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Interior Spending Bill Votes Highlight Support for Taxpayers and Alaska Public Lands

Washington — Today the House of Representatives accepted one amendment and voted down another to its 2020 Interior Appropriations bill that together will protect the Tongass National Forest and Arctic National Wildlife Refuge while simultaneously protecting the American taxpayer.

Arctic Refuge: Reps. Young/Duncan/Gosar Amendment 143 (#130) — Rejected 198-233

This amendment was aimed to strike a provision ensuring that the oil and gas lease sales in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge generate the expected revenue as promised in the 2017 Tax Act. The Arctic Refuge provision requires the Bureau of Land Management to set a minimum bid on what companies must pay to lease part of the Arctic Refuge's fragile Coastal Plain for drilling. A central part of this provision is to make sure the federal government is looking out for the American taxpayer.

Tongass: Reps. Blumenauer/Gallego Amendment 136 (#64) — Passed 243-188

This amendment seeks to end taxpayer subsidies for any roadbuilding activity including design, study or construction of roads for logging in the Tongass National Forest. On average, the Tongass timber sale program costs taxpayers \$26 million each year while yielding just \$1.3 million in return, for an average loss of more than \$24 million EACH YEAR over the last 20 years, largely due to the exorbitant costs of building and maintaining new logging roads. Reps. Blumenauer/Gallego's amendment would end millions of our tax dollars being spent subsidizing the timber industry in Alaska.

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

"Today, the House voted to rein in the Trump administration's assault on Alaska's national treasures while simultaneously protecting taxpayers.

To be clear, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge should never be auctioned off to oil companies regardless of price. But by requiring the administration to set minimum lease sale bids sufficient to meet revenue promised in the Tax Act, the House is calling drilling proponents' bluff. The reaction of the pro-drilling crowd to this provision, that it is arbitrary, unrealistic and will 'kill development,' tells you all you need to know. Specifically, that no one, not within the Trump administration and not Senator Murkowski, ever believed their own revenue justifications. They simply want to sell off America's largest wildlife refuge for a song in order to get leases into the hands of oil companies as quickly as possible, regardless of whether they fulfill their promise to the American people.



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The Tongass National Forest is not only America's largest remaining temperate rainforest in the world but a poster child for allowing federal taxpayer resources to subsidize the destruction of our national forests. Alaska national forests already face a \$68 million road maintenance backlog. The Tongass timber program costs taxpayers on average \$24 million each year. We can do better. By passing the Blumenauer-Gallego amendment will cut government waste and protect the outdoor economy, hunting, fishing, outdoor recreation and long-term, sustainable economic interests of Southeast Alaska.

We applaud passage of these bipartisan provisions and urge Congress to ensure they both are included as part of the final 2020 Interior-Appropriations bill."

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Alaska Wilderness League stands with, serves and supports the many people and organizations that believe in a sustainable future for Alaska. We honor and respect the cultures of Alaska Natives whose way of life remains deeply connected to the state's land, waters, and wildlife. We believe that Alaska's long-term economic future and subsistence traditions are inexorably tied to the health and sound stewardship of its natural resources, which support hunting, fishing, tourism and unrivaled outdoor experiences that are central to Alaskans' quality of life.



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