

Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS
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Anchorage, Alaska 99513

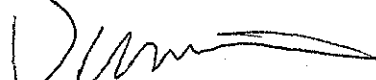
Public Comment on the Environmental Impact Statement for the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program

My name is Deanna Steege, Director of National Outreach with Defenders of Wildlife. I am here today in my professional and personal capacity to state for the record that I am strongly opposed to any oil and gas development on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge, known as the 1002 area by those wishing to boil it down to a reference point, is no place for drilling. The coastal plain is the most important onshore denning habitat for threatened polar bears in the country. Over 75% of it is designated as critical habitat for these iconic bears. As sea ice continues to melt due to climate change, pregnant females from the Southern Beaufort Sea polar bear population are increasingly forced to come ashore to birth and rear their young. What will happen to this species when their home is invaded by, and tangled with oil rigs, roads, pipelines and other infrastructure? We know from a September 15, 2017 report from the New York Times (<https://www.nytimes.com/2017/12/15/climate/arctic-drilling-anwr.html>) that the scars of this development never really go away, as shown by satellite images of the first, and only, oil well ever drilled in the refuge in the 1980's, remnants of which still scar the earth. Still to this day we do not know how much, or how little, oil was actually produced from this site.

The Arctic Refuge is a unique and unparalleled landscape, home not only to polar bears, but to the Porcupine Caribou Herd that sustain and maintain the Gwich'in Nation—a culture that has survived and thrived off the land for thousands of years—musk oxen, wolves, Arctic fox, and nearly 200 species of migratory birds that migrate to six continents and all 50 states.

This hasty and short-sided plan to plow through the lease sale process with only one public hearing outside of Alaska and the administration's rush to complete the EIS in one year is a clear indication that the administration has its sights set on drilling in this remote region, whatever the cost, and no matter the opposition from the majority of Americans. It is our moral obligation to protect this iconic landscape for the Gwich'in who depend on it for their culture and way of life; it is our moral obligation to protect this landscape for the wildlife who give birth there and who make up some of the greatest biodiversity in the nation; and it is our moral obligation to protect this landscape for the benefit of future generations who need clean air to breathe and clean water to drink, and who's chances of growing up on a planet that affords them these basic necessities diminishes with every new oil and gas program extracted around the globe.

Sincerely,



Deanna Steege
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