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[EXTERNAL] Comment RE NOI to Initiate Environmental Review of Oil & Gas Drilling in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Coastal Plain1 message

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To: blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov

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The Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the most important locations for protecting wildlife in our entire nation. It is important habitat for polar bears, muskoxen, caribou, not to mention the hundreds of species of migratory birds that travel from all 50 states and 6 continents.

There are many important legal protections in place for the refuge, and the administration needs to carefully ensure they will ALL be complied with. This compliance is necessary to protect one of our most treasured public lands. The rules protect caribou, water, subsistence, and all other sensitive resources of the Coastal Plain.

Politics must not be put ahead of these protections.

Polar bears are threatened in the US, and oil and gas leasing in the Coastal Plain would be detrimental to the most important denning habitat for these threatened bears. The imperiled bears would be subjected to even more risk, on top of the risk of global warming to their habitat.

Protection of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitats along its migration route is one of the reasons why the Arctic Refuge was established. The US and Canada are parties to a treaty that requires protection of the herd. The herd is an important subsistence resource for the Gwich'in Nation, who have relied upon them for millennia. The Gwich'ins consider the Coastal Plain to be the sacred place where life begins.

Interior needs to compile and use the best, most valid scientific data, and to consider the impact from all stages of oil and gas. These stages should include, at a minimum, leasing, seismic activities, exploration drilling, development, and all related infrastructure or activities. Besides the environmental impact of the actual footprint of the oil and gas developments, impacts will extend far beyond the immediate area to threaten wildlife, water, subsistence, and other values the Arctic Refuge was established to protect.

The fragile, vulnerable Arctic Refuge is not a place where oil and gas development should be allowed, period. Adherence to the environmental rules in place will help ensure that, but we need to make sure that these rules are followed and not cast aside for political reasons.

Thank you for considering my comments,
Jane Miller
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