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# NORTH STAR NEWS

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Your Voice.*

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# Strengthening Our Partnership with the Gwich'in and Other Alaska Native Allies

By Adam Kolton, Executive Director

When Alaska Wilderness League adopted our new three-year strategic plan last fall one of our commitments was “listen to, support and work side by side with our Gwich'in allies and Native partners.” In some ways, this wasn't anything new. Since our inception, Gwich'in leaders have sat on our board of directors and we have worked in close partnership with the Gwich'in Steering Committee, created by the Gwich'in Nation in 1988 to speak on behalf of their people in the fight for the Arctic Refuge coastal plain or, as they call it, “the sacred place where life begins.”

Recently, however, we've been challenged to consider whether our commitment to Native partners in Alaska needs to further evolve. Too often, we in the conservation movement have neglected to adequately engage and consult with tribes or acknowledge that the public lands we are fighting for were originally stolen from those who were here long before us.

Even the great conservation heroes who pioneered establishment of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge didn't prioritize dialogue with the Gwich'in and Iñupiat people of the region. Fortunately, there have

been positive steps in the decades since, including but not limited to subsistence measures in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 as well as an international agreement between the U.S. and Canada to protect the Porcupine (River) caribou herd.

Over the years, Alaska Wilderness League has collaborated with tribal entities and individuals on fly-ins, media opportunities, outreach events, trainings and much more. This month, the League joined litigation with the Village of Nuiquisit, a small Iñupiat village in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska where oil development has impacted their air quality and undermined access to areas long used for hunting. At the same time, we have worked together with our coalition partners to support tribal leaders across the country who stand with the Gwich'in.

Today our Indigenous partners seek a stronger voice in campaign decisions, a more equitable distribution of campaign resources and a willingness for groups like ours to step back, at times, so their voices can be front and center. The recent Bureau of Land Management (BLM) hearing on the Arctic

Refuge in Fairbanks was a powerful example of what can happen with prominent Indigenous engagement and leadership. Organized under the shared frame of “Defend the Sacred,” Gwich'in and other Indigenous leaders mobilized more than 200 people with just two business days' notice and peacefully forced BLM officials to accept direct public testimony instead of their intended informational session. That, in turn, moved BLM to change the formats for similar hearings in Anchorage and Washington, D.C.

This month, Chairman of the House Natural Resources Committee Raul Grijalva (D-NM) will hold a hearing on the Arctic Refuge that, for the first time, will feature three Gwich'in witnesses and others like the Episcopal Bishop of Alaska who will speak strongly in support of Gwich'in rights. And in a truly historic move, Grijalva has named freshman Native American Representative Deb Haaland (D-NM), one of three new Native American women recently elected to Congress, as the committee's Vice Chair.

At Alaska Wilderness League, we're eager to build on this progress,

*(continued on page 7)*

**Alaska Wilderness League** is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation founded in 1993 to further the protection of Alaska's incomparable natural endowment. Our mission is to galvanize support to secure vital policies that protect and defend America's last great wild public lands and waters.

**Board of Directors:** President Jimmy Carter, Honorary Chair, Honorable Robert Mrazek, Chair Emeritus, Betsy Loyless, Chair, Richard Spener, Vice Chair, Gareth Martins, Treasurer, Ellen Ferguson, Secretary, Toni Armstrong, Steve Barker, Tom Campion, Kit DesLauriers, Kristen Grimm, Debbie S. Miller, Lorraine Netro, Brian O'Donnell, Pat Pourchor and David Weinstein. For questions about our newsletter, please email us at [info@AlaskaWild.org](mailto:info@AlaskaWild.org) or call us at 202-544-5205.

**Cover photo:** A Pacific loon settles at the water's edge on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Malkolm Boothroyd/[MalkolmBoothroyd.com](http://MalkolmBoothroyd.com).

