




SUMMER 2022 \* VOL 16 \* NUMBER 2

# NORTH STAR NEWS

*Your Land.  
Your Voice.*

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- A large photograph of a wetland landscape serves as the background for the lower half of the page. In the foreground, three caribou are running through a shallow, muddy stream. One caribou is on the left, running towards the right. Two others are further back, also running towards the right. The water is dark and reflective, showing the silhouettes of the caribou. The surrounding land is covered in green grass and small plants. The sky is overcast and grey.
- \* **Calling on President Biden To Defuse a Climate Bomb**
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# Calling on President Biden To Defuse a Climate Bomb

Dr. Peter Winsor, Executive Director

**A**s most of America slides into summer rhythms, my recent trip to the Western Arctic reverberated alarm over the ongoing fight to protect precious resources in a one-of-a-kind place. Oil and gas industrialization remains an urgent threat, including the massive ConocoPhillips' Willow proposal.

As the single biggest oil and gas proposal on federal lands — by far — Willow is an existential climate threat. The massive project would recklessly accelerate damage in a region already being ravaged by climate change. President Biden is facing a critical test that will determine how serious he is about achieving climate and public lands protection goals.

The Biden administration released its draft environmental review of Willow on July 8, beginning a 45-day comment period to consider a plan to create the equivalent yearly climate impact of emissions from 76 coal plants, roughly a third of all coal plants in America. This is a brief window to act, and we're asking for your help to weigh in now if you haven't already done so. Please add your comment at [AlaskaWild.org/willowcomment](https://AlaskaWild.org/willowcomment),

calling on President Biden to stop this climate bomb and keep his promises.

A few weeks ago, on a visit to the Utukok River (southwest of the proposed drilling area), I had the remarkable experience of seeing firsthand what's at stake: caribou roaming, grizzly bears mating and endless carpets of wildflowers blooming across the expansive landscape. A mammoth tusk was found near camp, which made us think about how rich of an ecosystem this area has been for thousands of years. As we sat on the Arctic tundra, it was a stark reminder of these critical wilderness areas, and how this sensitive ecosystem would be pushed to a tipping point by industrial development.

This vast drilling project in the Western Arctic is a huge mistake: it would lock in oil extraction from a sensitive habitat for 30+ years. Irreplaceable resources in the crosshairs include the Porcupine Caribou Herd's migration — which provides subsistence to local peoples — and Teshekpuk Lake, one of the Arctic's largest, a lifeblood for waterfowl and many birds that nest and raise their young in the far north, migrating to the lower

48 states and across the globe.

The aftermath will be severe, including long-term, and harmful outcomes to food access, traditional activities, sociocultural systems, and public health in Arctic communities in and around the area. Polar bears in the region will likely be harmed or even killed. The proposal would include up to 250 wells on up to five drilling sites, processing facilities, nearly 1,000 miles of ice roads, an airstrip, permanent gravel roads, new bridges and 300+ miles of pipelines. And it's just the tip of the iceberg: a ConocoPhillips executive boasted to investors that up to 3 billion barrels of oil could be extracted — nearly five times more than is currently being considered. You'll find in this newsletter some details on how Alaska Wilderness League is continuing to fight back with all our force to delay and ultimately stop it, in addition to other highlights, stories and insights about wild Alaska. As always, we hope you enjoy, and thank you for your support! \*



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 protect Alaska's wild lands and waters by inspiring broad support for federal policy action.

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**Cover photo:** Caribou traverse the wetlands adjacent to Teshekpuk Lake in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. © Kiliui Yuyan/[Kiliui.com](https://Kiliui.com)

# Gwich'in Leaders Arrive in Washington, D.C.

Aileo Weinmann, Communications Director

**R**epresentatives of the Gwich'in Nation including Tribal Chiefs, Elders, Tribal youth and appointed designees traveled to Washington, D.C. earlier this year, to meet with the Biden administration and members of Congress. The goal: To discuss a path forward to repeal the oil and gas drilling program in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The trip was one of the largest gatherings of Gwich'in Tribal leaders and Chiefs ever to occur in Washington, D.C., and highlighted the cultural and spiritual importance of the Arctic Refuge for the Gwich'in people. The League's D.C. office served as a headquarters for our Gwich'in guests, whose participants included six Tribal Chiefs from the U.S. and Canada; four representatives appointed to attend on behalf of their Chiefs; three representatives of the Gwich'in Steering Committee from the U.S. and Canada; and three

Gwich'in Youth Council members from the U.S. and Canada.

