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**Call for oil and gas lease nominations includes Special Areas in the Western Arctic**

*Bureau of Land Management request includes acres currently off-limit to development in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska*

Washington – Today the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) [published notice in the Federal Register](#) that it will begin taking comments and nominations on areas to offer for oil and gas development for the 2017 National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve) lease sale. BLM has noted it will now accept comments and nominations on [acres](#) currently off limits to leasing under the Reserve's 2013 Integrated Activity Plan (IAP), in line with [Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke's secretarial order](#) aimed at making Alaska "open for business."

**Statement by Leah Donahey, Senior Campaign Director, Alaska Wilderness League:**

"The Reserve's IAP is a carefully crafted plan that the Interior Department spent years developing, working hand in hand with the tribal community, local governments, the state of Alaska, the Western Arctic Caribou Working Group and others. Upsetting this carefully crafted plan on a whim in order to appease the oil and gas industry is incredibly irresponsible of Secretary Zinke.

Clearly stating that BLM will accept comments or nominations on parcels currently off limits to leasing makes one thing perfectly clear: Secretary Zinke and his Interior Department are beholden to oil corporations over all others, including those Alaskans who weighed in on the current IAP and the American public that supports protecting the Reserve's Special Areas.

In particular, the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, long a target of the oil and gas industry, provides calving grounds for the 40,000-head Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd, an important subsistence and food security resource for nearby communities. In addition, half a million shorebirds breed in these lands, making it one of the most important shorebird sites in the Arctic. Combined, the five unique Special Areas protected under the IAP provide irreplaceable habitat for fish and wildlife including caribou, polar bears, migratory birds and waterfowl."

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