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- * **Alaska's Unparalleled Beauty Sustained Through Legacy of Conservation**
- * **The League's Campaigns Carry On**
- * **Insurance Victory**
- * **Honoring President Jimmy Carter and His Conservation Legacy**
- * **Two Spring Geography of Hope Episodes to (Re)watch**
- * **Highlight From the Field: Earth Day Outreach**
- * **Welcome to the Team, Alex, Lindsay and Anja**
- * **Celebrating Our Interns**
- * **Migrations**

Alaska's Unparalleled Beauty Sustained Through Legacy of Conservation

Kristen Miller, Executive Director

Summer is here again! Like many families, for me summer is a time to revisit favorite outdoor places and reconnect with others in the great outdoors. Every summer I relish the opportunity to visit Alaska as part of our work as well. Each time, after flying over a panorama of wild beauty and arriving on the ground to endless sunlight, I am reinvigorated by what our nation's largest state has to offer: unparalleled landscapes, made possible through a rich legacy of our greatest conservation victories. I am honored to enjoy Alaska and its beauty, and to be there with staff and colleagues who work so hard every day to ensure its protection.

This work sustains a long legacy. Thanks to heroic leadership from President Jimmy Carter, special places in Alaska are safeguarded for all Americans. We all have the privilege to enjoy wild places that many people fought to protect – for generations. These are places that remain protected today thanks to President Carter's legacy. Whether you've been to Alaska already, plan to visit, or enjoy its beauty from your own hometown, chances

are you've been inspired by the Great Land's stories of adventure, wildlife and endless splendor.

President Carter was ahead of his time in understanding how protecting wild Alaska would outlive his White House tenure. We celebrate his legacy in Alaska through our mission to protect Alaska's wild lands and waters for generations to come. Recently, much of that focus has been in America's Arctic, from the world-renowned wetlands of the Western Arctic to the life-sustaining habitat of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

As we've seen with the Biden administration's approval of the Willow project in the Western Arctic, unfortunately sometimes the White House gets oil and gas development decisions wrong. The summer brings a welcome pause from ConocoPhillips' rush to bulldoze the tundra, and our lawsuit to stop the project is not over. Alaska Wilderness League, Sovereign Inupiat for a Living Arctic and others joined together to sue in U.S. District Court challenging the Biden administration's approval of Willow.

We are deeply disappointed in the Biden administration greenlighting Willow and brought this lawsuit forward because the project's impacts weren't thoroughly considered before approval. This is not the path forward to address climate change, nor is it the right track to protect biodiversity in America's Arctic. We will not back down until the Arctic is protected once and for all.

The days will soon start to get shorter, but Alaska has plenty of summer amazement that's just getting started. With so much to protect, the League is working hard to meet the challenge – with three new staff bolstering our ranks to keep fighting to protect wild Alaska. Please enjoy our round-up of some of the great migrations that are happening, a longer tribute to President Carter, victories worth highlighting and more.

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 or call us at 202-544-5205.

Cover photo: Two newly born Western Arctic caribou herd calves on Archimedes Ridge in the Utukok Uplands. © Patrick Endres/PatrickEndres.com

The League's Campaigns Carry On

Maddie Halloran, Manager of Alaska Campaigns

Alaska Wilderness League stands with, serves and supports the many people and organizations that believe in a sustainable future for Alaska. From the Western Arctic to Southeast Alaska, we work closely with partners around the country to highlight important issues and produce durable policy changes that protect Alaska's lands and waters. Earlier this year, our work with partners to push back against ConocoPhillips' Willow project caught the national limelight, and new supporters arrived at a critical moment. A diversity of voices more than 5 million strong stepped up to tell the Biden administration that Alaska's Arctic should be part of our nation's climate solution, putting ongoing pressure on the administration and corporations to urgently transition away from fossil fuels.

As the organization that bridges the gap between in-Alaska and nationally focused groups, we work daily to maintain and strengthen partnerships through in-person convenings, meetings, phone calls and other community-building resources. We look forward to growing this work in the years to come, as we continue to fight alongside our partners in Alaska and around the country. *

Insurance Victory

Anja Semanco, Communications Manager

In April 2023, the insurance company Chubb officially signed a new policy prohibiting the underwriting of oil and gas extraction projects in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. With this action, Chubb became the first American insurance company to make such a policy and joined 17 other international insurers as well as every major U.S. bank in limiting financing for extractive practices in the Arctic Refuge.

