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[EXTERNAL] Protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from Oil and Gas Drilling -- DOI-BLM-AK-0000-2018-0002-EIS (Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing EIS)

1 message

Chris Lish <lishchris@yahoo.com>

Mon, Jun 18, 2018 at 9:04 PM

To: "blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov" <blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov>

Monday, June 18, 2018

Attn: Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS
[222 West 7th Avenue](#), Stop #13
Anchorage, Alaska 99513

Subject: Protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from Oil and Gas Drilling -- DOI-BLM-AK-0000-2018-0002-EIS (Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing EIS)

To: DOI Secretary Zinke, BLM Acting Director Michael Nedd, and Project Coordinator Nicole Hayes,

I strongly urge the Bureau of Land Management to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and shine a bright light on the immeasurable harm that oil and gas development would bring to this area. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is an iconic wilderness that is sacred to the Gwich'in people and a precious, vital ecosystem for numerous species. As someone who cares deeply about indigenous rights, wildlife, and public lands, I strongly oppose efforts to develop an oil and gas program and to hold an oil and gas lease sale in the coastal plain (1002 area) of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We can't let this pristine public land be destroyed just for the sake of fossil fuel industry profits.

"Our duty to the whole, including to the unborn generations, bids us to restrain an unprincipled present-day minority from wasting the heritage of these unborn generations. The movement for the conservation of wildlife and the larger movement for the conservation of all our natural resources are essentially democratic in spirit, purpose and method."

-- Theodore Roosevelt

This plan is the single-most destructive attack on a refuge in modern history. The Department of the Interior and the Bureau of Land Management must conduct a robust, science-based environmental review by closely examining the science and fully evaluating the impacts at every stage of energy development on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's wildlife, water, subsistence, and other public values for which it was created. A thorough, lawful planning process will reveal that drilling in this wild landscape would jeopardize sensitive species, destroy irreplaceable public lands, and threaten the Gwich'in way of life.

"Our government is like a rich and foolish spendthrift who has inherited a magnificent estate in perfect order, and then has left his fields and meadows, forests and parks to be sold and plundered and wasted."

-- John Muir

Nearly the entire Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is also designated Wilderness or recommended for wilderness designation by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service. This last great wilderness must

remain as it is, wild and free forever. Oil leasing and accompanying development has no place in the coastal plain or anywhere on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"It is horrifying that we have to fight our own government to save the environment."
-- Ansel Adams

Disappointingly and not unsurprisingly, the current administration has indicated its intent to expedite the review process and hold lease sales by 2019. This rushed timeline will not allow for the full analysis required under the law and which is necessary to meet the Department's obligations to responsibly steward one of the crown jewels of the nation's National Wildlife Refuge System. Rushing to sell off one of our most treasured public lands is irresponsible and reckless. The administration needs to comply with all the important legal protections that are in place to protect caribou and other wildlife, water, subsistence, and other sensitive resources of the Coastal Plain. The public is counting on your environmental review to be done right.

"As we peer into society's future, we—you and I, and our government—must avoid the impulse to live only for today, plundering for our own ease and convenience the precious resources of tomorrow. We cannot mortgage the material assets of our grandchildren without risking the loss also of their political and spiritual heritage. We want democracy to survive for all generations to come, not to become the insolvent phantom of tomorrow."
-- Dwight D. Eisenhower

One of the last completely unspoiled wild places on earth, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is irreplaceable. The coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is of cultural and natural value to all Americans, and is revered as the "sacred place where life begins" by the indigenous Gwich'in people of Alaska and Canada. Protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is also a matter of human rights for Alaska Native tribes like the Gwich'in, who rely upon the Porcupine caribou herd for over eighty percent of their diet. The coastal plain provides the most important calving grounds for the Porcupine caribou herd, which is vital to the culture and survival of the Gwich'in and other indigenous people who have sustained themselves and their cultures on this land for centuries. Oil exploration would impact the birth rates and migration patterns of the caribou, which would threaten the tribe's food sources and way of life. I stand with the Gwich'in Nation and the wildlife in defense of the sacred coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. By rushing to open this land to destructive oil drilling, the current administration is blatantly prioritizing profits over people and disregarding tribal sovereignty for the sake of corporate greed.

