H.R. 139
Udall-Eisenhower Arctic Wilderness Act

Lasting Protections - The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the last pristine, untouched wilderness areas in America. President Eisenhower began the bipartisan legacy of protecting this area for future generations half a century ago when he set aside 8.9 million acres as the Arctic National Wildlife Range in 1960. In 1980, President Carter continued this legacy by expanding the area, designating much of the land as protected Wilderness, and renaming it the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Wilderness designation provides strong protection from oil development and other harmful activities.

However, the biological heart of the Arctic Refuge – the 1.5-million-acre Coastal Plain – was not protected as Wilderness. To ensure the future protection of this fragile area, Congressman Ed Markey (D-MA) has re-introduced H.R. 139, the Udall-Eisenhower Arctic Wilderness Act, “to preserve the Arctic plain . . . as wilderness in recognition of its extraordinary natural ecosystems and for the permanent good of present and future generations of Americans.”

Unparalleled Wilderness - The 19.6 million-acre Arctic Refuge is a spectacular wilderness of boreal forests, rugged mountains, sweeping tundra vistas, wild rivers, coastal lagoons, and barrier islands. Located in the northeastern corner of Alaska, the Arctic Refuge features a complete range of arctic and sub-arctic ecosystems and extraordinary wildlife. It is a place so wild and untrammeled that one may walk for days without seeing signs of another human.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service calls the Arctic Refuge’s Coastal Plain “the center for wildlife activity.” There is no greater place in America to experience wild nature – to hike, fish, hunt, raft or camp. The Coastal Plain is also the epicenter of the drilling debate. Unfortunately, throughout its history, oil companies and their allies in Congress have lobbied hard to open what is considered the “biological heart” of the Refuge to drilling.

Indigenous People – The Gwich’in peoples’ way of life and culture have been intertwined with the Porcupine Caribou Herd for centuries. Each year, the herd travels hundreds of miles to the Coastal Plain to birth and nurse their young. The Gwich’in, who rely on the caribou as their primary food source and refer to the Coastal Plain as the “Sacred Place Where Life Begins,” adamantly oppose drilling and strongly support Wilderness protection. Designating the Coastal Plain of the Refuge as Wilderness would not only protect one of the last great American wilderness areas, but also this vital Native culture.

Polar Bears and Other Wildlife - The Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge provides vital habitat for much of America’s most spectacular wildlife. All three species of America’s bears, caribou, wolves and muskoxen are just a few of the more than 250 species that rely on the Coastal Plain to thrive and survive. Millions of birds representing some 180 species migrate to the Coastal Plain to nest, rear their young, molt and feed. Birds from all 50 states and six continents migrate to the Arctic Refuge each summer.

The Coastal Plain is also the most significant onshore polar bear denning habitat in the U.S.—an increasingly important distinction as researchers confirm that global warming is significantly reducing offshore ice floes, polar bears’ preferred denning habitat. Development in the Arctic Refuge would further compound the polar bears’ problems. Denning polar bears are extremely sensitive to industrial activity; females may abandon their dens if disturbed, which is usually fatal for cubs that are unable to fend for themselves. Now more than ever the bears depend on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to survive.

Help protect this unparalleled wilderness by cosponsoring H.R. 139.

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