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It's time for Interior Department to put Arctic Refuge seismic on ice

Washington — This weekend, the U.S. Department of the Interior notified the Kaktovik Inupiat Corp (KIC), the Native-owned company that applied for permission to conduct seismic surveys on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge this winter, that it had failed to do the required work to identify polar bear dens in the region that would be surveyed. As a result, the agency said it would be unable to either approve or deny a permit to harass polar bears, and as such, voided the permit request.

The Southern Beaufort Sea polar bear population is the world's most imperiled polar bear population with as few as 900 individuals, and the Arctic Refuge's coastal plain is vital to the survival of these iconic animals.

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

"This is great news for Alaska's polar bears, which can sleep a little easier in their dens this winter knowing that the threat of seismic disturbance is on ice for a while. The previous administration attempted to fast-track exploration on an unreasonably short timeline, so the fact that KIC was unable to do the work necessary to ensure the safety of threatened polar bears was completely foreseeable, and Interior responding by voiding the harassment request is the right move at this time.

"KIC's proposed seismic scheme envisioned having the recently bankrupt SAExploration set up roaming camps of up to 180 workers accompanied by a small army of industrial vehicles, crisscrossing one-third of the Arctic Refuge's biological heart with vibration trucks weighing as much as 97,000 pounds. These extreme activities presented clear risks to endangered polar bears and ringed seals, leaving lasting scars on the fragile tundra and its vegetation.

"The prospect of oil exploration and drilling in the Arctic Refuge is extremely unpopular. On seismic alone, millions of young people sent a loud and unmistakable message that they do not want the wildest place left in America sacrificed for a fix of oil that will make the climate crisis even worse. In fact, more than 6 million Americans filed comments with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, a number exceeding any other single public comment period on an environmental rule or permit.

"We commend the Biden administration for following the law, insisting on sound science, listening to all the Indigenous interests in the region and for committing to seeking permanent protection for this iconic national treasure."



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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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