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# NORTH STAR NEWS

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# Early Reflections on Wild Alaska in 2023

Kristen Miller, Executive Director

**B**y the time you read this, the Biden administration will likely have decided whether to approve the Willow oil project, ConocoPhillips' massive expansion of drilling in the Western Arctic. It's hard to know what to write about such an impactful decision before it is made, but it's easy to say that Alaska Wilderness League has gone all out to stop Willow. During the critical period between when U.S. Secretary of the Interior Deb Haaland issued the administration's final Environmental Impact Statement and when the government had the authority to release their final decision (aka Record of Decision), the League has led a coalition of groups to elevate the national and local opposition to this project, including:

- \* Sending more than 120,000 League comments opposing Willow to President Biden, plus coordinating more than 2.3 million actions from national groups in less than a month.
- \* A series of paid ads in President Biden's hometown newspaper, the Wilmington News-Journal, on behalf of Indigenous, climate and conservation organizations.
- \* Multiple paid ads in Washington, D.C. edition of The New York Times, on behalf of national and

local groups calling on President Biden and Secretary Haaland to stop the project.

- \* Social and traditional media reaching millions through national and local connections with reporters and through coordinating social posts for maximum impact.

In January, we supported a fly-in for leaders from Nuiqsut, the community closest to Willow, to visit Washington, D.C. and meet with decision makers. Rosemary Ahtuanguak, mayor of Nuiqsut, met with Secretary Haaland and joined the League and other groups at a rally outside of the White House, which prompted media coverage highlighting opposition to Willow.

As you know, defending wild Alaska happens on many fronts, and as the campaign to stop Willow was firing on all cylinders toward our goal of protecting the Western Arctic, we were also working hard on protections for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. In February, we joined Senator Ed Markey (D-MA) and Representative Jared Huffman (D-CA) for introduction of the Arctic Refuge Protection Act, to designate the coastal plain of the Refuge a wilderness area and protect it from oil and gas leasing and development. We were also honored to screen the film

"Walking Two Worlds" at the Capitol, with guests Jody Potts-Joseph (a member of the League's Board of Directors) and her daughter, supermodel Quannah Chasinghorse, who use their public platforms to defend their sacred homelands, including the Arctic Refuge.

We also collaborated on a February fly-in with Oregon-based nonprofit Love Is King, founded by League Board member, Chad Brown to advocate for the Arctic Refuge. Connecting Black, Indigenous and people of color (BIPOC) with lawmakers marks a step forward in the unique partnership between our organizations, to activate leadership and build advocacy around Arctic Refuge protection. A Black U.S. Navy veteran, Chad organized previous trips to the Arctic Refuge for all of the fly-in participants, providing rich experiences to advocate with their lawmakers.

As we enter our 30th year, Alaska faces a host of threats, but Alaska Wilderness League will always be there to protect wild lands, support human rights and address the climate crisis. I'm honored to have your continued support! \*

Kristen Miller  
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.

**Board of Directors:** Former President Jimmy Carter, Honorary Co-Chair, The Honorable Robert Mrazek, Honorary Co-Chair, Tom Campion, Chair Emeritus, Pat Pourchot, President, Kit DesLauriers, Vice President, Midy Aponte, Secretary, Yvonne Besvold, Treasurer, Toni Armstrong, Steve Barker, Chad Brown, Ellen Ferguson, Debbie S. Miller, Greg Moga, Brian O'Donnell, Jody Potts-Joseph, Amy Roberts, John Sterling. For questions about our newsletter, please email us at [Info@AlaskaWild.org](mailto:Info@AlaskaWild.org) or call us at 202-544-5205.

**Cover photo:** Caribou rush through the landscape in Alaska's Western Arctic. © Florian Schulz/[FlorianSchulz.org](http://FlorianSchulz.org)



# Major Roadless Rule Victory for the Tongass!

Maddie Halloran, Manager of Alaska Campaigns

**A**t the end of January of this year, the U.S. Forest Service reinstated Roadless Rule protections across the Tongass National Forest in Southeast Alaska, in a win for local communities, wildlife and the global climate. Tribal leaders, outdoor recreation businesses, commercial fishing operators, conservationists and people like you and me cheer the agency's restoration of this critical safeguard. The move restores federal protection — from industrial logging and damaging road-building — to just over 9 million acres in America's largest national forest.

