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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Congressional Attack on Alaska Public Lands and Waters

WASHINGTON, DC – On September 22, 2016 at 9:30 a.m., the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee will hold a [legislative hearing on various bills](#), including legislation that will log, develop and drill in our nation's valuable public lands and waters in Alaska.

Statement by Cindy Shogan, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

"S.3203, [the Alaska Economic Development and Access to Resources Act](#) and S.3273 [the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Improvement Act of 2016](#) are an all-out attack on the integrity of federal public lands and waters in Alaska – from the Tongass to the Arctic."

"Some of American's greatest natural treasures would be plundered if this package of bills moves forward, like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In 2015, President Obama made a Wilderness recommendation for the Arctic Refuge and called on Congress to make sure this icon was protected for future generations. Yet, this legislation will undermine this recommendation and would set the stage for drilling throughout the biological heart of the Refuge – its sensitive Coastal Plain."

"The legislation would force the federal government's hand in requiring leases in America's Arctic Ocean without the scrutiny of proper administrative and public oversight, including multiple lease sales in the Arctic Ocean. The Arctic Ocean is harsh, remote, unpredictable and unforgiving – drilling there is reckless and irresponsible. Alaska is feeling the effects of climate change at twice the rate of anywhere else in our nation. Adding drilling in the Arctic will only exacerbate the impacts of climate change on our nation and Alaska."

"This legislation would be destructive to the Tongass National Forest, America's largest rainforest. These bills would transfer 2 million acres of forest into state's hands, exempt the Tongass from the Roadless Rule and privatize public lands by allowing land trades, new allotments and the creation of new Native corporations, while also expediting government decisions while bypassing existing agency decision-making and public process. At approximately 17 million acres, the Tongass is our nation's largest rainforest and encompasses some of the largest remaining tracts of coastal temperate rainforests left on earth. It provides valuable habitat for an array of species, including salmon, bears, wolves and some of the greatest breeding concentrations of bald eagles in the world. With more than 17,000 fishing, recreation, tourism and supporting jobs in the region that rely on an intact ecosystem, good forest management practices are key to safeguarding the economy for southeast Alaska."

"This legislation would also include critical environmental areas for oil and gas leasing in the vicinity of Teshekpuk Lake in the National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska. Much of the area surrounding Teshekpuk Lake is currently closed to oil and gas leasing under the management plan for the Reserve. Teshekpuk Lake is the largest lake in Arctic Alaska, and is important habitat for many threatened migratory birds.



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Teshkepuk Lake and the surrounding area is also important to local communities, who rely on wildlife in the area as a subsistence resource. “

Fact sheets and additional backgrounders:

Link to [coalition letter here](#) which has 26 organizations broadly opposing Senator Murkowski's Alaska public lands bills.

Sectional on [S.3203, the Alaska Economic Development and Access to Resources Act](#) ([State land transfer](#) [Alaska Land Use Council](#) [Alaska Mental Health Trust land exchange](#))

Sectional on [S.3273, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Improvement Act of 2016](#) ([New Native Corps, Vets/Small Parcels](#), [Stumps-for-Trees](#))

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