that areas important for wildlife, subsistence traditions, and Americans' sense of the wild are passed on to future generations."

Contacts:

Corey Himrod, Alaska Wilderness League, 202-544-5205, corey@alaskawild.org

Lindsey Hajduk, Conservation Lands Foundation, 907-360-3320, lindsey@conservationlands.org

Jessica Girard, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, 907-452-5093, arctic@northern.org

Ginny Kramer, Sierra Club, 804-519-8449, virginia.cramer@sierraclub.org

Tim Woody, The Wilderness Society, 907-223-2443, tim_woody@tws.org

###