



CoastalPlain_EIS, BLM_AK <blm_ak_coastalplain_eis@blm.gov>

[EXTERNAL] Comments regarding oil drilling on the Coastal Plain in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

1 message

go <goldtailedhermit@aol.com>

Tue, Jun 19, 2018 at 12:37 PM

To: blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov

Dear Secretary Zinke,

I attended the hearing about oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Washington last Friday and handed in the notes that I used for speaking. However, today I took the opportunity to add more information and supportive details. I wish to share them here.

Thank you for receiving my comments.

Sincerely,

Maryanne Adams

Comments Regarding Oil Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Made at Washington, D.C. hearing June 15, 2018

Edited Version – more details

By Maryanne Adams, Conservation Chair, Onondaga Audubon, Syracuse, NY

The mission of the Bureau of Land Management is “to sustain the health, diversity, and productivity of the public lands for the use and enjoyment of future generations.” The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a place that must be preserved in its current pristine state for future generations of wildlife and humans. I vehemently oppose oil exploration and drilling in this magnificent, biologically diverse ecosystem.

Avian species from six continents and all 50 states use the refuge as a place to create the next generation. The fact that the Arctic Tern flies 12,000 miles from Antarctica to breed within ANWR boundaries indicates the importance of the refuge. Almost every bird species on earth is already in decline due to habitat loss, climate change, and pollution. Adding the loss of crucial breeding grounds would significantly accelerate the decline of the bird species that depend on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for reproduction.

Species that would be especially impacted by oil drilling on the Coastal Plain are the shorebirds that use this area for breeding. Here's the list: Black-bellied Plover, American Golden-Plover, Semipalmated Plover, Wandering Tattler, Spotted Sandpiper, Upland Sandpiper, Whimbrel, Ruddy Turnstone, Sanderling, Semipalmated Sandpiper, White-rumped Sandpiper, Baird's Sandpiper, Pectoral Sandpiper, Dunlin, Stilt Sandpiper, Buff-breasted Sandpiper, Long-billed Dowitcher, Red-necked Phalarope, and Red Phalarope (from *Arctic Wings, Birds of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*.) Although we don't see them every day, birders in the lower 48 are quite aware of shorebird migration and take advantage of any opportunity to catch a glimpse of iconic species like the Buff-breasted Sandpiper who follow flyways over the continent on their journey north. Because they nest on the ground in the open, all shorebirds are particularly vulnerable to the predators that are drawn to manmade disturbance. In order to drill for oil, roads, buildings, and industrial facilities would need to be built. This construction would fragment and degrade the habitat so much that nests would be abandoned or perhaps never even built.

The worst case scenario of a major oil spill is unthinkable. We already know what that looks like. Should that happen, clean up would be challenging and restoration of the land to previous pristine conditions impossible.

The best case scenario for the Coastal Plain should oil leasing occur, would be habitat fragmentation, noise and light pollution, and the presence of humans. Breeding birds would experience less nesting success and serious population declines. There is no such thing as “drilling responsibly” when considering the ability to avoid creating a negative impact on avian populations that nest on the ground.

Surveys conducted in 2002 and 2004 indicate that 14 species of breeding shorebirds (more than 230,000 individuals) were present on the Coastal Plain (*The Condor* 109(1):1-14. 2007). Many of these species are in decline and increased disturbance to their breeding grounds would put them at greater risk than ever before. In addition, more current data need to be obtained. The statistics cited here merely provide baseline information which does, however, indicate the importance of the Coastal Plain for shorebirds. *The Condor* article stated that “Existing studies are insufficient to predict or mitigate the potential impacts of development on shorebirds within the coastal plain because population sizes and the distribution of nesting shorebirds are unknown.” At the very least, more surveys should be carried out before determining that the area is appropriate for development and will not cause irreparable harm to avian species in the balance. This could not possibly be determined in one year.

As taxpayers, we see our dollars applied to projects that do not appear to be of any direct benefit to us as individuals. Although we may never even see some of the things our money is used for, we are expected to contribute. In this case, although I may personally never set foot in the Arctic Refuge, I feel connected to the birds that migrate through New York State and breed in the ANWR and I want them to continue to be protected.

Unfortunately, pressure to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to development is increasing exponentially under the current administration. According to Joe Balash, President Trump's appointee for Assistant interior Secretary for Land and Minerals Management, there is a new mission to be accomplished. He says that, "Developing our resources there (in the ANWR) is an important facet for meeting our nation's energy demands and achieving energy dominance."

I disagree. The Bureau of Land Management should not endorse the sacrifice of the Coastal Plain - the nursery for porcupine caribou, denning polar bears, and breeding shorebirds in order to reach this dubious goal. Instead, they should keep the facets sparkling on the gem that is the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge by preventing oil drilling there.

Can the Bureau of Land Management look profiteers in the eye and say, "No! Oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is not a sustainable process and runs contrary to our mission to insure the enjoyment of the refuge for future generations?" It would be the right thing to do.



Comments made at Washington 6-15-18.docx

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