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NORTH STAR NEWS

*Your Land.
Your Voice.*

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Making 2024 a Year To Remember

Kristen Miller, Executive Director

Happy spring from the League! I love this time of year as the Alaskan landscape slowly wakes from a long winter, blanketed in snow. Whales are returning to the coast, moose are giving birth to their calves, and bears are emerging from their dens. It's a time of renewed energy as the landscape shakes off the slow cadence of winter and arrives with vigor to a new, warmer season.

This is also the time of year when the League shifts from strategic preparation into energetic action. As our work ramps up, our mission grows increasingly urgent with tens of millions of acres of Alaskan land at risk.

In America's Arctic, we are busy supporting the Biden administration's efforts to strengthen protections on more than 13 million acres of designated Special Areas in the Western Arctic and setting the stage to gain more protected acres in the future. We are also working to secure a win on D1 lands, a sprawling network of ecologically significant lands covering 28

million acres of wild Alaska, while simultaneously finalizing the Ambler Road decision which would ensure security for another 200,000 acres from massive extractive industrialization.

Altogether, this would be one of the largest collections of land protections in U.S. history.

As we prepare for all these potential wins, we also have tough battles looming, and we are gearing up for the fight. Early in the year, the collaborative Arctic Defense Campaign met in Washington, D.C. for three days of strategic planning with our sights set firmly on stopping oil and gas development in America's Arctic.

A week prior to the strategy session, the League held its annual board meeting at our D.C. office. It was great to see our board members hit the Hill to advocate for our mission, and it was nice to welcome new board members, Leonard Steinberg, Nikki Buffa, Lisa Collins and Tonya Garnett, as well as a new slate of board officers including a new president, Kit DesLauriers. We're

more than ready to tackle the year ahead!

In the midst of this strategic planning, our champions on the Hill pushed back against bad legislation poised to gut protections for the Arctic while also bringing forward solutions to protect Alaska from further development. With the increasing complexity of our work, the League also added internal capacity, bringing on two new staff members who hit the ground running at the end of January.

All of that to say, we're strategically positioned to make 2024 a year to remember (and not just because of what happens in November). None of this would be possible without your support. I'm so looking forward to your involvement with the League in 2024 and can't wait to work closely with you on what is already shaping up to be an incredibly impactful year. *

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, Kit DesLauriers, President, John Sterling, Vice President, Yvonne Besvold, Treasurer, Debbie S. Miller, Secretary, Toni Armstrong, Chad Brown, Nikki Buffa, Lisa Collins, Ellen Ferguson, Tonya Garnett, Greg Moga, Brian O'Donnell, Jody Juneby Potts-Joseph, Pat Pourchot, Amy Roberts, Leonard Steinberg. For questions about our newsletter, please email us at Info@AlaskaWild.org or call us at 202-544-5205.

Cover photo: A moose takes a drink on a sunny Alaskan morning.

What Are D1 Lands? Protecting 28 Million Acres of Alaska's Heritage

Maddie Halloran, Alaska State Director

In 1971, President Richard Nixon enacted the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act, marking the largest land claims settlement in United States history. This legislation included a provision, section 17(d)(1), which empowered the Interior Secretary to designate lands throughout Alaska for protection – safeguarding subsistence ways of life, cultural ties to the land and wildlife preservation. These areas are colloquially known as “D1 lands.”

For over five decades, approximately 57 million acres stood shielded from the encroachment by fossil fuel and mining industries, preserving the delicate balance of crucial ecosystems and supporting Indigenous communities in Alaska. However, in 2020 Donald Trump's former Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt began to dismantle these safeguards.

From October 2018 to June 2019, Bernhardt opened more than 1.3 million acres of this land to mining, with the only public notice coming through a Federal Register announcement. Bernhardt then set his sights on opening an additional 28 million acres to mineral entry, including potential oil and gas exploration, through five Public Land Orders.



