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RESOURCE DEVELOPMENT COUNCIL

Growing Alaska Through Responsible Resource Development

March 10, 2022

Submitted electronically via: House.Resources@akleg.gov

The Honorable Josiah Patkotak
Chair, House Resources Committee
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

The Honorable Grier Hopkins
Vice Chair, House Resources Committee
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

Re: Support for HJR 34 – National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska

Dear Chair Patkotak, Vice Chair Hopkins, and Members of the House Resources Committee:

The Resource Development Council for Alaska, Inc. (RDC) submits this letter in support of HJR 34, A Resolution Supporting oil and gas leasing and development within the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska.

RDC is a statewide trade association comprised of individuals and companies from Alaska's fishing, tourism forestry, mining, and oil and gas industries. RDC's membership includes Alaska Native corporations, local communities, organized labor, and industry support firms. RDC's purpose is to encourage a strong, diversified private sector in Alaska and expand the state's economic base through the responsible development of our natural resources.

In 1923, Congress specifically set aside and designated the NPR-A, an area larger than the state of Maine, to ensure American energy independence. The 23 million acre reserve was specifically set aside nearly a century ago for its petroleum value. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates the reserve could hold as much as 9 billion barrels of oil. Given the vast resources estimated to be in the NPR-A, future production from Willow and other fields in the NPR-A could reverse recent declines in throughput in the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System (TAPS), maintaining its viability for decades to come.

Recently, the federal administration has taken steps to limit the ability to develop the NPR-A as Congress intended. Specifically, as HJR 34 notes, to reverse course on the NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan (IAP) and Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Record of Decision (ROD) published in December 2020. In January 2022, the U.S. Department of Interior (DOI) issued a memorandum that effectively suspends the 2020 NPR-A IAP-EIS final decision. In doing so, DOI is arbitrarily reverting to a prior version of the IAP and the result is to shrink the amount of acreage available – to the tune of millions of acres - to develop for oil and gas production in the NPR-A. This action was done without any substantive explanation except "to assess new circumstances and information that may have arisen since completion of the 2020 IAP/EIS."

This is a flawed approach to the sound science-based environmental analysis required under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) that was completed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in 2020. It ignores BLM's years of consultation, scoping, public meetings, testimony and comments taken since 2018 before arriving at the final ROD for the 2020 NPR-A IAP/EIS. The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) had significant public outreach on this project, including more than 16 public scoping and comment meetings around the state, receipt of more than 130,000 public comments, and this was done in coordination with many federal, state, and local cooperating agencies and communities.

[continued...]



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Development of the NPR-A is an important resource for meeting our nation's energy demands and achieving energy dominance, especially during times when a global pandemic has resulted in supply issues, rising energy costs as a result of unprecedented inflation, and particularly now as the United States just announced a ban on all foreign imports of Russian energy, including oil and gas, due to the escalating actions of Russian President Vladimir Putin waging a senseless war against the people of Ukraine.

The arbitrary and capricious nature of the DOI's current decision to reverse the 2020 NPR-A IAP/EIS without any meaningful consultation is unacceptable. The DOI should not be allowed to claw-back acreage available for production in this way. The NPR-A was created expressly for oil and gas development and production in Alaska to support America's energy independence, advance domestic energy production, and support local job growth. RDC supports HJR 34's attempt to ensure Alaska's resources are responsibly developed and to ensure well-paying jobs for Alaskans.

Thank you for allowing RDC to comment on this important issue.

Sincerely,

Leila Kimbrell
Executive Director

