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Arctic Refuge seismic exploration officially on hold for 2018-2019; polar bears breathe sigh of relief

Washington—SAExploration has [officially called it quits on plans to conduct seismic exploration](#) on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge during the 2018-2019 seismic season—in a statement made Friday to the Anchorage Daily News, Jeff Hastings, chief executive of SAExploration, said: “You can do the math and there’s no time left on the season.”

Earlier this month, [media inquiries to the Department of the Interior appeared to confirm](#) that SAExploration would not be conducting seismic exploration on the Arctic Refuge coastal plain this winter. We continue to await BLM’s release of its Environmental Assessment of SAE’s seismic proposal—which would be followed by a 30-day public comment period—and for the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to make a determination on a polar bear incidental-take authorization.

More than 250,000 people contacted SAExploration directly through emails or phone calls urging the company to abandon plans to conduct seismic on the coastal plain. And last month, [Indigenous advocates led by the Gwich’in Nation](#) hand-delivered boxes containing 100,000 of those letters directly to the company’s office in Houston.

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

“Polar bears can FINALLY rest a little easier in their dens this winter. The delay of seismic exploration is welcome news and a product of the myriad scientific and legal issues that have arisen as SAExploration’s inadequate seismic proposal and the Trump administration’s reckless push to lease the coastal plain ran headlong into the priceless wildlife and wilderness values of the Arctic Refuge.

SAE’s proposal is the polar opposite of what drilling proponents promised during the tax bill process. Instead of a small footprint and a careful process, SAE’s plan envisions a small army of industrial vehicles and equipment with a mandate to crisscross every square inch of the Arctic Refuge’s biological heart, putting denning polar bears at risk and leaving lasting scars on the fragile tundra and its vegetation.

That BLM is still planning to move forward with a lease sale in 2019 without the seismic data it claimed it needed underscores that the administration’s primary goal is to sell leases before a change in the political landscape. Congress needs to put the brakes on the administration’s reckless rush to drill and instead restore protections for this iconic landscape.”

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