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NORTH STAR NEWS

*Your Land.
Your Voice.*

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- A large photograph of a peregrine falcon sitting on a nest of brown eggs on a rocky, mossy cliffside. The falcon has dark feathers on its head and back, and lighter, speckled feathers on its chest. It is looking towards the left. The nest is made of dry sticks and is situated on a rocky outcrop with some green moss and small plants. The background shows a steep, rocky cliff face.
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Greetings From the League's New Executive Director

By: Dr. Peter Winsor, Executive Director

Happy springtime in Alaska and thank you for your continued generous support of Alaska Wilderness League! I am extremely excited to have joined the League in March as the executive director, and gladly wasted no time digging into the work of protecting Alaska, including its lands, waters and incredibly diverse wildlife. I cannot think of a more important task to work on — a true privilege.

I am from Sweden originally but have been living here in Fairbanks, Alaska, since 2008, and have grown a deep connection to Alaska. Living here I experience firsthand the rapid changes our state is now undergoing due to climate change. These changes are affecting entire ecosystems on land and in the oceans surrounding Alaska, places that Indigenous Peoples and communities critically rely on.

Perhaps overshadowed by the war in Ukraine, the release of the most recent report from the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) — the second part of its Sixth Assessment Report — noted that “some of the changes are so extreme and fast that they will push communities beyond their ability to deal with them in places like the Arctic and along some coastlines and pose a

serious threat to food systems in many regions within decades.”

This past winter the Arctic Ocean reached its maximum sea ice extent for 2022 — the tenth lowest in the satellite record. Continued ocean warming will mean more marine heatwaves — so severe that some marine species cannot survive — accelerating the rate of sea ice loss even further and altering ocean circulation, chemistry and nutrient cycling. Arctic wildfires are increasing in both frequency and intensity. Permafrost thaw is putting Alaska communities and infrastructure at risk, and by the end of the century, the projected economic impact of infrastructure reconstruction is estimated to range between \$4–5.5 billion. My own cabin here in Fairbanks is now tilting due to thawing permafrost, and some of our local roads have sunk and become impassable. Temperatures have shifted so much that the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration has officially downgraded our “subarctic” designation to “warm summer continental.”

United Nations Secretary General António Guterres, reacting to the IPCC report’s findings, painted a grim picture: “As climate impacts worsen — and they will — scaling

up investments will be essential for survival... Delay means death.”

I’m looking forward to working side by side with the tremendously dedicated team here at the League to address these changes and the many Alaska conservation issues we’re currently facing. That includes fighting the continued push for oil drilling across Alaska’s North Slope in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Alaska’s Western Arctic. These vast wilderness areas are key to giving nature elbow room to adapt and build resilience to the ongoing pressure from climate change.

We will continue to advocate for long-lasting protections to America’s climate forest, the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska. The Tongass is one of the most important forests in the world for carbon sequestration — not to mention the lifeblood for many Alaska Native communities.

I thank you again for the heartfelt welcome I received from so many League supporters, and sincerely hope you will continue being with us on this journey.*



Dr. Peter Winsor
Executive Director

Alaska Wilderness League is a nonprofit 501(c)(3) corporation founded in 1993 to further the protection of Alaska’s incomparable natural endowment. Our mission is to galvanize support to secure vital policies that protect and defend America’s last great wild public lands and waters.

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Cover photo: A Peregrine falcon uses the cliffs along the Utukok River to nest and guards its eggs. © Florian Schulz/www.FlorianSchulz.org

Campaign Updates as We Head into Summer

Priya Uppuluri, Legislative Associate

The first quarter of 2022 is already in the rearview mirror, and we remain poised on the precipice of some monumental achievements. One goal we can check off already: a new management plan for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve). At the end of April, the Biden administration scrapped the Trump management plan for the Reserve, reverting back to the 2013 protections finalized under President Obama. The key now will be to put durable protections in place that aren't dependent on which party controls the White House.