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# Member Spotlight: Preparing to Backpack in the Arctic Refuge

By Drew McCalley

**A**s I prepare for my fifteenth backpacking trip to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, I ponder whether this will be my last one. I am getting older, and more importantly, the Arctic Refuge's precious coastal plain is under its most dire and imminent threat of being degraded by oil development. I can't do anything about the aging, but we all can (and must) dig in and fight to preserve this remarkable place.

Setting aside these thoughts, let's consider the more prosaic question of how to prepare for a backpack trip to the Arctic Refuge. There are features of an Arctic backpack trip that distinguish it from one of comparable length in temperate zones. Can you handle the extreme remoteness? Are you comfortable exploring a place with no trails or guidebooks? Are you confident handling whatever weather conditions the Arctic throws your way? And are all of your muscles and joints in good operating condition (cognizant of the difficulty of rescue)?

If you answer yes to these questions, it's time to decide where to go. Start with maps, as always, and consult with someone who has been there (including Alaska Wilderness League staff). A few tips about route planning:

- (1) hike along major rivers, as the walking is usually better there than among the dreaded tussocks of the open tundra;
- (2) avoid crossing major rivers, as they can be quite dangerous; and
- (3) moderate your distance expectations, as hiking conditions can be challenging.

Now let's navigate the logistics of getting in there. You'll first fly to Fairbanks, which is an all-day trip even from California where I live. From there, you will need two flights north to get to the north slope of the Arctic Refuge (another all-day process). Most crucial is the bush flight from Arctic Village or Fort Yukon over the Brooks Range. Only a handful of pilots serve this area, and their calendars fill up months in advance, so book early. My trips usually range 10-12 days (11 this year), including fly-in and fly-out days. Be sure to plan at least



Drew McCalley in the Arctic Refuge.

Woody Hodgdon

a day in Fairbanks at both ends of your trip. Delayed baggage coming in can ruin your trip, and it is not unusual to experience weather delays when heading out.

Once you have flights, the rest is like any other long backpack, though be prepared for wet and windy conditions. My favorite equipment for these trips are Gore-Tex oversocks and hiking poles. Oversocks keep my feet and socks dry inside wet boots, and poles help navigate the rough terrain. Once full, my pack "kit" will weigh about 30 pounds, plus food. On that note, you'll likely need a food cache too, at a place you can hike back to or along your route where the bush pilot can land and drop it off (extra cost for that).

Now you're ready for the adventure of a lifetime! \*

*Drew's story has been abridged for the newsletter. Find the full article on our blog, including more images and where he's hiking this year: [AlaskaWild.org/blog/how-to-prepare-for-an-arctic-refuge-adventure](http://AlaskaWild.org/blog/how-to-prepare-for-an-arctic-refuge-adventure).*