This new policy is especially important for the Gwich'in who live and thrive in the Arctic Refuge. The Gwich'in and the Porcupine caribou herd



Polar bear sow with spring cub in the Arctic Refuge.

© Steven J. Kazlowski/LeftEyePro.com

depend upon Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit (the sacred place where life begins) for their identity, culture and ways of life. This policy from Chubb offers further protections for this sacred place.

A commitment of this magnitude from a major insurer plays a critical role in protecting America's Arctic. Because oil and gas drilling is incredibly risky, no company can drill without insurance. The more insurance companies that create these policies, the harder it is for oil and gas corporations to start development.

This fight to protect the Arctic Refuge has been ongoing for decades. In 1980, Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) which set aside 1.5 million acres of the coastal plain as a "study area." But 37 years later, a Republican-dominated Congress approved oil and gas leasing in the area through the passage of the 2017 Tax Act. Land that had been treated as federal wilderness for nearly 40 years was suddenly under attack from the same system originally intended to protect it. It was time for an additional tactic to ensure regular administration

(Continued on page 5)

Honoring President Jimmy Carter and His Conservation Legacy

Debbie S. Miller, Alaska Wilderness League Board Member

We are grateful to honor one of Alaska's greatest conservation heroes, President Jimmy Carter.

As a young farm boy growing up during the Depression in Plains, Georgia, Jimmy ran barefoot in the fields and understood the meaning of conservation and making do. Carter wrote in his memoir, "Hour Before Daybreak," that "the most persistent impression as a farm boy was of the earth. There was a closeness, almost an immersion, in the sand, loam and red clay that seemed natural and constant."

His rural upbringing, hunting and fishing traditions, and a deep appreciation for the great outdoors stayed with him through life. President Carter was the first world leader to address climate change concerns. Long before the 2016 Paris Climate Agreement, President Carter implemented vehicle fuel efficiency standards that saved millions of barrels of oil, reducing carbon emissions. Conservation was a priority in his White House.

When Congress stalled in their work to protect important public lands in Alaska, Carter used his executive authority under the Antiquities Act to protect 56 million acres of Alaska's wilderness in the form of monuments. That one action doubled the size of the



The author (left) visits with the Carters on the tundra in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Debbie S. Miller/DebbieMillerAlaska.com

National Park System. While some Alaskans protested and burned the President in effigy, many others hailed his decision, which ultimately pushed Congress into action.

Under President Carter's leadership, following his monuments designations, Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), the greatest piece of conservation legislation in U.S. history. With the stroke of his pen in 1980, this law set aside more than 100 million acres of conservation lands and waters in Alaska – an area the size of California. Not since Theodore Roosevelt had any president protected so much public land.

The "fierce debate and compromise" necessary to pass ANILCA, as Carter remembered

in his 25th-anniversary reflection, was well worth the political capital. "Alaska's parks were perhaps the last ones of large size that will be created anywhere in the United States, protecting natural landscapes on an ecosystem scale."

This sweeping act created or expanded 13 national parks and preserves, 16 wildlife refuges, 26 wild and scenic rivers, and many wilderness areas. It also protected the hunting, fishing and cultural traditions of Alaska's Indigenous people whose lives have depended on the resources of their homelands for thousands of years. Carter clearly saw the value of safeguarding these beautiful and wildlife-rich public lands for future generations, and we are so grateful that he did.

In 1990, 10 years after the passage of ANILCA, President

Carter and Rosalynn Carter had the opportunity to make a special trip to America's largest and wildest refuge, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the protection of which was made possible under President Carter's historic law. During this well-timed visit, the Porcupine caribou herd aggregated on the coastal plain. The Carters witnessed the astonishing procession of more than 100,000 caribou marching by them on the tundra. It was unthinkable to consider industrial activity in such a sensitive area. "Oil

development can never happen here," Carter boldly said.

Later that day, when asked what he felt most proud about during his presidency, he responded immediately, "The Alaska Lands Act!"

Soon after his trip to Alaska, Carter joined Alaska Wilderness League's Board of Directors as an honorary chair.

"The Alaska Wilderness League provides leadership on protecting the Arctic Refuge

and keeps other groups in the coalition invigorated," Carter said in 2013 at the Carter Center in Atlanta.

