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## [EXTERNAL] Scoping Comments for Proposed Oil and Gas Leasing on Coastal Plain of Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska: NO LEASING, COASTAL PLAIN NEEDS WILDERNESS PROTECTION

1 message

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To: blm\_ak\_coastalplain\_EIS@blm.gov

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Bureau of Land Management

Scoping Comments for Proposed Oil and Gas Leasing on Coastal Plain of Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska: **NO LEASING, COASTAL PLAIN NEEDS WILDERNESS PROTECTION**

Prior to 2007, I never thought I'd spend time on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, including its Coastal Plain. But I thought that JUST THE IDEA of its spectacular existence was important. Then, in June of 2007 I did the first of 5 hike/canoe trips with my husband and a couple friends, all but one hiking across the Continental Divide, picking up our canoe and resupply, and paddling to the Beaufort Sea. **WOW.**

Experiencing such an intact, large, biodiverse set of ecosystems, where everything that should be there is there, and nothing that should not be there is there, was a profound personal experience. It takes such a large landscape (with perhaps six ecotomes from the foothills south of the Brooks, to the lagoons, reefs, and open ocean on the Beaufort) to support the web of relationships amongst predators, prey, and plant life that allows life to thrive.

Although on every trip we have seen polar bears, wolves, grizzly bears, arctic fox, wolverines, moose, thousands of caribou, siksiks, and more, the birds for me have the most extraordinary stories, as they undertake unbelievable journeys to lay their eggs and raise young. Millions of birds travel on flyways from every US state and 7 continents to feed on the abundance of the Refuge, with the Coastal Plain being crucial. Examples: Yellow Wagtails and Northern Wheatears arrive from Asia and Africa; Arctic Terns nest and aggressively protect their young, after flying in from Antarctica (44,000 mile round trip every year, and since they live up to 34 years, they might fly 1.25 million miles in their lifetime to lay an egg on the Coastal Plain!!!); my Emeritus Chesapeake Bay Marine Ecologist brother sees Tundra Swans leave his area to breed on the Coastal Plain; the Red Phalaropes I see passing through Wyoming in the spring come from off the coast of Chile and continue to the Coastal Plain.

WHY DO THESE AND MANY MORE BIRDS MIGRATE TO, OR PASS THROUGH THE COASTAL PLAIN? Duh, because it is rich in resources such as tundra grasses and sedges, shrubs and forbs, insects, waterways, lakes, tundra ponds and coastal waters, and 24-hour sunlight for several months. The entire refuge, down past Yukon Flats is important, but the Coastal Plain is the engine driving the entire ecosystem. Not only is the Coastal Plain vital for the many land, air, and sea creatures on the landscape itself, but the Coastal Plain is vitally significant globally, as seen by bird migrations.

The importance of the Refuge with its Coastal Plain goes far beyond my personal experience. After each trip, and to this day, I have continued to read and learn of the importance of this area to the Gwich'in and Inupiat/Inuit people. For thousands of years the Gwich'in have depended on the caribou that calve on the Coastal Plain for subsistence, and perhaps more importantly are spiritually and culturally connected to the landscape and its wildlife. The Inupiat/Inuit depend on both terrestrial and marine environments for subsistence, and their cultural lives. These people need to be respected, which means not destroying the Coastal Plain.

Much of the Refuge has Wilderness status, but the Coastal Plain is not protected, and is now under threat that is difficult to understand. Oil companies know the risk of drilling in the Arctic, and realize it is a bad investment. However, if the Coastal Plain is opened to drilling, they will buy leases, and likely will do test drilling. Even with modern techniques and limited drilling pads, roads and more will destroy the fragile tundra. Climate change is melting the permafrost so the industrial impact will be more severe. What makes it even more crazy in putting the Coastal Plain at risk, is that we do not need this oil, we should not burn oil, and there are still alternative areas available in the National Petroleum Reserve for oil development.

Do not destroy this immense landscape by disrupting the ecological integrity of the Coastal Plain with drilling. All Americans own this area, not just CEOs of oil companies, and not just the Alaska Congressional Delegation. Thirty-seven years of a majority of citizens wanting protection must be respected.

#### **NO LEASING, COASTAL PLAIN NEEDS WILDERNESS PROTECTION**

Sincerely,

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**bev's june 16, 2018 letter to blm.docx**

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