

**ALASKA CENTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT
ALASKA COMMUNITY ACTION ON TOXICS
ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE
ALASKA QUIET RIGHTS COALITION
ARCTIC AUDUBON * AUDUBON ALASKA
FRIENDS OF ALASKA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES
GWICH'IN STEERING COMMITTEE
NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION
NORTHERN ALASKA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER
PACIFIC ENVIRONMENT * SIERRA CLUB
RESISTING ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION
ON INDIGENOUS LANDS * THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY
SOUTHEAST ALASKA CONSERVATION COUNCIL**

February 27, 2013

Re: Opposition to HJR 7 and SJR 3 (that Urge Congress to Open the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil & gas exploration, development and production)

Dear Alaskan Legislator:

Over 50 years ago, Alaskans played a major hand in establishing the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge ("Refuge" or "Arctic Refuge") to preserve the wilderness and wildlife values of this corner of Alaska on an ecosystem scale. Today, it remains the only area of Alaska's North Slope protected by law from oil and gas exploration and development. The Refuge's value as an intact ecosystem is increasingly important in the face of a rapidly changing climate.

Our organizations, representing thousands of Alaskans, support protection for the Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain from oil and gas leasing, exploration, and development. This is in the best interest of Alaska and the nation for a number of reasons:

1) Oil and gas development and wilderness are not compatible. There is no safe way to explore and develop the biological heart of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, its Coastal Plain. Despite the oil industry's numerous assurances, the National Research Council found long-term, major impacts from oil and gas operations on Alaska's North Slope to tundra vegetation, migratory birds, caribou, bowhead whales, subsistence, and other cumulative effects. Despite technological advances in the oil industry, there are still large numbers of oil spills every year on Alaska's North Slope, roughly one a day on average. Directional drilling does not solve this problem. It would result in spills and pollution just like conventional drilling and the impacts of noisy development and pollution would inevitably extend into key wildlife and subsistence areas, including the nearly 100 miles of sensitive coastlines.

2) Protecting the Arctic Wildlife Refuge is important ecologically and culturally. The Arctic Refuge's narrow Coastal Plain is the center of wildlife activity for birds, fish, polar bears, marine mammals, caribou, and other wildlife. It deserves our nation's strongest protection. Oil development here would adversely affect the health of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which the Gwich'in people rely on for their subsistence, cultural, and spiritual needs. The calving and

nursery grounds on the Coastal Plain of the Refuge – where up to 40,000 calves are born each summer – are referred to as "the sacred place where life begins." For the Gwich'in, it is a human rights issue that they be allowed to continue their way of life. Protecting the Coastal Plain upholds the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples which states 'In no case may a people be deprived of their own means of subsistence...'. The Coastal Plain supports the subsistence way of life for the Inupiat and other Alaska Native people.

3) Tourism is vital to Alaska's economy and plays an important role in the health of Alaskan businesses. People visit Alaska because of its spectacular natural beauty and extraordinary wilderness opportunities. Eco-tourism is a sustainable economy dependent on intact ecosystems with high wilderness values such as the Arctic Wildlife Refuge. The Arctic Refuge represents wilderness at its wildest. Oil development would have long-term negative consequences on the recreation and tourism industries that rely on these wild lands.

4) We must pursue alternative ways to meet our energy needs in Alaska and America – drilling in the Refuge is not part of that equation. Nationally, increasing the fuel efficiency of our automobiles, developing renewable energy sources, and adopting energy efficiency and conservation technologies are safer, cleaner, and quicker alternatives to meeting our energy needs than opening the Arctic Refuge to oil and gas leasing and development. In fact, such measures are the only way to truly reduce our dependency on foreign oil. As Alaskans, we do not need to wait for federal action or speculative revenues to continue to support Alaska's strong program of funding renewable energy, energy efficiency, and weatherization programs or to promote measures for Alaskans' energy self-sufficiency. Not all Alaskans support opening the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge to oil and gas. We oppose HJR 7 and SJR 3 and support continued protection of the Arctic Refuge.

To that end, we urge President Obama and Congress to defeat any efforts to allow any oil and gas leasing, exploration, or development in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge. Adopting a Wilderness designation for the Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain will protect this magnificent place for future generations of Alaskans and all Americans; it is that goal toward which we should all aim.

Sincerely,

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