

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

March 13, 2019

Contact:

Corey Himrod, Alaska Wilderness League, 202-266-0426, [corey@alaskawild.org](mailto:corey@alaskawild.org)

Anne Hawke, Natural Resources, Defense Council, 646-823-4518, [ahawke@nrdc.org](mailto:ahawke@nrdc.org)

Gabby Brown, Sierra Club, 914-261-4626, [gabby.brown@sierraclub.org](mailto:gabby.brown@sierraclub.org)

Tim Woody, The Wilderness Society, 907-223-2443, [tim\\_woody@tw.s.org](mailto:tim_woody@tw.s.org)

Leigh Anne Tiffany, Defenders of Wildlife, 202-772-0259, [ltiffany@defenders.org](mailto:ltiffany@defenders.org)

Dawnell Smith, Trustees for Alaska, 907-433-2013, [dsmith@trustees.org](mailto:dsmith@trustees.org)

Kristen Monsell, Center for Biological Diversity, 510-844-7137, [kmonsell@biologicaldiversity.org](mailto:kmonsell@biologicaldiversity.org)

Erica Watson, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, 907-452-5093, [erica@northern.org](mailto:erica@northern.org)

**ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE \* CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY \* DEFENDERS OF WILDLIFE \* EARTHJUSTICE \* ENVIRONMENT AMERICA \* FRIENDS OF ALASKA NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES \* GWICH'IN STEERING COMMITTEE \* NATIONAL AUDUBON SOCIETY \* NATURAL RESOURCES DEFENSE COUNCIL \* NORTHERN ALASKA ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER \* SIERRA CLUB \* STAND.EARTH \* THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY \* TRUSTEES FOR ALASKA**

**Public Overwhelmingly Opposes Drilling in Arctic Refuge**

*More than one million comments submitted to Bureau of Land Management oppose oil and gas lease sales in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*

Washington, D.C. — Today is the final day of the public comment period on the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS). BLM held seven public hearings in Alaska and one in Washington, D.C., on the planning process, with public sentiment overwhelmingly favoring protection for the Arctic Refuge and its coastal plain. BLM refused to hold additional hearings in the lower 48, but advocates hosted two additional people's hearings in Denver, Colorado, and Albuquerque, New Mexico. For the current comment period, the American public has submitted more than one million comments in favor of protecting these vital public lands. In addition to public comments, 27 organizations submitted technical comments regarding deficiencies in the DEIS, deficiencies that required 412 pages and more than 2,100 footnotes to address.

Several distinct coalitions have also submitted letters to BLM in support of Arctic Refuge protections:

- Scientists' Letter — [Re: Substantial deficiencies in the Draft Environmental Impact Statement on the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program](#)
- Scholar/Teacher Letter — [Arctic Refuge Protectors: An Open Letter from Teachers and Scholars](#)
- Alaska Coalition Letter — [Coalition Letter to BLM Re: Arctic Refuge Draft Environmental Impact Statement](#)
- Alaska Business Letter — [An Open Letter from Alaska Businesses Supporting Arctic Refuge Protections](#)

The Arctic Refuge is one of our nation's most majestic landscapes, home to the Porcupine caribou herd. Nine thousand Indigenous Gwich'in people of Alaska and Canada make their home on or near the migratory route of the Porcupine caribou herd, and have depended on caribou for their food and way of life for millennia. The Arctic Refuge is also home to imperiled polar bears, spawning streams for Dolly

Varden and other valued fish species, wolves, muskoxen, Dall sheep, arctic foxes and nearly 200 species of migratory birds that arrive to the refuge from six continents and all 50 states.

The Trump administration's rushed process for leasing the coastal plain is incompatible with protecting wildlife and the subsistence needs of the Gwich'in people, who refer to the coastal plain as "Izhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit," or "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins." Drilling the coastal plain would forever scar the landscape and threaten the way of life for the Gwich'in. BLM should take the time needed to adequately analyze scientific information, engage in meaningful dialogue with local communities and stakeholders, and examine the impacts drilling would have on the landscape, wildlife and climate.

**Statement from Bernadette Demientieff, Executive Director, Gwich'in Steering Committee:**

"The Gwich'in Nation of Alaska and Canada continues to stand against any destruction to the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd. We have been ignored in the draft DEIS process and our voices dismissed at the national level. We have people coming into our homelands and making decisions about our future without involving us. The Arctic Refuge is not a piece of land with oil underneath it — it is the heart of our people. Our state is warming twice the rate of the rest of the country, our animals suffering from climate change impacts, and the last thing we need is more drilling. Honor our human rights and stay out of the Arctic Refuge."

**The above organizations opposed to reckless drilling in the Arctic Refuge issued the following joint statement:**

"Our public lands, waters and wildlife are national treasures — and are increasingly under attack. Unfortunately, the Trump administration appears to listen primarily to those who would financially benefit from increased drilling and development, rushing to force a lease sale on the coastal plain in 2019 years in advance of the legislative timeline imposed by Congress. Despite promises not to undercut our environmental laws, the intent is clear: expedite oil leasing now before the political landscape shifts. BLM's current process ignores the science and best practices for protecting our land and wildlife and disregards the human rights of the Gwich'in people. We stand together with the Gwich'in in the fight to preserve this sacred place, and will continue to do so until protections are restored to America's premier wildlife refuge."

###