Brown bear fishing abundant salmon

John Schoen

Fortunately, they were deemed legally flawed under the Biden administration, but still need to be formally addressed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

The affected land encompasses critical migration corridors, covering nearly 13 percent of Alaska and representing some of the last remaining intact ecosystems in the nation. Beyond its ecological significance, these lands hold immense cultural, subsistence and historical value for Alaska Native peoples.

To address the potential risk of removing protections across D1 lands, the current administration committed to a more inclusive public process. On December 15, 2023, the BLM initiated a 60-day comment period, providing a unique opportunity for concerned citizens to voice their support of D1 lands protections.

Though the comment period has closed, we will continue to advocate for the “no action” alternative under consideration, ensuring the preservation of 28 million acres of Alaska's rich heritage. Thanks to thousands of you who spoke up to safeguard Alaska's wild landscapes, protect Indigenous ways of life, and maintain the ecological balance that has sustained these lands for millennia.



This past December, thousands of League supporters responded to requests via email and in social media posts like this Valentine's Day Graphic to raise their voices in favor of D1 land protections. Alaska Wilderness League

Read more at AlaskaWild.org/D1.*

Safeguarding Our Western Arctic: A Quick Journey Through Time

Hilary Stamper, Director of Member Engagement

America's Western Arctic – and in particular the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve) – is a landscape that catapulted to the forefront of public attention as the Willow project gained notoriety last year. And yet, the Reserve is more than just Willow; it's a region that Alaska Wilderness League has worked to protect for decades, and we've recently seen positive steps toward stronger protections in the first term of the Biden administration. As those efforts continue, we wanted to share an abridged recent history of attempts to both exploit and protect the Reserve.

The largest single unit of public lands in the nation, the Reserve spans nearly 23 million acres across Alaska's western North Slope. Its ecological importance is immense, hosting critical habitat for diverse wildlife, including migratory birds, brown bears, caribou, polar bears, walrus and endangered beluga whales. The region is not just a haven for wildlife; it has sustained the subsistence lifestyle of Alaska Native communities for thousands of years.



In the far west of Arctic Alaska lies the Kasegaluk Lagoon Special Area, one of the largest, undiminished coastal lagoon systems in the world, spanning approximately 125 miles of the Chukchi Sea coast. This sheltered, shallow lagoon provides important habitat for calving and molting beluga whales. © Florian Schulz/FlorianSchulz.org

The landscape's conservation journey began in 1977, when Congress sought to balance oil exploration with "the protection of environmental, fish and wildlife, and historical or scenic values" in the Reserve. This led to three officially designated "Special Areas" that should receive "maximum protection:" Teshekpuk Lake, Colville River and Utukok River Uplands. Yet, throughout the decades, the "maximum protection" offered these areas has not been clearly defined and oil and gas leases have still been offered in designated Special Areas.



The newest of the Reserve's Special Areas, Peard Bay includes high densities of ice seals and polar bears, and the highest density of spectacled eider nesting areas in Alaska. Male eiders display black feathers surrounding white eye patches, resembling a pair of spectacles!

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

In 2013, Alaska Wilderness League, partners and allies celebrated a huge milestone. The Department of the Interior (DOI) under President Obama adopted a management plan that put in place sensible conservation protections for 11 million acres of the Reserve. DOI spent years working with the tribal community, local governments, the state of Alaska, the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group and the public to develop the plan.



The cliffs along the river in the Colville River Special Area provide critical nesting sites and adjacent hunting areas for gyrfalcons (pictured), peregrine falcons, golden eagles and rough-legged hawks. The largest of the falcon species, the gyrfalcon preys mostly on large birds and nests in other birds' nests, usually on a cliff ledge.

© Hugh Rose/HughRosePhotography.com

With the clear majority of public comments (including those from League advocates like you) supporting strong protections for key areas and resources, DOI increased the number of and "maximum protections" for designated Special Areas for the exceptional wildlife and wilderness values of Teshekpuk Lake, Colville River, Utukok River Uplands, Kasegaluk Lagoon and Peard Bay.

