

Good afternoon. Thank you to Chairman Birch and the committee for providing this opportunity for public testimony. My name is Lois Epstein and I am an Alaska-licensed engineer with The Wilderness Society and the organization's Arctic Program Director. Since The Wilderness Society's beginnings in the 1930s, our scientists and other staff have worked in Alaska to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from development. We recognize it as a place with extraordinary wildlife, wilderness, and subsistence values, and as iconic as other American landscapes such as Yellowstone and Yosemite. Not all places in Alaska are alike, nor are all places appropriate for oil drilling and industrialization.

Had the provision supporting drilling not been quietly attached to the 2017 Tax Act where it needed only 51 votes to pass the Senate, the refuge still would be protected from development for future generations. Fortunately, earlier this month, CA Rep. Jared Huffman introduced H.R. 5911 with over 100 co-sponsors, a bill that would repeal the drilling provision of the 2017 Tax Act.

As a technical analyst, I would like to refute several incorrect statements often made by Arctic Refuge drilling advocates. Our organization's comments on the draft Environmental Impact Statement that will be submitted in March argue that the draft needs to be significantly revised and reissued for public review because of its extensive deficiencies.

First, the draft EIS does not include a reasonable range of alternatives. All of the alternatives offered would result in similar development impacts and production.

Second, even though the 2017 Tax Act limits surface disturbances to 2,000 acres, the draft EIS excludes substantial acreage throughout the Coastal Plain that would be impacted including gravel mines, ice roads, pipeline arrays, snow fences, raised structures, etc. In effect, the footprint of production and support will be much, much greater than 2,000 acres under BLM's interpretation of the law. Additionally, while well pad sizes have been reduced over the years, the rest of the industry's footprint and impacts have remained relatively unchanged.

Third, although the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System currently is operating at less than its peak, pipelines always are designed and operated to carry less than peak flow. Oil production in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is not necessary to ensure that TAPS remains viable and economic for decades to come. Staff at the Alaska Department of Natural Resources expect TAPS throughput to continue increasing through the late 2020s due to new discoveries on state lands and the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska that are now undergoing permitting, as well as the offshore Liberty development.

Fourth, the job claims made by some are highly misleading. Unless the people who obtain jobs would otherwise be unemployed, the jobs resulting from Arctic Refuge oil development are not "created" or "new" jobs.

Fifth, Alaska's Arctic oil development has some real problems. One employee died this past year, there have been two blowouts attributed to thawing permafrost during the past two years, and Alaska's venting, flaring, and fugitive emissions requirements are well behind other states' standards.

Sixth, as information about the problems with potential seismic operations and oil drilling in the refuge has been made increasingly available to Alaskans this past year, there has been growing opposition – non-Native and Native – to allowing any industrial activities on the Coastal Plain. The recent Senate poll showed over 44% of Alaskans oppose such drilling and would oppose this resolution.

Last, on a personal level and as an Alaskan, I'm concerned the state will have a long-term "black eye" nationally and globally for unnecessarily destroying this iconic landscape. While some may argue that oil production on the Coastal Plain is not destruction, no one argues that there will not be permanent impacts that will transform this near-pristine area.

For these and other reasons and on behalf of our membership in Alaska, I respectfully request that the SJR7 not be approved by this committee. I am happy to answer any questions. Thank you.

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