Alaska Wilderness League appreciates its thousands of supporters – like you! – who voiced their support of the Roadless Rule time and time again to get us to this point. And, we are grateful that the Biden administration listened and made this decision.

We applauded this announcement because it recognizes that Southeast Alaska's future is rooted in sustainable uses of the forest. The Roadless Rule protects Tongass old-growth trees while also providing flexibility for community access, hydropower projects, utility connectors and other economic development projects when they serve a legitimate public interest. While many Alaskan politicians have repeatedly accused this measure of protection as another instance of the federal government “locking up Alaska”, the reinstated rule still allows for the construction of roads to support small projects like access to renewable energy resources. This decision puts public lands and people first, and we are grateful for the action.

However, our work does not end here. While advancing 9 million acres for protections from damaging logging activity is a cause for celebration, there are still 7 million acres of the Tongass outside of Roadless areas that did not gain any additional protection from this final action. Fortunately, President Biden – through his Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) – recognized this, and he halted all industrial-scale old-growth logging, even in non-Roadless areas of the

forest. That said, this is just the policy of the Biden administration, and more is needed to stop a future president from restarting clearcut logging. In the next two years we will work to add durability to this administration's end of industrial-scale old-growth logging. We also will work to make certain that the government's commitment to robust Tribal consultation and sustainable economic development is maintained in years to come, two other critical components of the SASS.

The 17 million-acre Tongass National Forest, situated in the southeast corner of Alaska, is a temperate rainforest that draws visitors from around the globe and provides habitat for an abundance of wildlife including grizzly bears, bald eagles and wolves. It is the ancestral homeland of the Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian peoples. The Tongass also serves as the country's largest forest carbon sink, storing more than 10 percent of the carbon accumulated by all national forests in the United States, making its protection critical for U.S. efforts to curb greenhouse gas emissions and to set a global example. We will continue to work to ensure its protection. \*



The National Roadless Rule was rolled back for America's last great rainforest by the Trump administration, threatening millions of acres of undeveloped national forest lands. The Biden administration has reinstated it.

© Amy Gulick/[AmyGulick.com](https://www.amygulick.com)

# New Film Highlights the Beauty of the Arctic, and the Need To Protect It

Chris Konish, Director of Development

Using breathtaking footage from National Geographic Photographer, Florian Schulz, the film – which is currently appearing in IMAX and giant screen theaters throughout the United States – showcases Alaska’s Arctic, a remarkable place in the far north that few have truly seen until now. Florian and Princess Daazhrai Johnson (Neet’saii Gwich’in) narrate the film, helping bring its story to life.

When speaking about her involvement in the project, Princess Daazhrai Johnson (who also appeared in the League’s Geography of Hope series in 2022) shared, “Lending my voice to this film is lending my spirit to this work which I care so deeply about. The film is filled with wonder and spirit and I feel humbled to do my small part in opening the public’s eyes to the beauty of these lands. When I watch the image of the Porcupine caribou herd, I also feel the spirit of my Ancestors. It’s a deeply emotional sight to behold and I’m grateful that a larger audience might realize why this place is worth protecting.”

Alaska Wilderness League has been fortunate to partner with the filmmakers on screenings throughout the country and look forward to many more to come. We are especially grateful to our partners at the Champion Advocacy Fund who helped make this documentary a reality and are eager to ensure many more people can experience



As opportunities for in-person gatherings have increased in recent years, Alaska Wilderness League has proudly supported the distribution of a captivating new documentary, “The Arctic: Our Last Great Wilderness.”

the film to learn about the need for preserving Alaska’s Arctic.

In particular, the 19.6 million acres of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge highlighted in the movie are full of life and history. The land is home to hundreds of species of plants, birds, mammals, and fish. It supports Indigenous cultures and has global ecological importance. This public land is at risk and an active campaign persists to advance awareness of the threat and opportunities to protect this unique land.

