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NPR-A Lease Sale Exposes the Insanity of Rushing Sales in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

WASHINGTON — Today, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) held its annual lease sale in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska in Alaska’s western Arctic. The December 2019 NPR-A Oil and Gas Lease Sale included 350 tracts (approximately 3.98 million acres) available for leasing under the NPR-A Integrated Activity Plan/Environmental Impact Statement Record of Decision (ROD) finalized in February 2013. Owed largely to bidding by [North Slope Exploration, LLC](#) (a brand-new entity formed in November 2019 by Armstrong Oil & Gas, Inc.) this year’s lease sale attracted bids on 92 tracts totaling \$11,268,709 covering slightly more than 1 million acres, an average price of approximately \$11 an acre.

Last year, in [2018](#), BLM sold 6% of acres offered at an average price of just \$8.80 an acre. And in [2017](#), BLM received bids on just seven tracts out of the 900 offered (or on .08% of the acres offered) at an average price of \$14.50 an acre. All told, prior to 2019, [historical data](#) shows NPR-A lease sales have drawn \$283,631,268 in total bid amounts on 6,009,551 acres, or \$47.20 an acre.

When language was slipped into the \$1.5 trillion 2017 Tax Bill to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to drilling for the first time in decades, it was done as a so-called “offset” to the overall bill, one that would raise \$1 billion for the federal treasury as ultimately agreed to in the FY2018 budget resolution. To generate that \$1 billion in bonus bids from Arctic Refuge leasing, oil and gas companies would need to submit bids averaging more than \$1,300 per acre for every single acre of the coastal plain. If only a small portion of parcels received bids, the average bid price would need to be correspondingly higher. Nothing we saw this year, let alone throughout the history of Arctic lease sales, supports this type of wild assertion.

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

“Bidding in this year’s NRP-A lease sale, where valuable public land was leased at barely more than \$11 an acre, reinforces the fact that exposing America’s Arctic to oil development is about fulfilling an administration talking point and not meeting actual real-world demand. We shouldn’t be looking to exploit untouched wild places like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, crucial to wildlife and the continued health of Indigenous communities, to new drilling. There is too much at risk and no demonstrated need.

With the NPR-A lease sale now in the review mirror, the Trump administration is still pushing ahead with plans for an Arctic Refuge oil and gas lease sale at a time when supply is high and prices are low. Leasing under those conditions would negatively impact the Arctic Refuge and cost taxpayers millions. We support the minimum bid provision included in the current House spending bill and urge that it be



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included in the final conference report. Requiring a floor on what companies must pay to lease a piece of the Arctic Refuge coastal plain holds the administration accountable to its own promises.

Leasing on the Arctic Refuge coastal plain shouldn't happen under any circumstances. Regardless, nothing we saw this year, let alone throughout the history of NPR-A lease sales, supports the wild billion-dollar Arctic Refuge revenue assertions. There has never been any real evidence provided to back up the billion-dollar claim. In fact, many experts in 2017 pointed out that raising the proposed revenue would depend on the highly unlikely scenario of leasing nearly every acre of the coastal plain at sky-high prices. The math just doesn't add up."

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Alaska Wilderness League stands with, serves and supports the many people and organizations that believe in a sustainable future for Alaska. We honor and respect the cultures of Alaska Natives whose way of life remains deeply connected to the state's land, waters, and wildlife. We believe that Alaska's long-term economic future and subsistence traditions are inexorably tied to the health and sound stewardship of its natural resources, which support hunting, fishing, tourism and unrivaled outdoor experiences that are central to Alaskans' quality of life.



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