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FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

December 15, 2020

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Interior Department review of Arctic Refuge seismic recklessly understates impacts

Washington — Today the U.S. Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management [posted](#) a [notice](#) of Environmental Assessment and [draft Finding of No New Significant Impact](#) related to seismic exploration on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This follows last week's [publication in the Federal Register](#) of a proposed Incidental Harassment Authorization that would greenlight the harassment of polar bears during seismic activities. The Southern Beaufort Sea polar bear population is the world's most imperiled polar bear population with as few as 900 individuals, and the Arctic Refuge's coastal plain is vital to the survival of these iconic animals.

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

"Today's announcement is part of an illegal effort to ram through a massive seismic testing program in the final days of the lame duck Trump presidency, and it should be halted immediately. Studies have consistently shown that even the best technology detects denning bears less than 50% of the time. We shouldn't make the survival of the world's most at-risk polar bear population subject to a coin flip.

"This seismic scheme envisions invading the wildest place left in America with roaming camps of up to 180 workers accompanied by a small army of industrial vehicles, crisscrossing one-third of the Refuge's biological heart with vibration trucks weighing as much as 97,000 pounds. Incredibly, BLM is rubberstamping a finding of 'no new significant impact' attributed to these extreme activities despite clear evidence of risks to endangered polar bears and ringed seals and the likelihood of leaving lasting scars on the fragile tundra and its vegetation.

"This administration has repeatedly hidden or ignored science to achieve its goal of Arctic Refuge oil. The U.S. Geological Survey spent big money to [reprocess 2-D seismic data](#), yet investigative reporting reveals senior Interior officials won't allow the results to be shared with anyone. Why? The conclusions of career BLM scientists on a 2018 seismic application, including potential impacts to Alaska Native communities and polar bears, were [altered without their knowledge](#). Why? Because this is the last chance this administration has to ram through seismic exploration, and it will do whatever it takes to allow it to happen before the clock runs out.

"Both the U.S. Geological Survey and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have acknowledged they lack adequate information about the impacts of oil and gas development on the coastal plain. Today's assessment relies on the findings of a leasing process that has been flawed from the outset, one that has seen the Interior Department recklessly ignore science and Indigenous voices, and fail at every turn to



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sufficiently analyze the impacts drilling will have on our climate, our air and water quality, the health of wildlife or the future of local Indigenous communities.”

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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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