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Western Arctic Lease Sale the Next Chapter in Trump Arctic Assault

Washington – Today the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) opened sealed bids on public lands in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska as part of its annual oil and gas lease sale in the Western Arctic. Bids were placed on a total of 174,044 acres with the sum totaling \$1,133,105.25, 50% of which will go to the state of Alaska. Approximately 6% of the land offered in the 2018 lease sale was bid on.

Last year, BLM offered more than 10 million acres of undeveloped land, including sensitive wildlife habitat surrounding the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, one of the largest and most ecologically significant wetland areas in the world. Approximately 80,000 acres were leased, working out to around \$14.99 per acre. This year, nearly 175,000 acres were secured for just \$6.51 per acre.

Despite millions of acres being offered each year in the Western Arctic, last month BLM placed a Notice of Intent to Prepare an Integrated Activity Plan (IAP) and Environmental Impact Statement for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska in the Federal Register, which will likely seek to undo protections put in place by the Obama administration. The oil industry has long had its sights set on the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area in particular, one of the most productive and unique wetland complexes in the circumpolar Arctic and breeding grounds for countless species of migratory shorebirds as well as the calving grounds for the Teshekpuk Lake caribou herd.

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

“Today’s lease sale is just the next chapter in the current administration’s all-out push to sell off the Arctic for oil and gas development. The Trump administration is aggressively pursuing development in the Arctic Refuge, the Arctic Ocean and the Western Arctic simultaneously, often on a rushed timeline with little to no new information gathering to inform decisions.

Today’s bargain sale of \$6.51 per acre is also a far cry from the billion dollar revenue number that was thrown around to sell the American public on opening the Arctic Refuge to development. Our public lands are worth more than that.

The Reserve’s IAP is a carefully crafted plan that the Interior Department spent years developing, working hand in hand with the tribal community, local governments, the state of Alaska, the Western Arctic Caribou Working Group and others. Development is creeping closer and closer to the Teshekpuk Lake Special Area. Instead of upsetting this plan in order to appease the oil and gas industry, Secretary Zinke should slow down and maintain the integrity of the IAP, not speed up the process of selling off all of America’s Arctic.”

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