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BLM Pushes Forward on Western Arctic Development Plan Despite Coronavirus Pandemic

Washington — In the midst of the current COVID-19 pandemic the Interior Department's Bureau of Land Management has released a supplement to its Willow Master Development Plan Draft Environmental Impact Statement that carries with it a 45-day public comment period. This comes as the Trump administration has been quietly moving forward with a range of efforts to advance the interests of oil and gas companies including holding a Gulf of Mexico lease sale and advancing rules to weaken the National Environmental Policy Act and Endangered Species Act.

In response Alaska Wilderness League executive director Adam Kolton issues the following statement:

"The Trump Interior Department, on the heels of mismanaging national park access in ways that heighten health risks, is not only continuing to hold oil and gas lease sales but now is asking the public to comment on a proposal to greatly expand the oil drilling footprint in Alaska's western Arctic.

Now is not the time for the administration to continue to do the bidding of oil and gas companies, and the public should not have to worry about missing public comment deadlines when personal health, economic stability, childcare and home schooling are rightfully the primary concerns. It should be concentrating on keeping the American people healthy and safe and guiding them through the many hardships of these difficult times.

If Secretary Bernhardt wants comments on expanded western Arctic drilling, here's ours: 'People are struggling now to protect their families, put food on the table and take care of kids home from shuttered schools. This includes frontline communities that could be impacted by expanded drilling plans. This is not the time to ask them to read bureaucratic analysis or write lengthy comments. We urge you to focus on safely managing our public lands and historic sites during this crisis and to suspend development decisions and the associated public comment periods during this national crisis.'"

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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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