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New Trump administration report highlights need for more info Arctic Refuge drilling impacts

Washington – Yesterday, the U.S. Geological Survey released a new report, [Summary of Wildlife-Related Research on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska, 2002–17](#). While the Trump administration report is far from the caliber of the 2001 wildlife assessment it updates, its findings are still in stark contrast from the administration’s rush to drill in an area that has more abundant and diverse wildlife than any conservation area in the circumpolar north.

Among the report’s conclusions:

- Based on studies of the central Arctic coastal plain the Central Arctic Caribou Herd, there are persistent and emerging uncertainties about the long-term effects of energy development for caribou.
- Polar bears are becoming more common on shore in summer and fall due to climate change and the increasing decline in sea ice.
- Management agencies and energy companies need information about the behavioral effects of development on caribou.
- Studies over broader spatial scales and longer periods are needed to reliably identify important habitats near potential energy infrastructure and understand the cumulative effects of oil and gas development on caribou.

Statement by Adam Kolton, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

“Make no mistake. Even while downplaying the unparalleled wildlife of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the report still highlights the reality that oil development will likely lead to displacement of caribou, and that polar bears are becoming increasingly dependent on the Refuge’s on-shore habitat due to climate change.

The report is clear in its call for much more study and information over longer periods in order to assess potential oil drilling impacts. Proponents of Arctic Refuge oil development have repeatedly stated that any development will only move forward with strong environmental safeguards in place. This report makes clear, however, that we don’t even know what those safeguards would need to incorporate yet.

For nearly half a century, the Arctic Refuge has remained off-limits to drilling because the majority of Americans believe this refuge, this untouched wilderness, is not worth sacrificing for a short-term oil



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gain. That sentiment will only grow as the American people learn more about the extraordinary values at stake.

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