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# Corporate Campaign Brings a New Dimension to the Arctic Refuge Fight

By: Adam Kolton, Executive Director

**A**t Alaska Wilderness League we know you count on us to advocate for you and those who care deeply about the fate of some of the wildest places left on the planet. And for more than a quarter century, we've done that largely by galvanizing support for or against legislation or executive actions, resulting in some huge wins for conservation, Indigenous rights and wildlife.

But is this kind of advocacy the only path to progress? After Arctic Refuge drilling was jammed into the 2017 Tax Act, we set our sights on a new strategy, applying pressure on oil companies to not seek drilling rights on the coastal plain. That effort led investors representing more than \$2.5 trillion in capital to signal an unwillingness to finance Arctic Refuge exploitation. We followed that late last year with an ad in *The Wall Street Journal* outlining the legal and reputational risk to any oil company foolish enough to pursue drilling in this national treasure.

Since then, thanks to a partnership between Alaska Wilderness League, Sierra Club, the Gwich'in Steering Committee and others, major financial institutions are pulling out of Arctic projects altogether. Goldman Sachs, JPMorgan Chase

and Wells Fargo have now joined more than a dozen international banks in saying they will “decline any financing transaction that directly supports new upstream Arctic oil exploration or development [including] but is not limited to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.”

Is this enough to protect the Arctic Refuge? Not necessarily. With the Trump administration unwilling to set a fair minimum bid for companies seeking drilling rights, there may be speculators eager to buy low and look for exploration capital later. And while some of the smaller oil operators could struggle to advance projects without financing, there are still several major multinationals doing business in the Arctic including Exxon and ConocoPhillips.

Still, the pullback of large banks is a huge development in the campaign to protect the Arctic Refuge and one that potentially could impact the political landscape on the issue too. Indeed, almost all candidates in the Democratic presidential field called for an end to oil and gas leasing on public lands as a part of their broader plans to confront climate change, a titanic shift from the Obama administration’s “all of the above” approach to energy.

To be sure, this new sentiment is not universal. Alaska’s senior senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) has vowed that “the very last drop of oil that the world uses should come from Alaska’s North Slope.” And Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy is threatening to withhold state business from banks that have signaled an end to Arctic investments.

The backlash tells us we’re onto something and with your continued financial support, activism and advocacy, Alaska Wilderness League plans to double down on these private market-based strategies. Senator Martin Heinrich (D-NM) laid out the stakes well in a recent letter to banks signed by 16 senators: “The scale of your banks’ assets individually, let alone together, give you the ability to drive change in protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and in shifting towards a U.S. financial sector that effectively analyzes and plans for climate risks.” \*

Adam Kolton  
Executive Director

**Alaska Wilderness League** is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation founded in 1993 to further the protection of Alaska’s incomparable natural endowment. Our mission is to galvanize support to secure vital policies that protect and defend America’s last great wild public lands and waters.

**Board of Directors:** Former President Jimmy Carter, Honorary Co-Chair, The Honorable Robert Mrazek, Honorary Co-Chair, Tom Campion, Chair Emeritus, Betsy Loyless, President of the Board, Pat Pourchot, Vice President of the Board, Ellen Ferguson, Secretary, Gareth Martins, Treasurer, Midy Aponte, Toni Armstrong, Steve Barker, Kit DesLauriers, Chris Hill, Debbie S. Miller, Lorraine Netro, Brian O’Donnell, Jody Potts, Richard Spener. For questions about our newsletter, please email us at [info@AlaskaWild.org](mailto:info@AlaskaWild.org) or call us at 202-544-5205.

**Cover photo:** A flower blooms on the tundra of the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Mladen Mates, Alaska Wilderness League

# Bringing an Arctic Experience to the Pacific Northwest

By: Monica Scherer, Director of Outreach

**A**laska Wilderness League and Soul River Inc. recently joined forces to bring a multimedia photo exhibit on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to Portland, Oregon. “Vashraii K’oo: An Arctic Refuge Experience,” features 30 larger than life photos from Arctic Village, Alaska, and is designed to use art to bring the Arctic Refuge coastal plain and the efforts of the Gwich’in to protect their traditional lifestyle and the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd to life for audiences.

I headed out to Portland and joined up with Donald Tritt of Arctic Village and Portland’s own Chad Brown, founder of Soul River Inc. and photographer behind the exhibit. We hit the ground running, starting with Donald enthraling students at a local school (Sunnyside Middle School) about life in Arctic Village and the history of the Gwich’in.

Chad and Donald joined Portland hip hop icon and radio personality Mic Chrenshaw at the studios of KBOO, where they recorded a segment for his show “Culture in Motion.” The bi-weekly show discusses art, culture and politics and was an ideal space for both Chad and Donald to share their connections to the Arctic Refuge, their efforts to protect it from oil and gas development, and the role art can play in engaging with new audiences. The show aired February 26, and you can find it online at [kboo.fm](http://kboo.fm) — just type “Culture in Motion” in the search box and find the February 26 episode!