# At Public Hearings, a Wave of Opposition Against Arctic Refuge Development

By Emily Sullivan, Conservation Associate; Noa Banayan, Conservation Associate

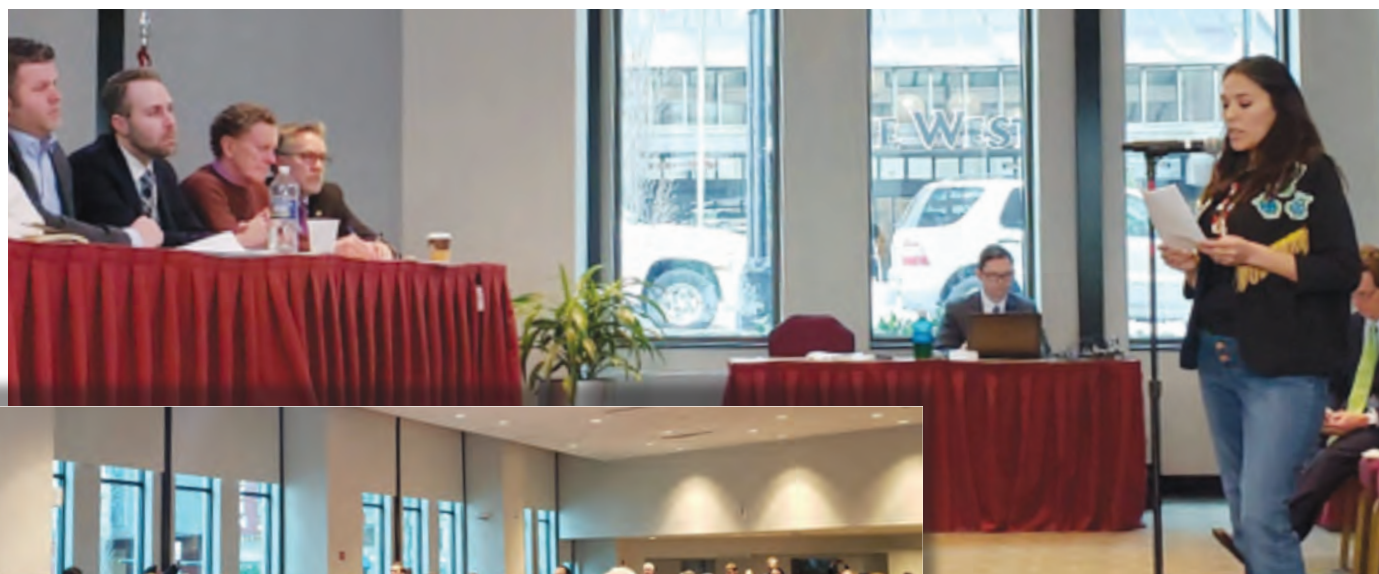
In December, the Bureau of Land Management released a Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS) in preparation to hold oil and gas lease sales for the Arctic Refuge coastal plain. As part of that process, the agency scheduled several public hearings across Alaska, and another in Washington, D.C.

On February 11, in Anchorage, Alaska, there was a strong turnout at the public hearing, and we were encouraged to see that speakers in favor of protecting the Arctic Refuge greatly outnumbered those who support drilling. Despite a six-hour open house meeting format, many who attended and wished to speak did not get a chance to testify publicly. Among those who were able to testify were

many Alaska Native leaders and community members, members of the conservation community and Alaskan adventurers who have experienced the Arctic Refuge firsthand. Volunteer-based movement Defend the Sacred AK turned out a great number of voices against drilling, and created a variety of visuals with messages of “Listen to the People” and “Defend the Sacred.” We were pleased to see positive media coverage of the hearing, and are grateful for all those who turned out and took the time to testify.

Two days later in Washington, D.C., Arctic Refuge advocates from Alaska to Massachusetts showed up to the last official hearing on the BLM’s plans to conduct oil and gas lease sales throughout the

coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Testimonies calling for protection of the Arctic Refuge filled the six-hour hearing and represented the Gwich’in, Alaska business owners, the faith community, conservation community and members of the public who simply didn’t want to see development in America’s largest wildlife refuge. Bernadette Demientieff, representing the Gwich’in Steering Committee, called for those in the audience that support protecting the Arctic Refuge to stand, and you could hear a pin drop as nearly the entire room rose to its feet at once. The impressive turnout is another reminder that the large majority of Americans that oppose development in the Arctic Refuge will not be ignored. \*



(Top) Gwich’in Steering Committee executive director Bernadette Demientieff gives testimony to Interior Department officials in Washington, D.C.

(Left) Gwich’in Steering Committee executive director Bernadette Demientieff asks those who support Arctic Refuge protections to stand at a public hearing in Washington, D.C.

Corey Himrod, Alaska Wilderness League

# Campaign Corner: Wild Alaska Campaign Updates

By Kelsie Rudolph, Arctic Campaign Manager

This is something new for Alaska Wilderness League's newsletters, but we're hoping this brief recap can become a newsletter mainstay and help catch you up on Alaska updates you might have missed.

