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**Rep. Fitzpatrick, House Republicans to Interior Secretary Zinke: The expedited process to allow oil and gas development in the Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain Requires a Thorough and Transparent Review Process. The Current Rushed, Piecemeal Format is Unacceptable.**

Washington, D.C. – Today, on the day that the Bureau of Land Management released its draft environmental impact statement in advance of a planned 2019 oil and gas lease sale, Congressman Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) was joined by six Republican members of Congress in sending a letter to exiting Interior Secretary Zinke in response to this administration’s efforts to allow oil and gas development on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. SAEExploration is also currently seeking BLM authorization to conduct three-dimensional (3D) seismic exploration on the coastal plain to identify oil and gas resources in advance of a lease sale.

**“We write to express our concerns with the Bureau of Land Management’s (BLM) efforts to allow oil and gas activities in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Since the Refuge was originally set aside for protection in 1960 by Republican President Dwight Eisenhower, Republicans, Democrats and Independents alike have stood together and vigorously fought to protect this unparalleled landscape. We have reservations about any effort to develop this pristine landscape and opposed the circumstances under which this controversial environmental issue was authorized last year, attached to an unrelated tax reconciliation bill,”** wrote the members of Congress in today’s letter.

**“This expedited process is especially problematic given the fundamental incompatibility between oil and gas activities and the original purposes for which the Arctic Refuge was established. The tax bill did not waive existing environmental laws that apply to the Coastal Plain, and BLM must provide for the conservation of fish and wildlife and their habitats, to maintain the biological integrity, diversity, and environmental health of the Refuge. Any regulatory process requires thoughtful input and consideration of public comments; unfortunately, the current process is not adequate, and does not live up to this standard. This could put the Arctic Refuge — the crown jewel of our National Wildlife Refuge System — in a vulnerable position to be exploited and destroyed,”** concluded the members.

The letter calls for the incoming Interior Secretary to ensure a more careful review of all aspects of the oil and gas lease program than was afforded under outgoing Secretary Ryan Zinke.

**From Rep. Brian Fitzpatrick:** “Serving as good stewards of our environment is something each of us are called to regardless of location, background or political ideology. Protecting our nation’s open spaces and wild places unites us as Americans. The Department of the Interior must make every effort to thoroughly review development on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. I’m proud to stand with my colleagues in the defense of America’s wilderness.”

**The following groups also issued statements of support for the letter:**

“It was a Republican, President Theodore Roosevelt, who established our National Wildlife Refuge System and it was another Republican, President Dwight Eisenhower, who originally set aside the Arctic Refuge as a wildlife sanctuary in 1960,” **said Adam Kolton, executive director of the Alaska Wilderness League.** “There is no reason why efforts to now restore these longstanding protections shouldn’t be embraced by both sides of the aisle. Even those who supported the tax bill drilling scheme should be alarmed at this administration’s reckless rush to hold a lease sale twice as fast as the bill stipulated and without any of the great care for the environment and wildlife that was promised.”

“Every spring, birds from across the nation migrate great distances to nest and fledge their young in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. That’s because the Arctic Refuge provides excellent foraging and habitat for Arctic birdlife,” **said Sarah Greenberger, Senior Vice President for Conservation Policy at National Audubon Society.** “Iconic birds like the Tundra Swan and shore birds whose numbers are declining like the Dunlin all rely on the unique tundra landscape and coastal plain ecology. Audubon thanks Representatives Costello, Donovan, Faso, Fitzpatrick, LoBiondo, Reichert, and Sanford for speaking out in support of the crown jewel of America’s wildlife refuges. We will continue working with bipartisan members of Congress to oppose oil exploration or development in one of North America’s most prolific bird nurseries.”

“Protecting our nation’s wildlife and wild places is not a Republican or Democrat issue. It’s an American issue,” **said Robert Dewey, vice president for government relations at Defenders of Wildlife.** “In a time when our society is sharply divided by party lines, we need the incoming Interior Secretary to put politics aside and uphold the responsibilities of the Department in protecting the irreplaceable Arctic Refuge.”

In addition to Rep. Fitzpatrick, Reps. Reichert, Costello, LoBiondo, Sanford, Faso and Donovan signed on to the letter.

[The full text of the letter can be found here.](#)

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