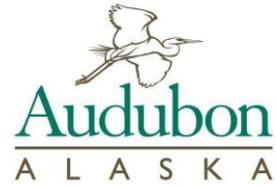




Conservation
Lands
Foundation
Protecting America's Heritage



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Conservation Organizations Call for Protection of Western Arctic

Alaska – Today, thirteen organizations sent a [letter](#) to Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke urging continued protection of the Western Arctic. The letter highlights the groups' opposition to changing the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska's Integrated Activity Plan to diminish current protections to Teshekpuk Lake and other designated Special Areas. These lands include some of the most biologically rich wildlife areas in America's Arctic.

The Western Arctic – also known as the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska – includes 23 million acres of public lands – the nation's largest public land unit. These places provide vital habitat for wildlife such as caribou herds, migratory birds, grizzly bears, polar bears and wolves.

A key feature of the lands is the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area. The 40,000-head Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd, an important subsistence and food security resource for nearby communities, uses the land around Teshekpuk Lake as calving grounds. In addition, half a million shorebirds breed in these lands, making it one of the most important shorebird sites in the Arctic.

"The Reserve has long been recognized for its incredible wildlife and subsistence values in northwest Alaska," **said Kristen Miller, Alaska Wilderness League's interim executive director.** "Upsetting this carefully crafted plan is irresponsible. The Interior Department spent years working with the tribal community, local governments, the state of Alaska, the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group and others on its current management plan. This plan is just a handful of years old and recognizes areas of critical importance to wildlife and North Slope residents, including Teshekpuk Lake."

"The Teshekpuk Lake area in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska provides a safe haven and globally-significant nesting habitat for millions of birds, including waterfowl that migrate through the lower 48 states and can be found in communities across the country," stated **Sarah Greenberger, VP for Conservation Policy, National Audubon Society.** Secretary Zinke should maintain the existing management plan, which incorporated the best available science and

compromises on all sides, to provide strong protections for birds and wildlife while also allowing for development in less sensitive areas.”

“The Western Arctic is one of the last spectacularly wild places in America and Teshekpuk Lake its crown jewel,” stated **Danielle Murray, Senior Director at the Conservation Lands Foundation**. “The Secretarial Order is another example of Zinke aligning himself with industry despite the harm to wildlife, Native Alaskans and the sportsmen’s community. These are America’s public lands and should not be sacrificed for the benefit of ConocoPhillips.”

This letter is sent to the Secretary in response to a recent Secretarial Order. On May 31, 2017, at the Alaska Oil and Gas Association conference, the Secretary of the Interior signed Secretarial Order 3352. The Secretarial Order kicks off a process to re-open sensitive habitat in the Western Arctic to oil and gas development by re-opening the 2013 plan for these lands. This plan offered critically needed protections for Special Areas in the Western Arctic, including Teshekpuk Lake and the Utukok River Uplands.

“Expanding oil and gas drilling in the Arctic is incompatible with the realities of climate change,” said **Erik Grafe, Staff Attorney with Earthjustice in Alaska**. “We must begin to forge a just transition toward a cleaner, more sustainable energy future, not double down on fossil fuels that will lock in decades of pollution in a region that is ground zero for climate change. Secretary Zinke should leave in place the protections afforded by the existing management plan for the Western Arctic.”

The 2013 Integrated Activity Plan allowed for drilling in more than 11 million acres while protecting 11 million acres critical for Native Alaska subsistence, recreation, wildlife and fish. More than 400,000 sportsmen, scientists, Alaskans, tribal members and citizens commented in favor of the protections that were ultimately adopted in the 2013 Integrated Activity Plan.

The letter to Secretary Zinke is sent as an initial recommendation period on the Secretarial Order comes to a close on June 21, 2017. [Full text of the letter may be seen here.](#)

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