In the Alaskan Arctic, we're excited to share that senior Interior Department staff and a chief executive at SAExploration, the company trying to conduct seismic surveys in the Arctic Refuge, confirmed they will not conduct surveys this season and is delaying its plans until next winter. This is a big step forward in our efforts to delay and ultimately stop all attempts to develop the Arctic Refuge!

Also, in February, Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA) and Representative Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA), along with 101 original cosponsors, introduced the Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act (H.R. 1146), which will restore protections to the Arctic Refuge that were stripped by the 2017 tax bill. This is hopefully just the first step toward building bipartisan support for restoring protections for the coastal plain.

Offshore, the Trump administration will release the next step in a new five-year offshore oil and gas leasing process. We're working hard with our partners and on Capitol Hill to pressure the administration to remove the Arctic Ocean from the planning process. The Arctic is a fragile, remote region with the potential for extremely hostile weather and zero infrastructure to deal with potential oil spills. Disasters like Deepwater Horizon and Exxon Valdez have shown us that there is no such thing as an effective oil spill cleanup. To that point, March 24 marks the 30th anniversary of Exxon Valdez, and today oil can still be found on the beaches of Prince William Sound.

And finally, in the Tongass National Forest, the U.S. Forest Service continues to move through an administrative rulemaking process that would identify portions of Alaska national forests for removal from 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule protections, which protects more than 58 million acres of roadless



The League's Leah Donahey and Noa Banayan with freshman representative Debbie Mucarsal-Powell (D-FL), a new Arctic Refuge supporter during Congressional Freshman Orientation Week! Alaska Wilderness League

national forests and is the result of one of the most extensive public processes in U.S. history.

On a positive note, the Forest Service recently released a summary of public comments submitted during the scoping process for the Alaska state-specific roadless rule, and the report found that a majority of comments received were opposed to changing the 2001 Roadless Area Conservation Rule for Alaska. Tongass old-growth provides the foundation for strong fisheries, tourism, recreation and the Alaskan way of life, and in the months ahead we will continue to fight to keep roadless protections in place! \*

Hope to see YOU soon on:



# Anchorage Adventure Community Comes Together for Conservation

By Emily Sullivan, Conservation Associate

**A**laska Wilderness League recently co-hosted an event for the Anchorage adventure community in conjunction with some amazing partners: the American Packrafting Association, Alpacka Raft and Alaska Conservation Foundation. A wave of enthusiasm for the Arctic Refuge filled Snow City Café as more than 130 people crowded in to build community, write official comments in opposition to the Bureau of Land Management’s draft plan for Arctic Refuge oil leasing, and share their love for the Arctic by signing special-edition Arctic Refuge packrafts.

The two rafts – christened Olaus and Ms. Mardy (after conservation pioneers Olaus and Mardy Murie) – have traveled across the Arctic Refuge six times, collecting

stories and signatures from those passionate about conserving this invaluable landscape. We collected many more Alaskan signatures at the Anchorage event before these packrafts head to D.C., where they will float the Potomac River this spring and be carried to Capitol Hill and the halls of Congress.

The event generated 72 unique comments against oil leasing on the coastal plain and helped renew Alaska momentum for Arctic Refuge protections. Renowned Alaskan adventurers and conservation advocates Luc Mehl, Haley Johnston and Roman Dial shared stories of their travels across the Arctic Refuge in boats, on foot and on skis. We were thrilled to engage with this sector of the Anchorage community, and look forward to fueling its energy as we move forward in the fight to keep oil development out of America’s largest and wildest wildlife refuge. \*



(Above) Roman Dial addresses the Arctic Refuge supporters at the Snow City Café in downtown Anchorage, Alaska. (Right) Special-edition Arctic Refuge packrafts bearing signatures of supporters far and wide.

Emily Sullivan, Alaska Wilderness League



(Below) The packrafts – Olaus and Ms. Mardy – on one of their treks through the Arctic Refuge.