In 2018, the Trump administration initiated a process to undo the well-supported and hard-earned Obama-era protections. The League aggressively fought this effort and in January of 2022, the Biden administration stopped this review and reinstated previous Reserve protections. Now in 2024, the administration is considering a new regulation to add additional protections, potentially covering up to 13 million acres. We hope this new process will help define and strengthen "maximum protection" for the region,

including an outright prohibition of future oil and gas leases for over 10 million acres. It could also reinforce environmental and subsistence protections and promote co-stewardship with Tribes.

With thousands of comments from concerned members like you urging the strongest possible protections in the ongoing conservation regulation process,

we will continue to fight for durable safeguards that will preserve the region's unique characteristics, ensuring the well-being of millions of migratory birds, raptors, wolves, whales and countless other inhabitants.

Read more in our blog at AlaskaWild.org/reservehistory and quiz yourself on wildlife in Teshekpuk Lake here: AlaskaWild.org/tlakequiz. *



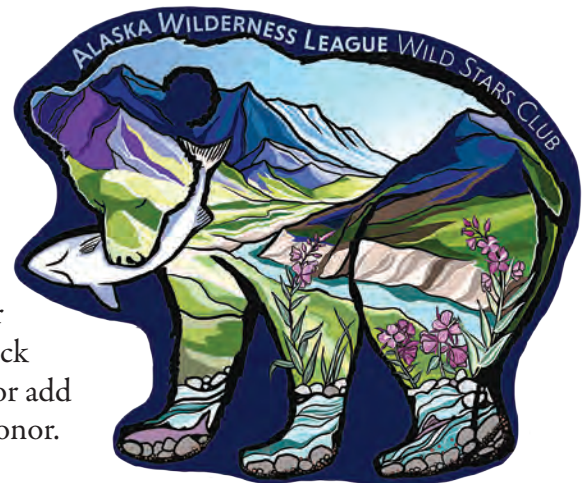
The Utukok River Uplands Special Area contains not just calving grounds and insect relief for the Western Arctic caribou herd, but the highest concentration of grizzly bears in the Arctic, as well as large populations of moose, wolves and wolverines. © Patrick Endres/PatrickEndres.com

Timeline: A Conservation History of the Reserve

- 1923:** President Harding set aside the area as "Naval Petroleum Reserve No. 4" for an emergency oil supply for the U.S. Navy.
- 1976:** Renamed the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, land management was transferred to the Bureau of Land Management
- 1977:** Teshekpuk Lake, Colville River and Utukok River Uplands designated as the first three Special Areas
- 1998:** Northeast Area IAP finalized, authorizing drilling in 87% of the Reserve
- 1999:** First oil and gas lease sale held for the Reserve
- 2004:** Secretary of the Interior designates a fourth Special Area, Kasegaluk Lagoon
- 2006:** A lawsuit successfully challenges attempted leasing in Teshekpuk Lake Special Area, resulting in conservation victory
- 2013:** New IAP released, expanding Special Area protections to approximately 11 million acres including adding a fifth Special Area
- 2015:** Greater Moose's Tooth #1 drilling project approved, impacting a critical subsistence area
- 2018:** Trump administration initiates an environmental review to expand oil leasing in the Reserve
- 2022:** Biden administration reverses leasing expansion plans and includes stipulations to protect threatened and endangered species
- 2023:** ConocoPhillips' Willow drilling project is approved
- 2023:** Biden administration proposes a new regulation to add additional protections, potentially covering up to 13 million acres.

