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Senate and House Arctic Refuge Wilderness Bills Introduced

Members of Congress Push for Wilderness Two Years after Transmittal

WASHINGTON – Today, 40 senators led by Senators Ed Markey (D-MA) and Michael Bennet (D-CO) and a bipartisan group of representatives led by Representatives Jared Huffman (D-CA), Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), Ruben Gallego (D-AZ) and Frank LoBiondo (R-NJ) introduced bills in the Senate and House to designate the Coastal Plain of Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness. For over three decades, support for protecting the Arctic Refuge has been diverse and extensive, reaching unparalleled levels in the 115th Congress.

On April 3, 2015, the first-ever administrative Wilderness recommendation for the Arctic Refuge was [transmitted to Congress](#). This recommendation was the result of a multiyear process by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service that included extensive public input. Of the more than 600,000 comments received, 96% were in support of Arctic Refuge protections with comments from all 50 states, conservation and religious leaders, Alaska Natives, communities of color, outdoor enthusiasts and veterans from across the U.S.

Nevertheless, the oil and gas industry and their allies in Congress have targeted the Coastal Plain, the Refuge's 1.5 million-acre biological heart, for development. Disregarding the ecological, cultural and spiritual values of the Coastal Plain, a number of bills have been introduced in this Congress to open the area to industrial development. Past Congresses have seen myriad failed efforts to add Refuge drilling provisions to moving legislation, including budget bills and defense appropriations.

One of the largest intact ecosystems in the world, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a place of breathtaking natural beauty and untouched, rugged wildness. Its remarkable glaciated peaks, northern forests and fragile tundra provide vital habitat for denning polar bears, a huge migrating herd of caribou, wolves, muskoxen and nesting area for more than 200 migratory and resident bird species.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was first established as the Arctic National Wildlife Range on December 6, 1960 by President Dwight Eisenhower, who recognized "unique wildlife, wilderness and recreational values." In 1980 Congress passed, and President Jimmy Carter signed, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. The act designated wilderness for most of the original range area, while expanding the acreage to the south and renaming the entire area the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

In addition, the act specified additional purposes for the Refuge, including conserving wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity, as well as protecting subsistence opportunities. It is

time for Congress to act and pass wilderness legislation for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge once and for all.

[Learn more about the Arctic Refuge here.](#)

GWICH'IN STEERING COMMITTEE:

“The very existence and identity of the Gwich'in are under threat,” said **Bernadette Demientieff, Executive Director, Gwich'in Steering Committee**. “On behalf of the Gwich'in Nation, we are grateful to Senators Ed Markey and Michael Bennet and Representatives Jared Huffman, Brian Fitzpatrick, Ruben Gallego and Frank LoBiondo for taking an honorable stand to protect this sacred place. We want to continue to live our cultural and traditional life with the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Any development to the Refuge or the Coastal Plain would be a human rights violation. Our identity is not negotiable.”

QUOTES FROM CONSERVATION GROUPS:

“We applaud our Congressional champions Senators Markey and Bennet and Representatives Huffman, Fitzpatrick, Gallego and LoBiondo for continuing the tradition of strong congressional support for the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This bill would ensure that one of the most imperiled pieces of our natural heritage will be protected now and for future generations of Americans,” said **Kristen Miller, interim Executive Director of Alaska Wilderness League**. “The Arctic Refuge is one of our most iconic landscapes and one of the last truly wild places in America. It’s time to move beyond drilling and ensure that no corporate interest can plunder it for its own profit.”

“Alaska’s Coastal Plain is one of North America’s most prolific bird nurseries. If the Arctic Refuge is ever developed, America loses one of its last untouched, wild places and millions of baby birds could lose their homes,” said **David Yarnold (@david_yarnold), Audubon’s president and CEO**. “The breeding and nesting grounds for birds that later fly to all 50 states and all seven continents make this a truly special place where no drill rig or pipeline should ever be. Today, in the face of a new campaign to open the wildlife refuge to drilling, a record number of Senators and a bipartisan group of Representatives introduced legislation to permanently protect this unique and rare landscape once and for all. Americans strongly support protecting this place and our natural heritage for our kids and grandkids, so the only question for the rest of Congress is, ‘Are you listening?’”

As **Helen Cherullo, Executive Director of Braided River** noted, “Protecting the Arctic Refuge offers an opportunity for this Congress to represent the interests of the vast majority of Americans. 91% of all voters think it is important to protect natural places for future generations. Over seven in 10 Americans would prefer to see the development of alternative energy rather than fossil fuels. Why should we destroy the bountiful Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge when alternate energy solutions that support family-wage jobs and clean air and water are well within our grasp?”