Over the past 30 years, Alaska Wilderness League has continued its work to protect the Arctic Refuge and other federal lands in Alaska, honoring President Carter's conservation legacy.

There is no place in the world that is quite like Alaska, and we can thank Jimmy Carter for protecting America the Beautiful in its purest form. *

(Insurance Victory, continued from page 3)

changes couldn't so easily turn back protections.

While some other insurance companies have announced they would stop financing Arctic Refuge drilling, few have followed through with actual policies. In 2022, the insurance company American International Group (AIG) made such promises, but failed to make clear if that policy would encompass the Arctic Refuge specifically and never responded to outreach from the

Gwich'in Steering Committee and their allies.

Still, other insurers haven't made any promises at all. Together with our partners, Alaska Wilderness League delivered more than 64,000 signatures on a letter asking Travelers' Insurance CEO to meet with the Gwich'in Steering Committee and agree to not insure drilling in the Arctic Refuge. We're still awaiting a response from Travelers — as well as Liberty Mutual and The Hartford. *



Greater white-fronted geese on the tundra at Teshekpuk Lake.

Mario Davalos/[MarioDavalos.com](https://www.MarioDavalos.com)

Two Spring Geography of Hope Episodes to (Re)watch

Hilary Stamper, Director of Member Engagement

In March the League was pleased to host another installment of its Geography of Hope series featuring filmmaker Mark Titus as he helped guide a celebration of our recent victory protecting Bristol Bay from the proposed Pebble Mine. Mark shared vibrant videos, images and stories about what it means to be connected to this magical region and its salmon. Salmon might be considered the lifeblood of Alaska, and this Geography of Hope episode revealed the deep

relationships between people and the land. Wild salmon show us how to give of ourselves for that which is far greater than ourselves. Our success in protecting Bristol Bay offers renewed hope that our efforts can leave future generations with a world that sustains them.

In early May, we also met with Kim Heacox, author of the new novel “On Heaven’s Hill,” to discuss the power of story in protecting wild spaces. Specifically, Kim focused on the rain-soaked,

shaggy green, ice-cut world of Southeast Alaska, the Tongass National Forest and the salmon-eating wolves that live there. He shared readings from his exciting new novel, and as he drew us into the fictional lives of his characters, he illustrated how both fiction and nonfiction stories can still bring connection to place and purpose.

Stay on the lookout for more Geography of Hope episodes coming your way at AlaskaWild.org/geography-of-hope. We always love to see you there. *

Highlight From the Field: Earth Day Outreach

Lois Norrgard, National Field Organizer

In honor of Earth Day, the League helped supporters host two special events to further build momentum and expand awareness about threats facing wild Alaska, while showing new supporters how to take action. By sharing our stories and passions, we expanded our base of supporters for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Western Arctic.

As participant Ron Melin in California shared, “Godwit Days was a fun weekend. The majority of folks who came by knew of the Willow project and several, perhaps 50, signed the petition. Being that Humboldt State University has strong wildlife, fishery and natural resource majors, several people had done field work in Alaska including the Arctic ... All in all, the weekend was a well-received success.”

“The Earth Day Festival in our small community went really wonderful,” said another participant, MaryCarol Nelson in Idaho. “Lots of folks came, it was busy and loud with lots of excited folks talking, sharing, and learning all things Earth Day ... People were delighted with my Alaska Arctic theme and were happy to spread the word



MaryCarol Nelson (second from left) advocates for Alaska on Earth Day.

MaryCarol Nelson

to stop the Willow project.”

Hosting fun events such as these — both small and large — raises awareness about the threats facing Alaska’s wild landscapes and motivates new activists to get involved. If you would like to learn more about other ways to engage in these fights, or are looking for opportunities to host local events, please let us know! Email Lois@AlaskaWild.org and we can support you with information and materials for your event. *

Welcome to the Team, Alex, Lindsay and Anja

Aileo Weinmann, Communications Director

Alaska Wilderness League continues to grow, with 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 for more information on our entire team!

Alex Cohen, Government Affairs Director, joined in

April. He grew up in the Washington, D.C. area, most recently working on Sierra Club's political program to elect pro-climate candidates. Prior to that, Alex spent years working on pro-conversation legislation. Alex previously fell in love with Alaska after spending a summer in high school hiking in Kenai Fjords National Park.

