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Alaska delegation continues mad dash to open America's wildest refuge to development

Washington – Last night, at the appropriately named Petroleum Club in Anchorage, Alaska, Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) noted that the Interior Department is pushing forward “aggressively” to issue oil and gas leases in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. She also revealed Interior officials plan to meet with one affected community in the Arctic, but said nothing of the Gwich’in people who have subsisted off of Arctic Refuge resources for thousands of years and have vocally opposed drilling there for decades.

Arctic Refuge drilling was fast-tracked through the congressional budget reconciliation process because of its extreme unpopularity – a provision buried within hundreds of pages of controversial tax legislation. However, that provision was so hastily written that it [broke Senate rules](#) and forced a last-minute rewrite of the bill by drilling supporters behind closed doors. And the Trump Interior Department has already admitted to [‘holding daily calls’](#) on Arctic Refuge leasing and seismic testing, yet the public remains in the dark on the content of these discussions.

Statement from Kristen Miller, Conservation Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

“Senator Murkowski has stated more than once that drilling in the Arctic Refuge will be done [responsibly](#), but her actions tell a much different story. Every step of the way, her goal has been to rush this process because she knows full well that Arctic Refuge drilling is deeply unpopular with the [American public](#) and would never pass muster in Congress on its own.

The Trump administration’s secretive work with Senator Murkowski and others to ‘aggressively’ push for Arctic drilling while dismissing the voice of the Gwich’in people runs counter to these promises to, in Murkowski’s [own words](#): ‘do it right. We will take care of our lands. We will take care of our wildlife. We will take care of our people.’

Just today, serious questions surrounding [administration actions in Alaska](#) related to oil and gas development were raised, actions that ‘fly in the face of decades of established practice and contradict written ethical guidelines designed to ensure the integrity of the agency’s scientific research and prevent it from being exploited by anyone seeking an unfair economic advantage.’ From congressional Republicans to the Trump White House, the fate of America’s most iconic wilderness is being decided in secret.



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We know from the Trump administration's own January Arctic Refuge [wildlife survey](#) that much more study and research is needed "over longer periods" to assess oil-drilling impacts. It's time for the Trump administration to come clean about its Arctic drilling plans and lay out how it intends to protect the environment and the rights of indigenous people and take steps to meaningfully consult with all affected communities, in particular the Gwich'in, whose subsistence lifestyle and culture is inexorably linked to the Refuge.

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