Some quick updates on where we stand:

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge: The climate provisions of Build Back Better in its new version continue to be at a standstill in the Senate. However, we continue to carefully elevate the Arctic Refuge nationally through targeted field and mobilization efforts. When the reconciliation vote happens — in whatever form the legislation takes — Alaska Wilderness League will keep pushing for the repeal of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge oil and gas program to remain as a part of the package.

As an aside, there is some good news to share! In early March, AIG became the first major U.S. insurance company to limit fossil fuel development in the Arctic. Additionally, 12 international insurers have now committed to not underwriting new oil and gas projects in the Arctic Refuge. The Arctic

Refuge coalition's corporate team is continuing to put pressure on other major U.S. insurance companies to follow suit.

Western Arctic: ConocoPhillips' Willow Project in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska is the largest imminent oil development in the United States. As one of 140 organizations to submit public comments in March urging the Biden administration to reject Willow, the League collected more than 20,000 comments during the 30-day comment period. Now, we continue to put pressure on the administration and Congress as we anticipate the impending release of a draft environmental impact statement and prepare for a second public comment period.

Tongass National Forest: As 2022 kicked off with a public comment period around reinstating Roadless Rule protections for the Tongass, the League easily surpassed its goal of collecting 10,000 comments. Alaska Wilderness League continues to push for long-standing protections for the country's largest national forest centered around the restoration of the Roadless Rule in Alaska. In addition, and in line with past fiscal years, we extend our support in saying "no" to old-growth logging subsidies in the Tongass and will continue to push Congress to make this a reality.

As always, watch your inbox or visit us online to see how you can help protect wild Alaska! * *



Porcupine caribou migrate along the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

© Hugh Rose/[HughRosePhotography.com](https://www.hughrosephotography.com)

The Month of May Is for the Birds

Corey Himrod, Senior Communications Manager

Protecting places like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Western Arctic from resource extraction and development isn't simply an Alaska issue – these faraway places are connected to all of us in many ways, including the migratory birds that depend on them. May is home to World Migratory Bird Day, which makes this the perfect chance to celebrate an amazing diversity of birds, some of which travel incredible distances just to reach their breeding grounds in America's Arctic.



Gyrfalcon (Arctic Refuge)

© Florian Schulz/www.FlorianSchulz.org

The largest falcon in the world, the **gyrfalcon** (pronounced JER-falcon) is a fierce Arctic predator that can chase down ptarmigans in flight or plummet from the sky at breathtaking speeds to strike prey on the ground. Though they nest and breed in the Arctic, they can sometimes be spotted during winter in the northernmost U.S. and southern Canada. Gyrfalcons are safe from most human disturbance but face challenges from a warming climate.

The **Arctic tern** has the longest yearly migration of any animal from start to finish. From their Arctic breeding grounds to Antarctica and back, that's a distance of at least 25,000 miles! They often will return to the very same area where they hatched to breed.

Larger than a crow but smaller than a goose, the **pomarine jaeger** is the largest and most barrel-chested of the three jaegers. These birds breed on the Arctic tundra before spending the rest of the year at sea. Breeding adults are unique with elongated spoon-shaped central tail feathers. All jaegers chase other birds and steal their food.



Arctic Tern (Arctic Refuge)

© Peter Mather/PeterMather.com



Long-Tailed Jaeger (Western Arctic) © Richard Spener/
RichardSpenerPhotography.com



Pomarine Jaeger (Western Arctic) © Kili Yuyan/Kilii.com

Meanwhile, the slender, almost tern-like **long-tailed jaeger** is smaller than other jaegers, but no less fierce in its approach to getting food. Similar to their larger relatives, long-tailed jaegers spend up to three-quarters of the year at sea — often on the open ocean — and can range well south of the Equator.

White-fronted geese are stocky brown geese that occur across the Northern Hemisphere. They feature white feathers around a pinkish-orange bill, orange legs, and a white line down their side. These geese



White-Fronted Geese (Western Arctic)

© Florian Schulz/www.FlorianSchulz.org

breed on the Arctic tundra and winter in large flocks in wetlands, lakes and croplands. Pairs of geese stay together for years and migrate together, along with their offspring.