“Vashraii K’oo” opened to the public on February



Chad Brown and Donald Tritt outside of KBOO prior to recording an edition of “Culture in Motion.”  
Monica Scherer, Alaska Wilderness League

14 and 15 and more than 200 attendees turned out to show some love for the Arctic Refuge. They were treated to first-hand stories from Donald and Chad on working together to capture images and anecdotes about the many Gwich’in family and friends who were featured in the exhibit. Many of those in attendance shared how moved and inspired they were by the photos and stories, and on the second day of the show we were even visited by Oregon governor Kate Brown and her husband who had heard about the exhibit and wanted to learn more!

From Portland, we traveled to Los Angeles in March for another exhibit sponsored in conjunction with the Hip Hop Caucus. For more information on upcoming exhibits or the L.A. showing, you can email me at [Monica@AlaskaWild.org](mailto:Monica@AlaskaWild.org).\*



Chad Brown and Donald Tritt (far left) speak with exhibit attendees at the Irving Street Studio in Portland, Oregon.

Monica Scherer, Alaska Wilderness League

# League Treks to Denver for Outdoor Retailer Show

By: Kristen Miller, Conservation Director

**W**orking in partnership with the outdoor recreation community is not just a core value for us at Alaska Wilderness League, it is one of the most impactful and fun parts of what we do every day.

And so, the League packed our bags for our annual trek to the Outdoor Retailer Winter Show in Denver, Colorado. Each year we head out to meet with some of our best outdoor industry friends and allies in the fight to protect Alaska’s lands and waters. This year, however, we had the added honor of participating in The Conservation Alliance’s annual breakfast, entitled “A Refuge at Risk” — a panel dedicated to telling the story of the Gwich’in people and the fight to protect the Arctic Refuge.

Since our beginnings, Alaska Wilderness League has looked to the Gwich’in people for guidance and walked side by side with them in the fight to protect the Refuge through the work of the Gwich’in Steering Committee. Similarly, for



Maia Wikler, Lorraine Netro and Tommy Caldwell at The Conservation Alliance breakfast. Alex Harris

years the League has worked closely with The Conservation Alliance, an organization that strives to connect businesses to conservation,

enabling and inspiring numerous companies to work together to protect wild places. Over that time, The Conservation Alliance has been a strong supporter of both the League and the Gwich’in Steering Committee’s Arctic Refuge work. Moreover, they have been instrumental in connecting their member businesses — amazing companies like Patagonia, The North Face, Osprey Packs and many more — to the fight to protect the Arctic Refuge and other lands and waters of Alaska.

Early Thursday morning, in front of hundreds of outdoor industry representatives, League board member Lorraine Netro, a Gwich’in elder and long-time Arctic Refuge



AWL executive director Adam Kolton (left) and conservation director Kristen Miller (right) with Maia, Lorraine and Tommy. Alaska Wilderness League

advocate, participated in a powerful panel discussing the fight to protect the Arctic Refuge. Also participating was renowned climber and Patagonia athlete Tommy Caldwell, and inspiring youth activist and writer, Maia Wikler. Together these three speakers wove a story of how people and place can bring individuals together from different walks of life to a common place of inspiration and advocacy. People in the room were called to join in this fight by using their personal and brand platforms to share the story of the Arctic Refuge,

by engaging with decision-makers and by voting for change.

The breakfast was followed by a panel hosted by The North Face as part of its Climate Speaker series. At The North Face's booth, Lorraine introduced the panel, moderated by Maia and featuring Kit DesLauriers (League board member, world champion skier and The North Face Athlete), Quannah Chasinghorse (Gwich'in Steering Committee Youth Council member), and Jody Potts (Gwich'in leader). The

panelists shared their experiences as advocates at the intersection of the climate crisis, human rights and the Arctic Refuge.

We are thankful that we can work with such strong partners and individuals in the Arctic Refuge fight. With our shared commitment to elevating a diversity of stories and perspectives, these allies help to bring the story of the Gwich'in people to an audience that might often come to the issue of public lands protection from a different perspective. \*



Lorraine Netro, Maia Wikler, Jody Potts, Quannah Chasinghorse and Kit DesLauriers speak on the Arctic Refuge and climate justice at The North Face booth.

Alex Harris

**Hope to see YOU soon on:**



# Climate Change and Skiing Across the Wrangells

By: Emily Sullivan, Conservation Associate

**W**hen 18 Alaskans set out last spring for the 2019 Alaska Mountain Wilderness Ski Classic, it didn't occur to any of us that the whole group would be shut down by Alaska's changing climate. For the first time in Classic history, and due to factors outside of our control, the whole field scratched together.