Lindsay Crowder, Arctic Campaigns Director, also

joined in April, bringing years of experience running local to global campaign offices, and recently working at the Peoples Climate Movement. She also ran the climate program at Exposure Labs, a film and impact company, to serve as a pathway for storytellers, organizers and the broader storytelling ecosystem to build narrative power in their communities and beyond.

Anja Semanco,

Communications Manager, joined in February. Originally from a small town in western Pennsylvania, she moved to Colorado to pursue a master's degree in environmental journalism and has remained out West ever since. She currently lives on unceded Ute, Arapahoe and Cheyenne land in Colorado's Front Range, where you can find her on wild single track, skin tracks or out salsa dancing when not busy crafting engagement strategies. *



(From left) Alex Cohen, Lindsay Crowder and Anja Semanco

Alaska Wilderness League

Celebrating Our Interns

Lois Norrgard, National Field Organizer

This year, the League launched a new virtual internship program focused on developing a network of young, active, culturally diverse people with skills in advocacy and knowledge about Alaska. We partnered with Delaware State University and three amazing students to explore what working to protect special places in Alaska encompasses – not only lands

and wildlife but also learning about the people most affected by decisions on these lands. Over the semester, the students wrote letters-to-the-editor, engaged in social media and advocated for the Arctic Refuge with the entire Delaware congressional delegation. A big thanks to these interns and faculty for their time and commitment to the League and wild Alaska! *



(From left) Senator Carper with Interns Lauren Smith, Kayla McKinley and Jelani Bryant

Alaska Wilderness League

Migrations

Anja Semanco, Communications Manager

Alaska boasts some of the most incredible wildlife in the U.S., not only for the sheer number of species that call Alaska home, but also for the hundreds and thousands of miles so many migratory species cover every year.

When President Carter visited the Arctic Refuge in 1990, he called it “America’s Serengeti,” comparing its likeness to the vast abundance of wildlife found in Tanzania and the expansive landscapes many animals traverse in their annual migrations there.

Take for example the Teshekpuk caribou herd — one of four main herds in Alaska — whose spring calving grounds around Teshekpuk Lake sit hundreds of miles from their more southern winter migratory corridor. Though many Teshekpuk caribou stick near the Arctic coastal plain and Brooks Foothills throughout the winter months, the herd is more than 41,000 animals strong and spreads its migration across the Western Arctic, depending on food availability and weather conditions. However, increased oil and gas development in the region — including ConocoPhillips’ recently approved Willow project — continues to impact the Teshekpuk caribou herd as well as the local Native villages like Nuiqsut that rely on caribou for subsistence.

Similarly, the Western Arctic caribou herd, often the largest of Alaska’s 32 herds, has recently been in decline. While it is



Caribou en route near the Teshekpuk Lake wetlands.

Kiliii Yuyan/Kiliii.com

not uncommon for caribou populations to fluctuate, the herd is now down to 164,000 from nearly 500,000 during its most recent peak population in 2003. This herd moves in a range stretching from Alaska’s North Slope in the summer down to the eastern Seward Peninsula in the winter, an expanse the size of California. The herd is facing threats from development projects like the Ambler Mining District Industrial Road — a 211-mile project that would cut through a large swath of this migratory corridor — putting the caribou at further risk. In addition to development, climate change continues to put pressure on these grazing Arctic species as vegetation shifts from hearty lichens and mosses (perfect food for caribou) to nearly inedible woody shrubs.

But it’s not just megafauna like caribou that rely on the intact, undisturbed range of Alaska to thrive. Salmon in the Yukon River similarly travel hundreds of miles from the Bering Sea to Alaska’s interior to mate and spawn. But climate change is also playing a

major role in their demise. In 2022, low return numbers shut down subsistence fishing for Chinook and chum salmon.

And of course, we cannot forget the millions of birds that migrate through Alaska every year, including the record-setting bar-tailed godwit which travels more than 7,500 miles from New Zealand to Alaska each spring. Which brings us back to Teshekpuk Lake and its surrounding wetlands, an area of global migratory bird significance. Tens of thousands of birds rely on this ecologically rich ecosystem and safe molting ground, including several species of geese, more than a dozen other species of birds on the Alaska WatchList, and many threatened species, some near endangerment. Like the Teshekpuk caribou herd, these thousands of migratory birds face ongoing risks as oil and gas development continues to wind its way through the Western Arctic. Another reason why Alaska Wilderness League continues to fight for lasting Arctic protections. *