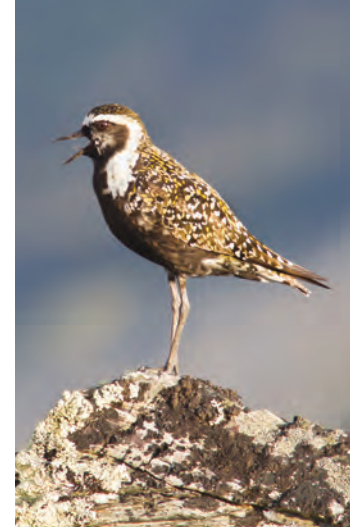


Snow Geese (Western Arctic)

© Kiliyi Yuyan/Kiliyi.com

Snow geese are medium-sized (4 to 7 pounds) and are completely white except for their black wingtips. Adult birds have pink legs and a pink bill, while the young have grayish-brown bills and legs and feathers tending to sooty-gray. A large portion of the Western Canada Arctic population — up to 325,000 — congregates in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Alaska during September.

Small and elegant, **American golden plovers** migrate every year from Arctic Alaska and Canada to southern South America. In Western Alaska, the American golden plover overlaps with the Pacific golden plover, and the American tends to nest at higher elevations on more barren tundra slopes.



American Golden Plover (Arctic Refuge)

© Hugh Rose/HughRosePhotography.com



Snowy Owl (Western Arctic)

© Kiliyi Yuyan/Kiliyi.com

Snowy owls are iconic Arctic birds, known for their white feathers and large, yellow eyes. Thick feathers for insulation from the Arctic cold make snowy owls North America's heaviest owl at around four pounds. Unlike most owls which hunt at night, snowy owls hunt in the daytime as well — a necessity due to the midnight sun of Arctic summers.

Tall and elegant, **sandhill cranes** can be found throughout North America, and are among the largest birds found in Alaska. Adults can stand three feet tall with a six-foot wingspan. They arrive on their nesting grounds of tundra, marshes and muskegs in mid-May. The oldest sandhill crane on record was at least 36 years, 7 months old! *



Sandhill Cranes (Western Arctic)

© Richard Spener/RichardSpenerPhotography.com

Will Mining Join Oil Drilling as a Major Battleground in Alaska?

Maddie Halloran, Alaska Campaigns Manager

By the time you read this, we will have hosted May's Geography of Hope episode with author Molly Rettig. Molly's book, "Finding True North," explores the boom-and-bust cycle of Alaska's economy in the 20th century. The book follows the stories of four individuals from the Fairbanks area as they share their experiences living in boom times of mining, the construction of the trans-Alaska pipeline, and the spread of air travel across the state.

It was fitting that I finished reading "Finding True North" the same week I attended the first-ever conference on Mining Impacts and Prevention in Alaska, hosted by Alaska Conservation Foundation in Girdwood this past March. This gathering of conservationists and community members had sessions on everything from how mining exacerbates the effects of

climate change to conservation communication techniques.

One topic that I was particularly interested in understanding more about was the domino effect of advocating for reduced reliance on fossil fuels. Alaska Wilderness League and other organizations are actively campaigning to end destructive drilling projects in the Arctic, and we are advocating for the U.S. to switch from fossil fuels to renewable energy. By supporting this transition, are we inadvertently moving the "sacrifice zones" from the Arctic oil fields to mining prospects in other areas of the state?

I was relieved to learn that the answer is not so simple. We can advocate for better battery technology, recycling mandates, reducing demand, and building a circular, regenerative economy — not just simply ramping up the production of critical minerals.

You may have heard the term "critical minerals" a lot in the news recently. The Biden

administration has announced it would like to expand domestic production of critical minerals by invoking the Defense Production Act (DPA). The DPA allows the president to use loans, direct purchases and other investments to incentivize the production of goods and materials — in this case, the minerals involved in building sources of renewable energy. While this may sound like a good thing, it is important to note that the last comprehensive mining law was passed in 1872 and was designed to prioritize mining over all other land use. Invoking the DPA would likely spur additional mining on federal lands with few safeguards.

