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Congress Seizes New Opportunity to Restore Arctic Refuge Protections

Conservation groups voice support for Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act

Washington, D.C. -- In response to today's U.S. House Natural Resources Committee vote passing the bipartisan Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act out of committee (the bill passed 22-14), **Alaska Wilderness League, Natural Resources Defense Council, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, Defenders of Wildlife, Environment America, Trustees for Alaska, Earthjustice, National Audubon Society, Center for Biological Diversity and Northern Alaska Environmental Center issue the following joint statement:**

"The Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act reinstates key safeguards to one of America's most prized wildlife refuges, protections that were stripped away in haste by the 2017 tax bill.

"The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge coastal plain contains critical denning habitat for threatened polar bears as well as the calving grounds for the Porcupine caribou herd that has sustained the Gwich'in people for generations and serves as a critical nursery for migratory birds. This bill will restore protections stripped by a provision of the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act that mandates leasing for oil and gas development on the Arctic Refuge coastal plain. That grossly unfair provision was sold to the public on false pretenses and jammed through Congress using budgetary tricks that eliminated any opportunity for a full, fair and open debate.

"To date, the Trump administration has rushed to complete an expedited environmental impact statement within one year. Such a hurried process is incompatible with protecting the wilderness and wildlife values of the Arctic Refuge or the subsistence needs of the Gwich'in people. We call on Congress to pass this important bill.

"We are deeply grateful to Representatives Jared Huffman (D-CA) and Brian Fitzpatrick (R-PA) for introducing this essential legislation."

Background on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge:

The Arctic Refuge is one of our nation's most majestic landscapes. Its coastal plain contains the summer calving grounds for the Porcupine caribou herd and winter denning habitat for the threatened Southern Beaufort Sea polar bear population. 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 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 rush to lease the coastal plain threatens wildlife and subsistence needs of the Gwich'in people, who refer to the coastal plain as "*lizhik Gwats'an Gwandalii 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. This bill resets the clock to before passage of the 2017 tax bill so that the impacts of development to wilderness and wildlife and the concerns of all interested stakeholders can be identified and considered through the normal legislative process.

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