The fly-in was a great success, as the League helped set up and coordinate meetings for the leaders with several Senate and House offices, as well as Interior Secretary Deb Haaland, Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality Brenda Mallory and White House National Climate Advisor Gina McCarthy. The League also coordinated a sit-down for the Chiefs with a reporter from CNN that resulted in some great connections and opening the door for future media elevation.

All in all, efforts such as this are driving the campaign to restore Arctic Refuge protections forward in a meaningful way. Your input and support help make work like this possible, and we are eager to celebrate with you once we cross the finish line. \*



Members of the Gwich'in Nation arrived in D.C. to advocate for Arctic Refuge protections.

Alaska Wilderness League



# A Threat to Landscapes, Communities and Our Climate

Hilary Stamper, Director of Member Engagement

In her July blog ([AlaskaWild.org/WillowBlog](https://AlaskaWild.org/WillowBlog)), author and founding League board member Debbie S. Miller expressed the joy she has found visiting the Reserve:

“Imagine a place about the size of Maine, with a breathtaking expanse of open tundra, countless lakes and sparkling ponds, meandering rivers and coastal lagoons, and the majestic Brooks Range rising in the distance. The Western Arctic is a boundless wilderness that stretches our imagination to a time when buffalo freely roamed across the Great Plains.

“I’ve traveled this incredibly vast and beautiful region of Alaska known as the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve), with a rich diversity of life including three caribou herds, high concentrations of grizzlies and wolverines, threatened polar bears, and millions of migratory birds from six continents. Many Indigenous communities, whose ancestors have lived on these lands for thousands of years, depend on the Reserve’s abundant food resources to sustain their lives and cultural traditions.”

Recently though, Debbie and many others, feel rightfully concerned about its future.

The massive ConocoPhillips “Willow” oil drilling project in particular, proposed near the protected Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, threatens one of the most productive and unique wetland complexes in the circumpolar Arctic. On top of risk to communities and wildlife in the region, **no single oil and gas project has more potential to derail this administration’s climate and public lands protection goals than the Willow project.**

In July, the public was asked to weigh in on a new revised Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for Willow that will help determine its fate.

In addition to leading the charge on public comment and letter-to-the-editor efforts, the League has coordinated congressional outreach to educate Congress about the risks of Willow. We are grateful for the roughly 40 volunteers who pressed their representatives on the critical need to deny the Willow permit in virtual district office meetings.

**How you can help:** Your elected official must be encouraged and held accountable for their position on new Arctic drilling. To participate in a virtual district meeting contact our national field organizer, Lois Norrgard, at [Lois@AlaskaWild.org](mailto:Lois@AlaskaWild.org).\*



Caribou from the Teshekpuk Lake herd gather near along the shore of the eponymous lake in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

© Richard Spener/[RichardSpenerPhotography.com](https://RichardSpenerPhotography.com)

# Devil Bear. Carcajou. Glutton. Wolverines Have a Bad Rap ... but Is It Deserved?

Hilary Stamper, Director of Member Engagement

Perhaps lesser known than some of the larger mammals in Alaska, the intelligent, secretive wolverines are the largest members of the weasel family and adaptable survivors. These solitary medium-dog-sized scavengers that can travel up to 40 miles in a single day across Alaska's landscapes, avoiding development and people.

Wolverines' sparse numbers often coincide with wolves, as they scavenge leftover kills with powerful jaws. Craig Gardner, an Alaska Department of Fish and Game biologist suggests, "Take the wolf numbers in that area and divide by five, and you've got a pretty good estimate of the number of wolverines."

They also hunt smaller mammals like ground squirrels, which they cache and dig up over the winter. Yet, in contrast with their Latin name *Gulo* ("glutton") and tendency to steal from traps, they are most likely to die of starvation or at the jaws of larger predators.

In fact, this pressure to find food likely drives wolverines in Alaska to travel long distances – males have a home range around 200-260 square miles. With incredible endurance they can outlast many animals in long chases. "You can see how fast they move around terrain, they go up and down really steep, icy, rocky slopes like they're not even there. You could never hike it – you'd need



An Arctic wolverine traversing the snowpack in Alaska's North Slope.