The conference experience highlighted for me the importance of pushing for a transition to clean, domestic, renewable energy that is truly "sustainable" and won't require endless open-pit mines to create the technological resources we need. "Clean energy" isn't clean if it just creates more environmental issues elsewhere.

Thank you for supporting our work to protect Alaska's wildest places from this extractive cycle. *

Meet the League: Ellie Krueger

Lois Norrgard, National Field Organizer

Alaska Wilderness League is lucky to have had some pretty amazing interns through the years, and 2022 is not different. In this issue, we chatted with Ellie Krueger, finishing up her junior year at the University of Minnesota and doing some pretty cool stuff in her free time. (Note: Answers have been lightly edited for length.)

What was it that drew you to Alaska Wilderness League?

One of my first memories is holding a newspaper (like I'd seen my dad do countless times, although I was too young to read) and my mom telling me that the article I was looking at was about global warming. She told me that it was up to my generation to fix what previous ones had broken. Even though she said it jokingly, it stuck with me, and since then, I've felt a responsibility towards the environment and the land. This is partly what drew me to Alaska Wilderness League. I'm studying wildlife and conservation biology right now, and I was interested in learning more about the political and public advocacy parts of conservation. Alaska Wilderness League does a lot of important work, and also works on environmental justice and representation for indigenous communities, which I think is an incredibly important part of conservation.

Tell us about college life? Have you chosen a major? Are you planning on pursuing

conservation as part of a future career?

I am a junior at the University of Minnesota right now, with projected graduation in the spring of 2023. I want to go into research or work directly with wildlife, but I also think that the human aspects of conservation are equally important.

How has the outdoors played a role in your life to date?

My dad, especially, instilled a passion for wild places in me. We would go camping and hiking every summer, and I learned to start a fire and set up a tent. I learned about leaving no trace, how to portage a canoe, how to keep food away from animals. Sitting on the lakeshore, listening to the birds, is the closest to myself I ever felt. There are no deadlines in the woods—no desks, no cubicles, no pandemic. There is only the droning of a fly and the humming of a bullfrog.

You're working on an exhibit for the Bell Museum of Natural History. Tell us about it.

I have worked at the Bell Museum for almost a year now, and when I joined Alaska Wilderness League and heard about how they work with other organizations to promote conservation, my first thought was that a cooperative project would be great for both organizations. The Bell is currently showing an exhibit about birds as a celebration of its 150th



Ellie Krueger

anniversary, and birds are an important tie between Minnesota and Alaska. I thought that it would be good to remind people that birds — like humans — share one planet, and what happens in Alaska affects us here. Lois Norrgard, my supervisor, was kind enough to provide me with a list of birds that share habitat here and in Alaska, and a map of basic migration paths. We will use these to highlight our connection to the protected lands in Alaska.

The project will come to a conclusion on May 21 at the museum's Spotlight Science event. We will have conversations with visitors about birds and habitat and migration, and a scavenger hunt to find the birds in museum exhibits that share habitat here and in Alaska. I highly recommend paying a visit!

Since you haven't yet been to Alaska, where would you visit first and why?

I think I'd like to see the northern lights. I know they're not very predictable, and there's no guarantee, but it's always been a dream of mine. I'd also like to see Denali National Park because I've heard it's absolutely stunning. *



Letting your Legacy Soar

As you contemplate your future plans, consider adding a charitable gift annuity (CGA) with Alaska Wilderness League into the mix. A CGA is a gift that pays you income for life while helping to protect iconic Alaska landscapes for generations to come. You can also qualify for a variety of tax benefits, including a federal income tax charitable deduction when you itemize.

For additional information, contact Chris@AlaskaWild.org or visit AlaskaWild.org/Planned-Giving. We would be happy to work with you and your advisors to answer your questions.

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