Become a Monthly Donor and Add Bear Flair to Your Repair

Become a monthly donor and we'll send you a FREE custom Alaska-designed art patch that can be applied to your clothing or outdoor gear as a stylish repair or just "bear flair." No sewing, no ironing. You can stick these gorgeous fabric bear patches on your gear to help repair damage or add flair that recognizes your valuable role as a Wild Stars Club monthly donor. Learn more at AlaskaWild.org/bearflair. *



Musings From an Arctic Traveler

Chris Konish, Senior Director of Development

Following a return visit to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge last year – filled with caribou, brown bear and Dall sheep sightings – Alaska Wilderness League member Thea Levkovitz found it difficult to encapsulate the experience in words. Fortunately, she found inspiration in her memories of the excursion, providing us with an artful depiction – through her eyes *and heart* – of her time in the Arctic. An excerpt is below; find the full version at AlaskaWild.org/Liminal.

There is no Liminal Space in the Arctic Summer
Thea Levkovitz, 2023

There is no liminal space in the Arctic Summer.

All is illuminated, all the time

The sun circles low on the horizon day and night from spring to fall.

I doze deep in a sleeping bag – a dark cocoon of my own making where night is illusory.

From morning dream-time, I am pulled from half-slumber by this waking vision – 10,000 caribou – mothers and newly born calves, screeching their bonding to each other in unending cacophony.

There is no rest. Within minutes of birth, calves are wobbling on puppet legs. To move with the herd is paramount, to escape predators, some 4-legged and millions more winged,



Thea Levkovitz

with blood thirst.

In the bright night of sleep, I gaze into the low-slung sun where caribou silhouette against the edge of the earth.

Enveloped within a murmur of ungulates – continually alert, moving, shifting, reforming.

*There is no stillness in the Arctic summer.**

The Down-Low on D.C.: Updates From Our Nation's Capital

Alex Cohen, Government Affairs Director

This winter, in addition to elevating administrative actions and public processes that could enhance protections for the

Tongass National Forest, the Arctic and 28 million acres of “D1 lands” (see page 3) across Alaska, we faced a major fight against H.R. 6285, the “Alaska’s Right to Produce Act” from Representative Pete Stauber (R-MN). The bill aims to undo every protective measure we’ve secured for Alaska in the last three years. Walking the halls of Congress, our legislative team has been hard at work educating new staff and engaging long-term allies so they are ready to vote to protect Alaska’s bountiful resources, wildlife and people.

H.R. 6285’s heels came this year’s equally bad appropriations bills. Thousands of you urged your representatives to oppose these bills, which attack the Western Arctic Special Area regulations, attempt to bring back Arctic Refuge drilling leases, and mandate two Arctic Ocean oil and gas lease sales a year. Combined with our efforts on the Hill, voices like yours have slowed these attacks and helped turn the tide on dangerous developments like the proposed Ambler Road and associated open pit mines at the foot of the Brooks Range.

The bottom line: This Arctic extraction bill won’t be the first or the last all-out assault on Alaska’s wild lands and waters. In fact, on

With steady effort we hope to see more victories in the months ahead.*

“Instead of considering a bill that puts oil company interests over the planet & the people, I wish we could discuss how to save our planet while prioritizing their lives of indigenous communities, workers & ordinary Alaskans.”

Thanks RM @RepAOC for opposing this harmful bill 🙌



RM OCASIO-CORTEZ (NY-14)
HNRIC ENERGY & MINERAL RESOURCES SUBCOMMITTEE

Several of our champions in Congress, including Representative Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (D-NY-14) pictured, testified against H.R. 6285 that threatens so many of Alaska’s iconic landscapes. Alaska Wilderness League

Welcoming New Board Members in 2024

Chris Konish, Senior Director of Development

Alaska Wilderness League is thrilled to announce a string of new additions to its Board of Directors, each from varied backgrounds, though all sharing a passion for Alaska's wildest places. Read more about their connection to the League and our mission below. To learn about our full board of directors, visit AlaskaWild.org/who-we-are/board-of-directors.



Nikki Buffa resides in southern California where she is a partner at Latham & Watkins. Ms. Buffa brings two decades of experience into this role, previously working on energy and environmental policy including eight years in the Obama administration where she served as Deputy Chief of Staff at the Department of the Interior, Deputy Director of Cabinet Affairs at the White House and Associate Director for the Council on Environmental Quality at the White House.