View the official trailer for “The Arctic: Our Last Great Wilderness” at <https://youtu.be/-HopOaiD5TM>.

And find out if a screening is in your area at [ProtectTheArctic.org/arctic-national-wildlife-refuge-giant-screen-film](https://ProtectTheArctic.org/arctic-national-wildlife-refuge-giant-screen-film).\*

## New Grant Award Winner Begins Work

Chris Konish, Director of Development

Last fall, the Alaska Wilderness League community gathered together in Seattle to celebrate Alaska’s wildest places and also announce the inaugural recipient of the Adam Kolton Alaska Storytelling Grant

Award: Polly Andrews.

Polly Andrews, who is Cup’ik from the village of Chevak on the Bering Sea coast, combines ancient and contemporary story, song, drum and spoken word to showcase the unique values

and strengths of Alaska Native people. The intent behind her application was to use the grant to help others tell their stories through youth workshops in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta.

At the League’s fall event, Polly



accepted the award virtually, sharing a few remarks as well as an original song, which you can view here: <https://youtu.be/qOcnls3DDXo?t=2815>.

As I noted following this landmark announcement, the quality of applications received during this initial year of the grant program was overwhelming in the best possible way. We are so delighted to support her storytelling practice and to carry on Adam's legacy.

Since that time, Polly has already begun scheduling storytelling workshops. Current plans consist of spending time on the Kuskokwim River in June, to host workshops for youth in collaboration with other Yup'ik artists. Polly is also considering a visit to Washington, D.C. to help

bridge her storytelling practice from Alaska to our nation's capital while increasing representation of Alaska Native people.

Additionally, given the strength of the year one application pool and the difficulty in arriving at a final decision, the selection committee was pleased to offer a runner up award to author Michaela Stith. Michaela's work also shined through during the selection process, and we are happy that Alaska Wilderness League could support her future endeavors in some small way.

The Adam Kolton Alaska Storytelling Grant Award was made possible thanks to generous contributions to the Adam Kolton Memorial Fund. To help support future opportunities like this, and to



Polly Andrews, 2022 recipient of the Adam Kolton Alaska Storytelling Grant Award. Polly Andrews

drive critical campaigns forward like the fight to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, you can donate to the fund at [AlaskaWild.org/AKMF](https://AlaskaWild.org/AKMF).

To receive information on the 2023 application cycle for the Adam Kolton Alaska Storytelling Grant Award, please email [Chris@AlaskaWild.org](mailto:Chris@AlaskaWild.org). \*

## Love Is King and the League Team Up in Washington, D.C.

Monica Scherer, Director of Outreach

In mid-February, the League was fortunate to host our partners nonprofit Love Is King for an event that was nearly three years in the making. When the partnership idea was launched in 2020, Alaska Wilderness League had a goal of strengthening and diversifying our advocate bench

to allow us to build relationships with critical offices in Capitol Hill. The vision came to fruition earlier this year when 10 Black, Indigenous and People of Color (BIPOC) leaders, all of whom have spent time in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, came to D.C. from across the country to share their unique experiences in the Refuge with key members of Congress and the Environmental Protection Agency's office of Environmental Justice.

The timing for such a compelling group to hit the Hill was perfect, as just two weeks earlier the House of Representatives and the Senate both introduced the Arctic Refuge Protection Act of 2023 for the 118th Congress. I had the great experience of being able to spend three amazing days learning and sharing knowledge



Love Is King fly-in participants meet with the Environmental Justice office at the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). Chad Brown

*(Continued on page 7)*

# Springtime Highlights From the Tongass National Forest to Wildlife Corridors Throughout the Arctic

Hilary Stamper, Director of Member Engagement

**W**ith climate chaos continuing to upturn our seasonal expectations, Alaska in springtime still signals a variety of unique experiences. As a land devoid of color transforms into a kaleidoscope of greens and blues, wildlife and their young offspring begin to prepare for a summer feast.