Dan Ransom Photography



# New Year, New Board Members

By Chris Konish, Director of Development

**A**laska Wilderness League is thrilled to welcome two new board members to the organization, who will bring a breadth of experience and knowledge to our issues. Read more about their connection to the League and our mission below. To learn about our full board of directors, visit [AlaskaWild.org/who-we-are/board-of-directors](http://AlaskaWild.org/who-we-are/board-of-directors).

**Pat Pourchot** lives in Anchorage, Alaska, and worked for over 45 years in the state. Pat came to Alaska with the Department of the Interior in 1972, following passage of the Alaska Native Claims Act, to study federal lands for potential inclusion in new national conservation system units. Forty years later he again found himself working for the Department of the Interior as Special Assistant to the Secretary for Alaska Affairs. He retired from that position in March of 2015. He served in state government including eight years (1985-1992) as a legislator in the Alaska State House and State Senate, and as Legislative Director and Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources for Governor Tony Knowles. His non-profit experience has included management positions with Commonwealth North, the Alaska Federation of Natives, the Alaska Conservation Foundation, and Audubon Alaska. He holds a BA from the University of Wisconsin-Madison and



Pat Pourchot Jennifer Johnson

a MPA from Harvard University, and spends much of his spare time chasing rare birds throughout Alaska and North America.

**Kit DesLauriers** is a ski mountaineer and the first person in the world to have skied off the top of the Seven Summits, the highest mountain on each of the seven continents. She completed this lofty goal with her October 18, 2006 ski descent from Mount Everest. Beyond the Seven Summits, Kit has made several first ski descents of the highest peaks in the Brooks Range of Alaska and counts the experience of skiing in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's pristine landscape as among the favorites in her lifetime. In 2015, Kit was named a National Geographic Adventurer of the Year for her merging of science and adventure in the US Arctic. She is a 15-year member of The North Face Global Athlete Team. Kit holds two consecutive World Freeskiing Women's Champion titles and her ski expeditions have also included notable descents on big mountains in New Zealand, Bolivia, the Alps as well as Siberia where she met her husband Rob DesLauriers, himself a former professional skier. Since the year 2000, Kit and Rob have been living in the Teton Range of Wyoming and are now raising their daughters to appreciate adventure and the natural world.\*



Kit DesLauriers Jimmy Chin

## Strengthening Our Partnership... *(continued from page 2)*

leaning into our commitment to be better partners to the Gwich'in and other Indigenous Alaskans. This won't always be easy. We face the reality of balancing these efforts with other national campaign demands and imperatives including engaging many other people and constituencies who care about protecting Alaska's extraordinary public lands and waters. Ultimately, however, we share many of the same values as Alaska Native

communities increasingly struggling with the impacts of climate change, eager to stop ill-conceived projects like the Pebble Mine and Arctic Refuge drilling, and who often think generations ahead, even when faced with the potential for short-term gain.

We have a long road ahead to fully realize the promise of our commitment to our Alaska Native partners, but we hope you will

support and join us on this journey. I'm confident that, in the process, we will not only end up with stronger, more diverse campaigns to protect wild Alaska but be enriched by the wisdom, teachings and generosity of spirit of our Indigenous partners along the way.\*

Adam Kolton  
Executive Director

# Your Lasting Legacy for Alaska Public Lands



## **A Bequest with Alaska Wilderness League Today Protects Wild Alaska Tomorrow**

Ensure areas like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge remain protected for generations to come by naming Alaska Wilderness League in your will or trust. You can change your beneficiaries at any time, and hold onto your assets for as long as you need them.

If you would like to include the League as a beneficiary, or have any questions, please contact us at 202-266-0415 or [Chris@AlaskaWild.org](mailto:Chris@AlaskaWild.org). Visit [AlaskaWild.org/planned-giving](http://AlaskaWild.org/planned-giving) for more information.