Tonya Garnett holds a B.A. in Alaska Native Studies and a B.A. in Sociology from the University of Alaska Fairbanks. She is Neets'aii Gwich'in, originally from Vashraii



K'oo (Arctic Village, AK). Tonya has served as Communications Director for Fairbanks Native Association (FNA) and worked previously with Tanana Chiefs Conference Self Governance and Tribal Development, Arctic Village Council, Doyon Foundation, Big Brothers Big Sisters Rural Expansion Program, and with Three Star Enterprises, LLC on the Administration for Native Americans Alaska Region T/TA contract. Tonya has served as a representative and as a board member on Gwich'in Council International, Yukon Flats School Board, and the Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government.



Lisa Collins, Ed. D is an author, assistant professor and racial healing leader. An

environmental advocate, Lisa explores the outdoors and supports communities to expand outdoor experiences for those unfamiliar with the healing nature of the outdoors. She is an assistant guide for the nonprofit Love Is King, which creates leadership opportunities for Black, Indigenous, People of Color (BIPOC) leaders to explore outdoor environments. Lisa is an angler and flyfisher with experience in guided backcountry exploration.



Leonard Steinberg, a resident of Anchorage, Alaska, is a retired attorney and corporate executive. Leonard first visited Alaska in 1974 and from 1977-1980 he was employed by the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council advocating for wilderness protection for the Tongass National Forest. During these years, Leonard spent his holidays sea kayaking remote areas in Southeast Alaska. Leonard has also visited the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the Western Arctic, and other remote parts of the state. In retirement, Leonard continues to explore Alaska, the Lower 48, and the rest of the world. *

Planning Resources for a Wild Alaska Legacy



Success for the Next Generation Starts Today

At Alaska Wilderness League, a good plan is often the key to helping us reach our goals to ensure that Alaska's wild landscapes endure to support vibrant communities and abundant wildlife for generations to come. A little *personal* planning can go a long way too, to help you achieve your goals while also providing long-lasting support for wild Alaska in the years ahead.

Learn more about how to establish your legacy for Alaska's wildest places at AlaskaWildLegacy.org.



© Kim Heacox

Investing in the Future of Alaska's Wildest Places

By supporting Alaska Wilderness League, you can help ensure that Alaska's cherished and iconic natural treasures are protected for future generations. We will put your money toward building power, creating partnerships and securing new laws and administrative actions that safeguard Alaska.

Every dollar donated to Alaska Wilderness League helps fund critical legal, legislative and public education efforts to protect America's Arctic and other wild landscapes throughout Alaska. Reach us at 202-544-5205 or membership@alaskawild.org if you have any questions.

For more information on other ways to give, scan the QR code with your smartphone.



Ways to Support Alaska Wilderness League



Monthly Giving: Wild Stars Club

To join the Wild Stars Club with your monthly donation to provide sustaining resources for our work, visit AlaskaWild.org/WSC.



Gift of Membership

Make the perfect gift for any occasion — a membership to Alaska Wilderness League — at AlaskaWild.org/Gift.



Gifts of Stock

Alaska Wilderness League can easily accept gifts of stock. Notify our team or learn more at AlaskaWild.org/Stock.



Donor-Advised Fund

Learn about this centralized vehicle for charitable giving or recommend a grant directly to Alaska Wilderness League at AlaskaWild.org/DAF.



Corporate Matching Gifts

You might be able to double or even triple your support for protecting wild places in Alaska simply by asking if your employer sponsors a matching gift program. Learn more at AlaskaWild.org/Match.



Wild Giving Society

Join this community of dedicated advocates whose leadership gifts of \$1,000 or more help Alaska Wilderness League go above and beyond for Alaska's public lands: AlaskaWild.org/WGS.



Planned Giving

A little planning now can help you achieve your charitable giving goals. Introduce yourself and learn how easy it is to plan a legacy gift. To get your free planning resources visit AlaskaWildLegacy.org.