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## **Groups Rally to Oppose Oil and Gas Drilling in the Arctic Refuge**

*Demonstration Marks Final DOI Scoping Hearing on Proposed Lease Sale*

WASHINGTON – Indigenous and environmental groups and concerned citizens are gathering here today to protest the Trump Administration's proposal to conduct oil and gas exploration in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The **rally at 4:00 pm, outside the National Association of Homebuilders**, marks the last of seven Department of Interior [public hearings on the environmental scoping process](#) to open up the Refuge to oil and gas exploration and leasing. DOI granted this hearing—the only public meeting in the Lower 48—in response to a request by more than a dozen groups, and scheduled it for the highly unusual hour of 5:00 pm on a Friday afternoon in a blatant effort to deter public turnout and media scrutiny. And this week, Bureau of Land Management made a last-minute change in the speaker selection process, switching from first-come-first-served to a lottery system, after industry officials complained that drilling opponents had arrived early and taken speaking slots in the Alaska hearings.

A 60-day **public comment period ends Tuesday, June 19**. Over 400,000 public comments will be submitted to DOI opposing the planned leasing.

This unorthodox, accelerated process to advance drilling in the Arctic Refuge comes months after oil industry allies in Congress, in a backdoor maneuver, snuck a drilling provision into the unrelated federal tax bill in December. For more than 30 years, the oil lobby and its allies in Congress have pushed to drill in the Refuge, but have been turned back by the overwhelming opposition of the American people, who want this special place protected.

The Refuge is one of the largest intact ecosystems in the world, and is among America's most treasured public lands. Its remarkable glaciated peaks, northern forests and fragile tundra provide the most important onshore habitat for denning polar bears, vital habitat for a huge migrating herd of caribou, wolves and muskoxen, as well as nesting area for migratory and resident birds.

The Administration's proposed lease sale would target the biologically rich coastal plain—an area of the Refuge the Gwich'in people, who depend on the calving grounds they call "the sacred

place where life begins.” Drilling there would not only violate the cultural values and human rights of the Gwich’in, but also imperil wildlife and harm our climate.

The groups offered the following statements:

“We’re here to tell the Trump administration that we will not allow them to sell off the Sacred Place Where Life Begins,” said **Bernadette Demientieff, Executive Director of the Gwich’in Steering Committee**. “This plan, motivated by greed, would permanently destroy one of the world’s last unspoiled ecosystems and the culture and way of life of the Gwich’in people. We will keep fighting to defend the coastal plain.”

“This absurd move by the Trump Administration shows contempt for public input,” said **Ana Unruh Cohen, Managing Director of Government Affairs for the Natural Resources Defense Council**. “The American people own these public lands, and deserve a meaningful and fair opportunity to weigh in on the future of the Refuge and a chance to put forward clear scientific arguments for why it’s such a bad idea to turn this wilderness into an industrial zone for the benefit of polluters.”

“I hope this entire undertaking isn’t simply a rubber-stamp exercise masquerading as a public process. Unfortunately, having already announced plans to hold a lease sale next summer, there has been no indication the Trump administration will listen to the American public who overwhelmingly oppose drilling in the Arctic Refuge,” said **Adam Kolton, Executive Director of the Alaska Wilderness League**. “It’s vital that Congress act to restore protections for the one of the wildest places left on the planet.”

“This reckless and rushed planning process could be catastrophic for polar bears, caribou and other wildlife,” said **Robert Dewey, Vice President of Government Affairs for Defenders of Wildlife**. “The coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is critical habitat for wildlife struggling to survive in a warming world. Oil drilling would threaten the way of life of the Gwich’in people and important habitat for mother polar bears, the Porcupine caribou herd and thousands of migratory birds. The coastal plain is of incredible biological and cultural and biological value, and we vow to fight this and any other attempt to industrialize it.”

“The stakes have never been higher. In addition to bringing potentially devastating impacts, developing and burning any fossil fuels in the Arctic Refuge would worsen climate change and lock us into a dirty-fuel future,” said **Erik Grafe, an attorney for Earthjustice**. “Scientists have already warned that all of the Arctic’s untapped oil must remain in the ground if we are going to avoid an extremely dangerous climate scenario. Our federal government should listen to the majority of Americans, who – as polling has shown – strongly oppose drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.”

“Drilling in the Arctic Refuge would exacerbate climate change, destroy one of the world’s last truly wild places, and violate the human rights of the Gwich’in people,” said **Lena Moffitt, Senior Director of the Sierra Club’s Our Wild America campaign**. “We are rallying today to send a message to Donald Trump and Ryan Zinke that we stand with the Gwich’in in defending

the Arctic Refuge and, joined by a diverse and powerful coalition, we will continue to fight to ensure that drilling rigs never enter the borders of this rare natural wonder.”

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