"Shortsighted men ... in their greed and selfishness will, if permitted, rob our country of half its charm by their reckless extermination of all useful and beautiful wild things."
-- Theodore Roosevelt

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of America's and Earth's last truly wild places, and the coastal plain is its biological heart—home to the largest array of wildlife in the circumpolar north. It provides sanctuary to some of the most diverse and magnificent wildlife in Alaska, including wolves, Arctic foxes, wolverines, musk oxen, and vast herds of caribou. It provides the most important onshore denning habitat for threatened polar bears and serves as an avian nursery for hundreds of species of birds. Our entire nation and planet is connected to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, as birds from all fifty states and six continents migrate to this unique habitat. The coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge also bears witness to the migration of the Porcupine caribou herd—one of the largest animal migrations in North America—which uses the coastal plain as its most important calving grounds. Drilling has no place in this wildlife haven and we can't afford to put these animals and our environment at risk of irreversible pollution. Oil and gas production would permanently destroy this sacred place, disrupting wildlife in the region and leading to devastating oil spills that negatively impact wildlife, water, and climate. The oil and gas industry should not be allowed to trample this amazing landscape and foul its pristine air and water.

"In permitting the sacrifice of anything that would be of the slightest value to future visitors to the convenience, bad taste, playfulness, carelessness, or wanton destructiveness of present visitors, we probably yield in each case the interest of uncounted millions to the selfishness of a few individuals."

-- Frederick Law Olmstead

Energy development raises a suite of environmental issues that forecast permanent harm to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's fragile environment. If oil companies are allowed to drill on the coastal plain, the environmental damage to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will be irreversible. The impacts from oil and gas will extend far beyond the footprint of the well pad and harm the wildlife, water, and other values the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was set aside to protect. Scars on the tundra from heavy seismic equipment will remain visible decades later. Nesting birds will be vulnerable to numerous, inevitable industrial oil spills and increased predation. The Porcupine caribou herd will face potential population-level impacts from roads and pipelines displacing the herd from calving grounds on the narrow coastal plain. The remote Arctic has a small population, with few facilities available to address a cleanup. The harsh conditions and temperatures make responding to the inevitable oil spills exorbitantly difficult and expensive. The long-term conservation of a holistic Arctic ecosystem in the U.S. will be significantly jeopardized by embarking on this oil and gas program in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"These temple destroyers, devotees of ravaging commercialism, seem to have a perfect contempt for nature, and, instead of lifting their eyes to the God of the Mountains, lift them to the almighty dollar."

-- John Muir

Not only would oil and gas drilling have devastating and irreversible impacts on the people and wildlife for whom the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is home, but it would also cause great harm to our climate. The Arctic is already seeing and feeling the effects of climate change. Alaska is already warming twice as fast as the rest of the nation and experiencing harsh impacts—from community relocation to permafrost melt to wildfires—that will only be exacerbated if more fossil fuels are extracted and burned. Allowing drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would inevitably increase climate pollution, harming communities already bearing the brunt of the changing climate as they are forced to adapt to rising seas, melting ice, and changing migration patterns. We shouldn't continue to blindly lease public lands without considering the impacts to our climate. Recent scientific research concludes that Arctic oil and gas reserves must remain in the ground to avoid dangerous levels of global warming. In the face of our planet's rising climate crisis, opening new frontiers like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling simply makes no sense.

"The ultimate test of a moral society is the kind of world that it leaves to its children."