Around the Tongass National Forest in April, rain and temperatures in the 30's and 40's are offset by more daylight hours than anywhere in the other 49 states! Secretive forest-loving varied thrush announce warmer weather, joined by songbirds migrating their way north and others that live in Alaska year-round, such as the chestnut-backed chickadee and pine siskin.

While grey whales should be plentiful along the coast by April, sea otters along the

Tongass coast will pup in late spring. Eulachon (a small, oil-rich fish) move into rivers to spawn and attract harbor seals that congregate at river mouths, often hauled out on icebergs and sandbars. Bald eagles also feast on these fish and can often be seen in pairs in the old-growth forest along the coast and river valleys.

On land, snowshoe hare litters are born during April and May. Watch for females with young in late evening and early morning in shrubs along the Southeast. By May, warmer weather greens the landscape with flora and fauna emerging in earnest. Salmon should begin returning and bears moving closer to the coast to greet them. At this time, visitors can enjoy the wonders of Southeast Alaska before tourists flood the region.



A bald eagle in Southeast Alaska.

© Daniel Dietrich/[DanielDietrichPhotography.com](http://DanielDietrichPhotography.com)

In the Arctic, female caribou and the previous year's young congregate in preparation for migration to calving grounds on the wet tundra of the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. They are as much a signal of spring as the warming temperatures and the brown bears emerging from hibernation. And, only days after giving birth, female caribou shed their antlers on the tundra, providing a long-standing natural historical record of their presence. In fact, scientists have found antlers dated to 3,157 years ago on their birthing grounds in the Arctic Refuge.

Following an early spring breeding season, the first litter of Arctic fox pups are born in May as well, in dens excavated by adults who transition from their white



A baby caribou finds a moment to rest.

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



winter fur to their caramel summer coat. Wolves pup around the same time and adults can be seen hunting away from their dens, more easily spotted at this time of year thanks to the still-snow-covered ground.

In the air, millions of migratory birds have begun to arrive. Arctic terns start their return from summer Arctic breeding grounds after a winter spent almost 19,000 miles away in Antarctica. Intense king and common eiders move from wintering in the North Pacific



A sea otter floating in the Tongass National Forest.

© Daniel Dietrich/[DanielDietrichPhotography.com](http://DanielDietrichPhotography.com)

and Bering Sea to breed in the north, along with countless other species. \*

*For a fantastic guide featuring wildlife by month in Southeast Alaska, check out this seasonal*

*calendar from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game:*

[AlaskaWild.org/southeastwildlife](http://AlaskaWild.org/southeastwildlife)

*And learn more about Arctic wildlife across the seasons here:*

[AlaskaWild.org/arcticwildlife](http://AlaskaWild.org/arcticwildlife)

#### *(Love Is King... continued from page 5)*

with the very impressive group. Learning about their experiences and how their time in the Arctic Refuge had such a significant impact on their day to day was incredible. Seeing them in action in Hill offices lobbying for protecting the Arctic Refuge was a clear example of how the League is at its best when it can elevate compelling voices in front of key decisionmakers.

Over a day and a half participants met with 18 congressional offices including key freshman members and leadership both in

the House and Senate.

This fly-in was very impactful, specifically because the participants' professional backgrounds vary from education to outdoor retail, to making public lands equitably accessible to people of color, and more. We are excited to continue to build on this successful partnership with Love Is King ([LoveIsKing.org](http://LoveIsKing.org)) to continue bringing the right voices to D.C. to share their stories and help the League continue to succeed in protecting critical ecosystems throughout Alaska. \*



The Love Is King group outside of the Capitol in between meetings.

Chad Brown



# Charting New Horizons With Your Legacy Support



**Legacy gifts to Alaska Wilderness League** – such as charitable gift annuities, including a gift to the League in your will or listing the League as the beneficiary of a life insurance policy – can help chart a new path for Alaska’s wildest places. With a little planning today, you can provide lasting and impactful resources to aid in the 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](https://AlaskaWild.org/Planned-Giving).