© Peter Mather/[PeterMather.com](http://PeterMather.com)

climbing gear," says Fish and Game researcher Howard Golden.

Built for snow, wolverines long, dense fur – generally dark brown to black with a creamy band from shoulder to tail – insulates the wolverine and makes it a target of trappers (another major source of their demise.) Wolverine paws expand almost double, functioning like snowshoes.

Smithsonian Magazine captured an Inupiat hunter's perspective: "They're just a vicious piece of muscle," says Qaiyaan Harcharek from Alaska's Arctic coast, "Even the bears don't mess with them little guys."

Alaska's wolverine denning habits are poorly documented. Most young are born blind in complex dens that can reach 10 or so feet deep and extend 200 feet along a snow-buried riverbank, with separate tunnels for beds and latrines and others for cached food. Females in particular prefer higher mountainous elevations where snow lasts longer and small mammals are available.

Wolverine survival depends on vast swaths of wild lands free from development. Already facing pressure from habitat encroachment and hunting, climate change adds a terrible threat as it melts wolverine dens earlier each year and risks the survival of the young. We hope you'll continue to join Alaska Wilderness League in defending lands wolverines need to survive, because sometimes even the fiercest of predators need our help the most. \*

## More reading:

"On the track of the wolverine" (University of Alaska Fairbanks, Alaska Science Forum):  
[bit.ly/3IJCxhE](http://bit.ly/3IJCxhE)

"Beasts of the Northern Wild" (Smithsonian Magazine):  
[bit.ly/3uVBEgg](http://bit.ly/3uVBEgg)

"Meeting a legend: Wolverine" (Anchorage Press):  
[bit.ly/3PC5UEC](http://bit.ly/3PC5UEC)

Wolverine species profile (Alaska Department of Fish and Game): [bit.ly/3PEjjMK](http://bit.ly/3PEjjMK)



# A Lifetime of Positive Impact and a Legacy To Build On

Chris Konish, Director of Development

**M**ost readers of this newsletter may not recognize the name Donald K. Ross, though his lasting impact on the world – and on Alaska’s wildest places – is hard to overlook.

Donald passed away on May 14, 2022, and was recognized in The New York Times’ obituary “as an innovative and pragmatic public interest lawyer and philanthropist [who] galvanized a generation of students into doing good.”

The write up – which is certainly worth your attention – adeptly outlines Donald’s most significant achievements including those early in his career advancing legislative change and bolstering grassroots and student activism throughout the United States. It also recalls his later roles as director of the Rockefeller Family Fund and the Tortuga Foundation (from which he retired in 2021), where he helped direct transformational grants – often with little strings attached – to nonprofits carrying on the grassroots activism work he kickstarted earlier in his life.

A lesser-known history, however,

was Donald’s role in the earliest days of Alaska Wilderness League.

Shortly after the League’s founding in 1993, Donald became aware of the organization during his role as director of the Rockefeller Family Fund, thanks to his work with the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council. Understanding the importance of the League’s mission – as well as the potential pitfalls that many young organizations face – Donald helped direct critical financial support for the League to stabilize itself. In doing so, Donald also provided its young staff and namely its new executive director, Brian O’Donnell, and a newly hired Arctic campaign manager, Adam Kolton, with a chance to evolve the organization from a bootstraps outfit to a Washington, D.C. powerhouse with strong partners in Alaska and a powerful grassroots network throughout the United States.

After those early years, Donald still maintained his connection to the League and its growing staff. When Adam Kolton arrived back at the League in 2017 – this time as its



Donald K. Ross, on a 2019 trip to the Arctic Refuge.  
Alaska Wilderness League

executive director – Donald and Adam would trade notes and calls frequently, covering the latest news and updates on Alaska public lands and waters. These ongoing chats even led to a first-time opportunity for Donald to explore one of these iconic landscapes, when he joined Adam and a few other League supporters on a memorable trip to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in 2019.

Donald K. Ross is missed by all of us at Alaska Wilderness League, though his legacy will continue to live on with each step forward, each measure of success achieved.