The Alaska Mountain Wilderness Ski Classic is an Alaska tradition since the 1980s and is about as rugged as wilderness races come: participants travel unsupported across Alaska's mountains in winter with no set course. There is only a start line and a finish line, and routes vary from 120 to 200 miles in length. This year's Classic was set to cross the Wrangell Mountains of Eastern Alaska — a notoriously cold landscape in March. When my partner, Taylor, and I began planning for the Classic months ago, we expected to carry -25°F sleeping bags, down parkas, and all the typical winter gear we would need to safely travel our chosen route over an 8,000' pass through glaciated terrain.



**Rain turned skiing into a wet, slushy slog.**  
Emily Sullivan, Alaska Wilderness League



**A rain-soaked Emily reflects on the relationship between climate change and skiing.**  
Emily Sullivan, Alaska Wilderness League

But as the race drew closer, we were alarmed by warm temperatures permeating across the state of Alaska. March is typically the month Alaskans bank on for long stretches of clear, cold weather, but this March was different: eyeing the temps and the forecast, we decided to pack our summer sleeping bags and hope for the best.

The race start was sunny and promising: a firm and icy snowmachine trail made for seven miles of relatively quick skating out of McCarthy. However, after miles of river travel and our first icy open water crossing, the sky progressed from gray to dark, and the first drops of rain began to fall. They would continue to fall for the next 36 hours.

As our journey continued, we spotted someone skiing fast toward us. My heart sank a little when I realized it was my friend Max and that he was heading back to McCarthy. It sank even more when Max informed us that all nine members of the leader pack, mostly AMWSC veterans, had decided to turn around together.

The disappointment of not getting to complete the Classic was real, but what hurt worse was the why. It's no secret that climate change and skiing can't be separated, or that we as winter recreationalists have a lot to lose. And this wasn't my first wilderness trip to be shut down by climate change — just seven months earlier, I backed off a solo packrafting traverse in the Arctic Refuge due to raging August floods. That overly wet weather was also wildly unusual — the excessive late summer rain resulted from the lack of sea ice on the Arctic Ocean.

I've been fired up about climate change for a while, but never more than I am now. It feels almost silly to me that the loss of the Wilderness Classic is what reignited the fire, but I'm thankful for the perspective that grew out of that loss. We are all incredibly privileged and lucky to go to the mountains for fun, and we need to do more to protect what we love.

*This is just a short re-cap of Emily's adventure with climate change — for the full story, visit our blog at [AlaskaWild.org/blog](http://AlaskaWild.org/blog). \**

# Supporter Inspiration: Jack Telfer

By: Lois Norrgard, National Field Organizer

I recently had the opportunity to enjoy a wonderful breakfast with Jack Telfer — he and his late wife Pat have been consistent Alaska Wilderness League supporters, taking meaningful actions offline (that is Jack on the far right at our Shell Oil protest!) and providing meaningful financial support as well, supporting us as a member of our Wild Giving Society and participating in our Planned Giving program.

I have known Jack and his amazing wife Pat for decades, first meeting them through a shared interest in birds and all things birding at our local Audubon Chapter. Pat and Jack led many wonderful birding field trips, including several important Audubon Christmas Bird Count trips — touted as the longest running citizen science project in the world! Jack truly is a special hero and mentor to me — he was the first one to spark my passion to take action for protecting our environment! That spark was ignited thanks to a long-ago invitation from Jack to participate in his “armchair activist” program, which was a letter of the month club tackling local and national environmental issues. Once engaged, I felt compelled more and more to get out and “do something,” and from this



Jack Telfer and Lois Norrgard at the Good Earth restaurant in Edina, Minnesota.  
Lois Norrgard, Alaska Wilderness League

monthly action taking I started down the path to what has become a full-time career working for the Alaska Wilderness League as our National Field Organizer. Jack and Pat really changed the course of my life, and we at the League continue to benefit from their positive impact to this day! \*



Jack at a polar bear protest outside a Shell Oil station in Minneapolis, MN, the day the Bush administration held its Chukchi Sea lease sale: February 2, 2008.

Lois Norrgard, Alaska Wilderness League

# Planning Today for a Wild Alaska Future



## Success for the Next Generation Starts Today

A little planning today can ensure you have the final say on how your hard-earned assets will be distributed so those important decisions aren't left to chance. And no matter the size of your estate, when you include a gift to Alaska Wilderness League in your will, you help provide lasting and impactful resources to aid in the long-term defense of irreplaceable Alaskan landscapes and the wildlife and people who depend on them.

To learn more, please contact Chris Konish at 202-266-0415 or [Chris@AlaskaWild.org](mailto:Chris@AlaskaWild.org), or visit [AlaskaWild.org/Planned-Giving](http://AlaskaWild.org/Planned-Giving).

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