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House Appropriations bill provides protections for Alaska public lands

Washington — Today, the U.S. House of Representatives passed its Interior, Environment and Related Agencies 2021 funding bill, which includes responsible provisions that would protect American taxpayers and protect federal public lands and waters in Alaska, including the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Tongass National Forest, National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and the Arctic Ocean Outer Continental Shelf.

Statement by Adam Kolton, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

“Nowhere in America are the lands, waters and wildlife as threatened by climate change as in Alaska, thanks to rapidly rising temperatures, increases in wildfires, thawing permafrost, receding glaciers, eroding coastlines and disappearing sea ice. We are grateful to the House and the leadership of Rep. Betty McCollum as Chair of the House Appropriations Committee, as well as Arctic champions like Reps. Jared Huffman, Alan Lowenthal and Raul Grijalva, for passing an appropriations bill that recognizes our climate crisis and properly values America’s public lands and waters.

“This bill prevents oil and gas leasing on the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge while protecting American taxpayers in the future by requiring a floor on what companies must pay for those leases. It holds the Trump administration accountable for false revenue promises made when the Arctic Refuge was opened to leasing in the 2017 tax bill. And it would prohibit any lease from happening at all in the coming fiscal year.

“The House bill defunds new oil and gas leasing in currently protected areas of the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, preserving the unique ecological and subsistence values of the western Arctic. The Trump administration is currently attempting to hand an additional seven million acres of wilderness-quality land over to the oil and gas industry, a move that has faced fierce public opposition, especially from local communities concerned about food security and fearing increasingly negative impacts on air quality and public health due to oil pollution and climate change.

“This bill contains important language to halt the spending of millions of American tax dollars each year subsidizing the timber industry in Alaska, protecting the Tongass National Forest from costly large-scale old-growth logging. The Tongass is an international treasure that attracts hunters, fishermen and tourists from around the world.

“President Trump’s combined attacks on the Tongass and the Arctic Refuge alone could release nearly five billion metric tons of carbon dioxide, or as much pollution as all the world’s cars emit in a full year, more than one billion passenger vehicles. The administration is also trying to force open huge expanses



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of the western Arctic and Arctic Ocean to new oil drilling, and those impacts will be felt well beyond Alaska's borders. If this country is serious about addressing climate change and protecting our natural resources, we need to change how America's public landscapes are managed sooner rather than later, and protecting Alaska's public lands will significantly contribute to the desperately needed set of solutions to cut future climate emissions."

Relevant U.S. House Appropriations Bill Alaska Provisions:

- The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge provision (Sec. 117) requires a minimum bid amount on what companies must pay to lease a piece of the Arctic Refuge's fragile coastal plain. This is an important provision that would hold Congress accountable for the promises made when Arctic National Wildlife Refuge leasing was jammed through Congress in an unrelated tax package in 2017.
- The Tongass National Forest provision (Sec. 434) would end taxpayer subsidies for any roadbuilding activity including design, study or construction of roads for logging in the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska. For decades, the timber industry in the Tongass has quietly benefited from hundreds of millions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies, much of it covering costs associated with building logging roads that serve no public benefit.
- The Offshore Drilling provision (Sec. 119) would prevent the Secretary of Interior and Bureau of Ocean Energy Management from conducting or authorizing oil and gas preleasing, leasing, or related activities in any planning area that didn't have proposed leases in the 2017-2022 Outer Continental Shelf Oil and Gas leasing program. This includes the Arctic Ocean where the Trump administration is trying to hold 6 leases sales over the next 5 years.

Relevant Amendments:

- [National Preserves in Alaska](#)
- [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](#)
- [National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska](#)

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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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