-- Dietrich Bonhoeffer

The federal government must clearly explain to the public how fossil fuel development in the coastal plain would impact vital public resources. The environmental review must fully evaluate the many and cumulative effects from all stages of oil and gas leasing, including seismic exploration, development, drilling, and production on the following:

- Migration routes and calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd;
- Critical habitat where federally protected polar bears den and raise their cubs;
- Rivers, lakes, and streams that shelter Dolly Varden and other valued fish species;
- Nesting, feeding, and breeding grounds for migratory shorebirds, waterfowl, raptors, and other birds;
- Essential habitat for muskoxen, gray wolves, brown bears, and other terrestrial wildlife;
- Coastal waters where seals, belugas, and bowhead whales live;
- Wildlife corridors and the biological integrity of refuge ecosystems;

- The wilderness character of both the coastal plain and designated Wilderness to the south and east;
- Subsistence resources upon which the Gwich'in and other indigenous people depend; and
- Increasing impacts of climate change.

"One hundred years from now, as people look back on our use of this continent, we shall not be praised for our reckless use of its oil, nor the loss of our forests; we shall be heartily damned for all these things. But we may take comfort in the knowledge that we shall certainly be thanked for the National Parks [and wildlife refuges]."

-- Secretary of the Interior Ray Lyman Wilbur, 1931

These and other impacts must be evaluated for their effects that will extend far beyond the footprint of any physical development. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge should remain a place in America's Arctic for birds and wildlife seeking refuge from the pressures of climate change and development. Therefore, the environmental review must also include a "no leasing" alternative. The Department must carefully collect the science and consider these issues, which clearly indicate why an oil and gas program does not belong in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"I think America will have come to maturity when it will be possible to erect somewhere in the United States a great bronze marker which will read:

"Beneath these lands which surround you there lies enormous mineral wealth. However, it is the judgment of the American people, who locked up this area, that these lands shall not be disturbed, because we wish posterity to know that somewhere in our country, in gratitude to nature, there was at least one material resource that we could let alone."

-- Freeman Tilden

The effort to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas drilling is the single most destructive attack on the wilderness, wildlife, and subsistence resources of a national wildlife refuge in modern history. The coastal plain is a global treasure worthy of wilderness designation—it should not be turned into an industrial oil field, replete with roads, pipelines, drill rigs, spills, leaks, and noise, air, and water pollution. Such development would cause long-term damage to sensitive tundra. Drilling for oil and gas in the 1002 area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is irresponsible and unnecessary at a time when we should be transitioning to a renewable energy future. I proudly stand with the Gwich'in to defend the, along with the seventy percent of Americans who support keeping the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge wild and free from fossil fuel extraction. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a symbol of what we want for our future—the preservation of a way of life, climate justice, and wild places for future generations. I urge you to protect it from drilling at all costs.

"Every man who appreciates the majesty and beauty of the wilderness and of wild life, should strike hands with the farsighted men who wish to preserve our material resources, in the effort to keep our forests and our game beasts, game-birds, and game-fish—indeed, all the living creatures of prairie and woodland and seashore—from wanton destruction. Above all, we should realize that the effort toward this end is essentially a democratic movement."

-- Theodore Roosevelt

Please protect our communities, our natural heritage, and our clean energy future by halting your plans to hand over the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas leasing. The Department of the Interior should be doing more to protect this sacred space, not putting the greed of oil corporations before the needs of our communities and ecosystems. Instead of moving forward with drilling, we must protect this land, as it is critical to the Porcupine caribou herd and the Gwich'in people who continue their subsistence way of life, as they have since time immemorial. I strongly oppose any alternative that would put these unparalleled public lands on the auction block to the

oil industry. The only acceptable option to avoid destruction of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is to prevent oil and gas development altogether. I request the Bureau of Land Management include a "no leasing" alternative in its environmental review.

"A thing is right when it tends to preserve the integrity, stability, and beauty of the biotic community. It is wrong when it tends otherwise."

-- Aldo Leopold

Thank you for your consideration of my comments. Please do NOT add my name to your mailing list. I will learn about future developments on this issue from other sources.

Sincerely,
Christopher Lish
San Rafael, CA