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is an international treasure on the same scale as the Serengeti in Africa. It’s called the crown jewel of our National Wildlife Refuge System for a reason. There is literally no place like it in the world – polar bears, migrating caribou herds, musk oxen, grizzlies, migratory birds from all 50 states, all in one spectacular landscape. We owe it to ourselves and to our children to keep this irreplaceable part of our natural heritage safe from oil drilling and development,” said **Jamie Rappaport Clark, president and CEO of Defenders of Wildlife**.

“The Arctic Refuge is all American’s Refuge - it is ours to steward and allow to remain wild and free. The Refuge represents a pristine message of hope and rebirth. The multiple layers of critical importance the Arctic Refuge presents are beyond mere words. A place where the spring sun hits our country first after the long winter; where millions of birds come to feed and nest; where caribou come to give birth. The human rights of a people, the Gwich’in, are at stake. As Americans, we applaud this effort to keep the Arctic Refuge free from oil development, and to stand with the stewardship values that are inherent in American hearts,” said **Carol Hoover, Executive Director, Eyak Preservation Council.**

“Whether or not most of us will ever visit the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Americans from all corners of the country know that protecting our most special places is critically important,” said **Margie Alt, Executive Director, Environment America.**

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the wildest and most pristine places in America. We stand in solidarity with the Gwich’in people and the millions of people across our nation who have called for permanently protecting this treasure, rather than turning it over to Big Oil for private profit. Thanks to Senators Markey and Bennet and Representatives Huffman, Gallego, Fitzpatrick and LoBiondo for leading this effort,” said **Gene Karpinski, President of the League of Conservation Voters.**

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge comprises the major portion of the largest intact ecosystem in North America. It is home to important populations of plants and animals, including the Porcupine Caribou Herd on which the Gwich’in people depend for survival. It is also an important living laboratory for scientific research into changes being produced by global climate change and possible ways to mitigate its impacts. To sacrifice this irreplaceable and renewable resource for the short-term gain of fossil fuel profiteers would be an insult to the planet and a major threat to those who draw physical and spiritual sustenance from its bounty. We urge you to support the wilderness recommendations of the USFWS, Secretary of the Interior, and President Obama to enact permanent protection for this irreplaceable natural gem,” said **David C. Raskin, Ph.D., President, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges.**

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the crown jewel of our National Wildlife Refuge System, the world’s largest network of protected lands and waters dedicated to wildlife conservation. Designating the coastal plain as wilderness will ensure the biological heart of Arctic Refuge is afforded permanent protection under our nation’s strongest conservation law, the Wilderness Act. The National Wildlife Refuge Association applauds those in Congress who have demonstrated their steadfast support for protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for all and future generations of Americans.” – **Geoffrey Haskett, Acting President, National Wildlife Refuge Association.**

“This is America’s wilderness,” said **Rhea Suh, president of the Natural Resources Defense Council.** “These lands are vital to the cultural survival of Gwich’in Natives in the U.S. and Canada, roamed by some of the continent’s grandest, most-imperiled wildlife, and blessed with vast, pristine vistas. The Refuge has survived decades of assaults by oil companies and their allies. Congressional protection will make sure it endures into the future.”

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge coastal plain is the sacred place where life begins, the birthing grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd. A Wilderness designation for these grounds would permanently protect the way of the life of the Gwich'in people. Ultimately, a congressional Wilderness designation for the whole of the Arctic Refuge would ensure that the cultural value of the landscape remains intact and provide for a thriving, living, and vibrant ecosystem. We are grateful for the Congressional

leadership shown to keep the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge protected, forever,” said **Elizabeth Dabney, Northern Alaska Environmental Center.**

"We applaud Congressional leaders for acting on what the Gwich'in Nation and others have long realized-- the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is too special to drill. There's no such thing as safe oil production, so there's no question if it will fail, but when. The Arctic Refuge must be permanently protected, not sacrificed to corporate greed," said **Sierra Club Executive Director Michael Brune.**

“As Alaskans, we know the value of keeping our wild places unspoiled for our children and generations to come. We thank the members of Congress who stand with us in historic numbers to protect the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge. Many Alaskans want to keep the oil and gas industry out of the pristine Arctic Refuge, and they support preserving the Coastal Plain as Wilderness. Hundreds of types of animals call the Coastal Plain home—including the Porcupine Caribou Herd, an important subsistence resource. With the impacts of climate change felt more strongly in Alaska than the rest of the nation, now is the time to take bold action to protect this area.” – **Vicki Clark, executive director of Trustees for Alaska.**

“We are profoundly grateful to Sen. Markey, Sen. Bennet, Rep. Huffman and Rep. Fitzpatrick for this legislation to protect one of the last pristine and untouched wild places in America,” said **Jamie Williams, president of The Wilderness Society.** “Generations of Americans have supported protecting the Arctic Refuge, and we have a moral obligation to do so for our children and grandchildren.”

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