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May 2009

United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator,

On behalf of the millions of conservationists our organizations and businesses from across the country represent, we write in opposition to S. 503, the 'No Surface Occupancy Western Arctic Coastal Plain Domestic Energy Security Act' introduced by Senators Murkowski (AK-R) and Begich (AK-D). This legislation would undermine the fundamental purpose of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to protect wilderness and wildlife by opening the area to oil leasing and development.

At a time when Congress has a historic opportunity to pass legislation focused on clean, renewable energy sources, energy efficiency and conservation, and reversing climate change, we are deeply disappointed that the Alaska delegation is trying, once again, to divert attention from necessary policy to rehash the unproductive debate over developing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Our nation is already on a path to significantly reduce its oil addiction through sustainable clean energy solutions. In fact, changes in policy and practices from just the past few years have set us on track to reduce our oil consumption by an amount 17 times that of the speculative oil potential estimated from the Refuge over the same period. And with the current legislation being considered in Congress, there is so much more that can be done. With the right leadership, America can have energy policy that continues to reduce our use of fossil fuels, while ensuring that our most important wild places are passed on to our children and grandchildren.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a national treasure, and protecting the Arctic Refuge has long been a top priority for the members of our organizations. The Refuge's coastal plain sustains hundreds of species of wildlife, as well as the culture and way of life of the Gwich'in Nation and other Alaska Native communities. S. 503 would seriously threaten these resources. The bill's sponsors tout unproven, exaggerated oil potential from the Refuge's speculative reserves, sought ostensibly through directional drilling and pipeline technology that is currently untested in Alaska. At the same time, S. 503 would allow surface activities including seismic and exploratory drilling across the biological heart of the Refuge, disturbing denning habitats used by imperiled polar bears and harming sensitive tundra vegetation. The legislation promotes increased development focused along the Canning River and across the entire Refuge coast, activity which risks dangerous spills in key wildlife and subsistence areas of the coastal plain. Furthermore, the bill would waive vital environmental laws and destroy the very values for which the Refuge was originally set aside nearly 50 years ago – its unparalleled wilderness and wildlife.

With so many loopholes and exaggerated claims, it is hard to take this legislation as much more than a Trojan horse aimed at opening the entire Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain to oil leasing, exploration, and development.

Americans deserve a cheaper, quicker, safer and cleaner energy policy that safeguards the wild places we care so deeply about. Congress has repeatedly rejected attempts to open the Arctic Refuge to oil drilling. Instead of trotting out dead-on-arrival proposals, it's time for America to prioritize clean, renewable energy solutions that move our country away from our addiction to oil and protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as Wilderness.

*\*The Alaska Coalition is a coalition of over 1,000 businesses and organizations across the country committed to keeping Alaska wild.*