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# Let the Trump administration know Arctic Refuge is no place for oil and gas drilling

By SALLY JEWELL  
Special to The Times

When I visited the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in 2013, we flew across the sweeping coastal plain, high above flocks of snow geese and the tangle of rivers that flow to the Arctic Ocean. We steered through the massive Brooks Range, where the steep mountain walls made our four-seater prop plane seem minuscule. We landed on the banks of a river on a nameless valley floor, and hiked where native people have, for thousands of years, found sustenance and solitude in the rugged landscape. It was a deeply humbling and awe-inspiring experience — words alone cannot convey the grandeur and beauty and wildness of the place.

The small plane that took us deep into the Arctic Refuge? Powered by aviation fuel. The jacket that kept me warm? My rubber-soled hiking boots? Both petroleum-based products.

I share these last details because I'm clear-eyed about the fact our nation remains a fossil-fuel based economy, and energy development is particularly critical to the economy of Alaska. Even as we must strive to transition to a clean-energy future, we can't simply turn off our collective dependence on oil and gas overnight.

But as a former petroleum engineer, businesswoman and Secretary of the Interior, I can say with confidence there are no justifiable reasons that we must drill for oil in America's last truly wild place, the Arctic Refuge.

Unfortunately, that's precisely what the Trump administration is rushing to do. This spring, the Interior Department launched an expedited leasing process with the aim of auctioning off at least 400,000 acres in the Arctic Refuge to the highest bidder as early as next year.

The administration says that drilling in the refuge is an important component of their so-called "energy dominance" strategy, necessary to bolster our nation's energy portfolio. But that claim simply doesn't stand up to scrutiny.

Right now, the oil and gas industry has a massive surplus of oil and gas leases and permits. Less than half of federal acreage under lease is currently producing. Last year, industry bid on just 7 percent of federal acreage offered for lease at auction — the lowest share ever over the past decade.

The most promising oil plays are still in the Lower 48, primarily on state and private lands, where fracking has unlocked resources that have enabled us to cut our dependence on foreign oil. Any economist would tell you that adding to the glut of supply at this time just doesn't make good business sense.

Alaska's U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski — the



U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

An airplane flies over caribou on Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

## Stop the drilling

The Bureau of Land Management is accepting public comment until June 19. Submit your comments via the website, email or mail:

Online: <https://st.news/ANWR>

Email: [blm\\_ak\\_coastalplain\\_EIS@blm.gov](mailto:blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov)

Mail: Attn: Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS 222 West 7th Avenue, Stop #13 Anchorage, Alaska 99513.

driving force behind drilling in the refuge — got her way by tucking the provision into last year's tax package, ensuring that debate of the proposal was muted and that it could squeak by with only 50 votes, instead of the 60 usually required. Her legislative jujitsu reversed nearly six decades of bipartisan efforts in Congress to protect the Arctic Refuge — first to establish it in 1960, and then to periodically beat back attempts to undermine its safeguards. Her actions also undermined the interests of Alaska Native communities who rely on the refuge for subsistence and cultural practices.

Sen. Murkowski justified her budget rider by claiming that the oil and gas development would send \$1 billion to the U.S. Treasury over 10 years. That claim doesn't pass the laugh test either.

Recent and historical lease-sale data from other places on Alaska's North Slope suggests that number would be closer to \$50 million. Last year's sale of more than 10 million acres in the U.S.'s National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska — perhaps the best indicator we have of industry's interest in the North Slope — brought in bids on less than one percent of the acres offered and generated just over \$1 mil-

lion.

The most concerning claim of all is that the drilling can be done safely, without harm to the surrounding environment. The refuge's coastal plain, where development would take place, is brimming with wildlife — critical calving grounds to caribou, denning habitat for polar bears and home to more than 200 species of migratory birds.

We know from experience that the web of roads, requisite infrastructure and inevitable spills would cause irrevocable damage to one of the most sensitive and pristine places on the planet. This isn't just my opinion: It's what the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service concluded in 2015 after a multiyear review that included more than a million public comments, including from scientists, biologists and Alaska Native communities.

We should not be a nation that trades away our children's future for reckless, shortsighted political gimmicks. We are better than this.

We have a small window of time in which to let the Trump administration know that the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is no place for oil and gas drilling — not now and not ever. The rushed leasing process includes a 60-day public comment period that expires on June 19. It remains my hope that the administration will listen to the American people and reconsider their ill-conceived, dangerous and costly rush to sell out one of the last truly wild places on earth.



Sally Jewell was U.S. Secretary of the Interior from 2013-2017 and currently serves as a Distinguished Fellow at the University of Washington College of the Environment.

6-6-2016

I completely agree with this article —  
The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is precious.  
It should be kept for all of us to cherish.

This is my opinion, also.

LARRY HEEREN - same address

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