

March 13, 2019

Dear Acting Secretary Bernhardt and Assistant Secretary Balash,

We, the 71 undersigned Alaska businesses, wish to make it known that we support permanent protection of the entire Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, including the sensitive Coastal Plain.

As business owners, we represent a wide range of backgrounds and priorities. But we all oppose the current effort to open the Coastal Plain to seismic testing and oil and gas exploration and drilling. We believe permanent protection of the entire Refuge is in the best interest of Alaska and the nation for the following reasons:

- Protecting the Arctic Refuge is a matter of human rights. The narrow coastal plain provides calving and nursery grounds for the Porcupine Caribou herd, and is known to the Gwich'in people as "the sacred place where life begins." Oil development would adversely affect the Porcupine herd, and thus the health, food security, and cultural practices of the Gwich'in.
- The Arctic Refuge is one of the most biologically diverse areas in the circumpolar region. Five ecological zones that extend from the boreal forest to the polar sea, including the coastal plain, have remained largely untrammelled by human influence since the beginning of time. Renowned for its incomparable wildness, the Arctic Refuge stands as an iconic symbol of our nation's resolve to preserve its most treasured landscapes.
- Oil and gas development would negatively impact other business users. Tourism is vital to Alaska's economy. Most people visit Alaska because of its spectacular natural beauty and extraordinary wilderness character. Properly regulated eco-tourism is a sustainable means of economic development, and it relies on intact ecosystems with high wilderness values, such as the Arctic Refuge. Oil and gas development would have long-term consequences for the recreation and tourism and associated service industries that rely on these wild lands.



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- Despite new technologies and strict regulations, there is no way to ensure environmental protection of this fragile ecosystem from the impacts of oil and gas development. Spills are inevitable, and extreme conditions make complete clean-up difficult. For this reason, oil and gas development is incompatible with the other goals of the Refuge, which was originally established to preserve wildlife, wilderness, and recreational values.
- Oil development on the Coastal Plain will exacerbate effects of climate change in a region already experiencing impacts at an accelerated rate. If we wish to avoid the worst impacts of climate change for Alaska and our nation, we simply cannot continue to open new areas to drilling. Instead, we must work together to develop a truly sustainable economy for Alaska while protecting Alaskans from current and future climate impacts.

For these reasons, we oppose the Department of Interior's effort to open the Coastal Plain to leasing and development. We encourage our customers and clients to join us in opposition.

We ask that Congress repeal legislation opening the Coastal Plain to drilling and instead designate all suitable lands within the Refuge as Wilderness, thereby protecting all of this magnificent place for future generations.

Sincerely,

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