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[EXTERNAL] Attn: Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS

1 message

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Thank you for the opportunity to comment on drilling on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is very important to us. For decades I (Phyllis) "worked to protect the Coastal Plain never dreaming I would ever see it. In 2007 I fulfilled a life long dream to explore some remote areas of the Arctic Refuge along the Kongakut River. Backpacking in the Arctic Refuge was my first true wilderness experience and I was profoundly touched. I walked where polar bears den and climbed up a high ridge to look out to the ice of the Arctic Ocean and down on the Coastal Plain. I saw small groups of the Porcupine Caribou herd turn into hundreds and thousands pouring over the passes on their way to calve on the Coastal Plain. Nothing could prepare me for this ancient, moving ritual. I could scoop water from any stream and drink it untreated." There are very few places left in America to experience such pristine wilderness values.

The Arctic Refuge was established to protect wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and subsistence and wilderness values. The Arctic Refuge is one of America's last spectacular wildernesses with wild rivers, jagged mountains, sweeping tundra landscapes, boreal forests, coastal lagoons, and barrier islands. It is unique because it has such a wide range of Arctic and subarctic ecosystems that are completely undisturbed. For centuries, the Gwich'in people of Alaska have depended on the Porcupine Caribou herd that calves on the Coastal Plain (1002 area) for their economic, cultural and spiritual existence.

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) purposes are: (i) To conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity, including, but not limited to, the Porcupine caribou herd (including participation in coordinated ecological studies and management of this herd and the Western Arctic caribou herd), polar bears, grizzly bears, musk ox, dall sheep, wolves, snow geese, peregrine falcons and other migratory birds, Arctic char, and grayling; (ii) To provide the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents; and (iv) To ensure water quality and necessary water quantity within the Arctic Refuge.

Phyllis also backpacked a number of times along the Atigun River Gorge of the Refuge and saw more and more human debris (building materials, plastics, etc) from increasing development along the Dalton Highway. Any peace and quiet was shattered by increasing helicopter activity flying over the refuge itself and is not consistent with wilderness values, or what tourists flock to Alaska to see or hear. Please continue to "perpetuate conditions that enable visitors to the Arctic Refuge to experience: authentic adventure, hunting, independence, self-reliance, exploration, and solitude" with rules and guidelines that protect the Refuge's unique wilderness values. Drilling would cause destruction the entire Refuge because destroying the Coastal Plain would negatively impact the entire Refuge.

In 1987 the United States and Canadian governments signed an international agreement for management and long-term protection of the Porcupine caribou herd and formed the International Porcupine Caribou Commission (IPCC). The objectives were "to conserve the Porcupine caribou herd and its habitat through international cooperation and coordination so that the risk of irreversible damage or long-term adverse effects as a result of development to caribou or their habitat is minimized; To ensure opportunities for customary and traditional uses of the Porcupine caribou herd; To enable users of the Porcupine caribou herd to participate in the international coordination of the conservation of the Porcupine caribou herd and its habitat; To encourage cooperation communication among governments, uses of Porcupine caribou and others to achieve these objectives." Canada has honored this agreement by making the Porcupine caribou calving grounds in Canada National Parks. The United States has not honored this agreement by not permanently protecting its Porcupine caribou calving grounds on the Coastal Plain. The Coastal Plain is the largest calving ground, and because of the mountains, they have nowhere else to go.

The Coastal Plain is vital to the entire Refuge because of the diversity of plant, animal and fish species that would be destroy by drilling. Sen. Lisa Murkowski justified her budget rider by claiming oil and gas development on the Coastal Plain would bring \$1 billion to the U.S. Treasury over 10 year. Leading economists and recent lease sales on the North Slope suggest the number closer to \$50 million with half going to the state of Alaska and the rest to the U.S. Treasury. It's been proven that drilling in the harsh Arctic climate is not safe, and to destroy land, fish, birds and caribou that belong to all Americans is reprehensible. Please listen to the American people who the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge belongs to, and say no to drilling and destroying our last pristine wilderness.

Michael and Phyllis Mains

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