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5 million Gen Z youth coordinate civic action on the Arctic Refuge via TikTok
Gen Z social media users have made the threat of energy development inside the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge a viral cause, leading to a tidal wave of youth-led action.

Washington — Millions of Gen Z youth have set a new standard for online organizing in little more than two weeks. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, currently facing the dual threats of an upcoming oil and gas lease sale on Wednesday as well as potential seismic exploration this winter, has become a viral topic on TikTok, the rapidly-growing social media video platform that now has more than 50 million daily U.S. users.

This week, Alaska Wilderness League delivered more than 5 million letters to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service prior to the close of the [public comment period on seismic exploration](#) on Jan 7, 2021. The come predominantly from Gen Z (under 25) voices concerned that drilling the Arctic Refuge is counterproductive to climate action, wildlife conservation, and the human rights of the indigenous Gwich'in peoples who oppose the plan for energy exploration.

“There is a misconception that young people are distracted by social media,” said [Alex Haraus](#), **a TikTok user who created an Influencer kit to help other social media users learn about and elevate the Arctic Refuge issue.** “This is evidence that social platforms can be used to organize participation in the democratic process at a massive scale.” See Alec’s latest update here: <https://www.tiktok.com/@alex.haraus/video/6913508054528969990>

“Having to worry about our future is no fun. Watching our state melt three times the rate as the rest of the world as our elected leadership pushes for more oil and gas development is very concerning,” said **Kaila Druck, Draanjik/Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in and Gwich'in Youth Council President.** “We are witnessing something that even our elders haven’t seen. This is why we must protect our animals, our land and our water; that is our survival. Mahsi Choo (thank you) to the millions of TikTok supporters who stand with the Gwich'in Nation to protect the sacred Arctic Refuge.”

Millions of teens have answered the call by creating their own TikTok stories and directly calling on Influencers to amplify the issue. Viral TikTok creators like [Ben de Almeida](#), [Addison Re](#), and [Charli D'Amelio](#) have shared personal Arctic Refuge stories reaching millions of teens. Charli (#1), Addison (#2) and [Dixie D'Amelio](#) (#7) continue to feature the Arctic Refuge on their profile pages and all rank in the top ten of most-followed TikTok accounts worldwide. But the call to

action extends far beyond TikTok celebrities. From [front line accounts](#) by indigenous youth to [humorous dating advice](#) to [polar bear craft projects](#), young people have shown both passion and creativity in organizing as a cohort to demand protection of the Arctic Refuge.

“Millions of young people are sending a loud and unmistakable message: They do not want the wildest place left in America sacrificed for a fix of oil that will make the climate crisis even worse,” **said Adam Kolton, executive director of Alaska Wilderness League.** “President-elect Biden should be emboldened by this show of force for protecting the Arctic Refuge, and any company that seeks to drill should also take notice. Young people will not sit on the sidelines. They will make their voices heard at every step, every stage, and never rest until this sacred landscape to the Gwich’in people is permanently protected.”

“This isn’t an accident,” **Alex Haraus said.** “If people think we’ll get bored and forget about this, they’re going to be surprised. Today’s youth are savvy and informed. And now they’re using their biggest social platform to organize. Gen Z is watching to see who will bid on the lease sale for the Arctic Refuge. You’ll be hearing from us. We’re watching to see if our comments to the Fish & Wildlife Service are acknowledged and acted on. We’re not stopping until we see the US government take action to permanently protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.”

“The youth are the future and we should have a say in what that reality will be,” **said Nanieezh Peter, a Gwich’in and Diné youth.** “As an indigenous young woman I am a political statement from the day I am born. I must protect the lands, water, and even my own body constantly. It’s tiring, but it’s important.who have deep connections to the land of the Arctic. If that connection is broken it will have a much larger impact on the rest of the world. We are all connected.”

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Additional Resources:

For full digital press kit: <https://tinyurl.com/ydzclzqo>

For broadcast media reel and licensing: <https://tinyurl.com/ybkzvoq2>

For still images and licensing: <https://tinyurl.com/y8tezc4>

For TikTok video assets: <https://tinyurl.com/ycfbvvr5>