For more information on Donald K. Ross’s immense impact, visit [NYTimes.com/2022/05/19/us/donald-k-ross-dead.html](https://www.nytimes.com/2022/05/19/us/donald-k-ross-dead.html). \*

## Welcome to the Team, Aileo and Ashley

Chris Konish, Director of Development

**T**he spring and summer have marked a period of welcome growth for Alaska Wilderness League, which has seen new staff arriving throughout the organization to help secure strong victories for Alaska’s wildest places. A few highlights are included below, though be sure to visit [AlaskaWild.org/staff-full](https://AlaskaWild.org/staff-full) for more information on our entire team!

**Ashley Davis, Climate and Justice Partnership Organizer**, brings a background in partnership building, policy advocacy and community activism to her role at Alaska Wilderness League. Prior to joining the team in 2022, Ashley led an immigrant workforce development initiative in Idaho and supported a program advancing human rights and social justice in the Americas. She thrives when building

community around shared questions, such as: What is our responsibility to the land, each other, and all of Earth's inhabitants? How can we act in a way that respects our interdependence and ensures collective thriving for generations to come? Raised in the Pacific Northwest, Ashley currently resides on unceded Shoshone Bannock and Paiute land in Boise, Idaho.

**Aileo Weinmann, Communications Director,** joined Alaska Wilderness League in June of 2022. He got hooked on Alaska and its unique riches of people and resources while reporting public radio stories for a weekly show about all things Alaska. Prior to joining Alaska Wilderness League, Aileo worked in communications for the National Wildlife Federation and Resource Media, and as a journalist in Alaska, California and Michigan – producing and reporting public radio stories, reporting and editing magazines, and reporting newspaper stories. Aileo is based in Colorado on

lands originally belonging to the Arapaho Tribe (the Denver region's Indigenous history also includes the Southern Ute Indian Tribe and Ute Mountain Ute Tribe.) He holds a master's degree in journalism from Michigan State University and a bachelor's in American culture from The University of Michigan. \*



New League staff Aileo Weinmann (left) and Ashley Davis

Alaska Wilderness League

## A New Arctic Advocate Film Captures Our Attention

Chris Konish, Director of Development

**T**his summer, we at Alaska Wilderness League are most excited about a different type of summer blockbuster than you'll find in theaters throughout the country: "Walking Two Worlds," a documentary focused on Han Gwich'in 19-year old, Quannah Chasinghorse, and her mother, League board member Jody Potts-Joseph, as they take a stand to defend their sacred homelands in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and Yukon Flats.

"Walking Two Worlds" underscores Quannah and Jody's spiritual connection to the land and animals, and how defending the sacred is critical for the healing journey of the mother-daughter duo. The film gives an intimate and honest glimpse into the life of Quannah,

as she pursues and achieves her dreams as an Indigenous supermodel, breaking barriers of representation, while walking in two worlds: her Indigenous way of life and high fashion.

Director Maia Wikler – who has previously reported on the Gwich'in Nation's efforts to protect the Arctic Refuge for Teen Vogue – had this to say about the short film, "In partnership with, Quannah and Jody, I wanted to help create an inspiring and empowering film by women, about women, that challenges audiences to engage more deeply on issues of climate justice and Indigenous rights by mobilizing empathy and community-based storytelling, rather than the tired tropes of conservation that depict struggles for environmental justice

without centering Indigenous rights and voices."

We think she's done just what she's set out to accomplish.

"Walking Two Worlds" made its world premier in June at the Tribeca Film Festival. You can stream it at home by visiting: [TribecaFilm.com/films/walking-two-worlds-2022](https://tribecafilm.com/films/walking-two-worlds-2022). \*



Jody Potts-Joseph (left) and her daughter Quannah Chasinghorse appear in a new documentary appearing now in festivals across the country.

Emily Sullivan



# A Legacy of Protecting the Places You Love



By planning today, you can ensure you have the final say on how your hard-earned assets can benefit the people and causes you care about most. Whether you choose to establish a Charitable Gift Annuity with Alaska Wilderness League or include a gift to the League in your will, you can help provide lasting and impactful resources to aid in the long-term protection of irreplaceable Alaska landscapes.

To learn more, please contact Chris Konish at 202-266-0415 or [Chris@AlaskaWild.org](mailto:Chris@AlaskaWild.org), or visit [AlaskaWild.org/Planned-Giving](http://AlaskaWild.org/Planned-Giving).

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