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Looking Back, but With an Eye on the Future

Kristen Miller, Executive Director

As we ease back into the cozy, hibernation-like rhythm of shorter days and longer nights, it's a perfect time to curl up with a hot beverage and meditate on the conservation and climate achievements we collectively secured for Alaska this year. While not all news was good, the League was heartened to see real progress for Alaska's public lands, from across America's Arctic all the way down to the Tongass National Forest.

In 2023, the fight to stop ConocoPhillips' Willow project in the Western Arctic rose to the forefront of American media, filling social feeds and mobilizing millions of advocates across the country. By early March, more than five million Americans had formally called on the Biden administration to #StopWillow, the hashtag receiving more than 650 million views across social media platforms. To our disappointment, the administration ultimately concluded that their hands were tied regarding ConocoPhillips' permits, and allowed the Willow project to move forward. However, the power and influence of the climate movement was fortified, and activists have continued to apply pressure and elevate

Alaska and climate policy decisions all year long.

On the heels of this decision, we saw a win on the other side of America's Arctic for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. After months of pressure and campaigning by the League and partners, Chubb insurance company officially signed a new policy prohibiting the underwriting of oil and gas extraction projects in the Refuge. They are 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.

In early summer, thanks to Representative Ruben Gallego (D-AZ), Senator Maria Cantwell (D-WA) and 15 other lawmakers, we saw the reintroduction of the Roadless Area Conservation Act (RACA). This legislation would codify the Roadless Rule on 58.5 million acres of national forest land nationwide — including in Alaska's Tongass National Forest — a landscape in urgent need of protection.

And more recently, we wrapped the "hottest summer on record" (thanks to climate change) with sweeping actions from the Biden

administration to protect diverse landscapes across America's Arctic. These decisions recognized the importance of Alaska's public lands and waters for communities, biodiversity and our global climate. Most importantly, President Biden canceled all remaining oil and gas leases on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge, as the Department of the Interior proposed regulations that would provide additional protections for 13 million acres of "Special Areas" in the Western Arctic. Together, these actions brought protections for America's Arctic back to the forefront of the American mind.

None of this work would have been possible without your support and commitment to our mission. We have a big year before us in 2024 as we head once again into a primary election year that poses uncertainty for Alaska's wild lands and waters and we'll need all hands on deck. Thank you, sincerely, for being a part of our family and providing support so that we can lock in victory after victory, year over year. We'll need all that and more for the year ahead and I feel so grateful and inspired to have you at our side.*

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: White-fronted geese fly over Teshekpuk Lake in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. © Kiliiii Yuyan/Kiliiii.com

How Amazing Arctic Animals Survive an Alaskan Winter

Anja Semanco, Communications Manager

In honor of the winter season and people like you who protect their homes, we'd like to introduce a few of the Arctic's most incredible animals. Each endures extreme, dynamic Alaskan landscapes in its own extraordinary way.

The Arctic Ground Squirrel and Its Supercool Slumber

Arctic ground squirrels have perfected the art of hibernation. These tiny daredevils dive more than a meter beneath the tundra, dropping their body temperature to -2.9 degrees Celsius — a feat that baffles scientists. Their secret? It might be that periodic shivering sessions keep their brains active and also hold the key to understanding neurodegenerative diseases.

Arctic Woolly Bear Caterpillar: Life in Stop-Motion

In the blink of an Alaskan summer, woolly bear caterpillars feast on anything green before transforming into dormant, frozen pupae. These patient souls brave temperatures as low as -70 degrees Celsius, producing their version of antifreeze to stay alive. As soon as temperatures begin to drop, they return to a dormant, frozen state for nearly the entire year. It can take up to 14 years to get from egg to the final moth — the longest lifecycle of any moth.



An Arctic fox trots in wintry snow in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
© Steven Kazlowski/LeftEyePro.com

The Arctic Fox and Its Fantastic Phonics

The Arctic fox is a pint-sized cousin of the red fox, designed for survival in Alaska's frigid embrace. With its cozy winter coat and acute hearing, it identifies prey from far off and once close to its location, leaps into the air and burrows through snow for the kill. Their winter



A group of Muskoxen huddle together in the snowy Arctic.
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

wardrobe, ranging from white to nearly blue, provides the perfect camouflage, making them elusive phantoms in the snow.

Musk Ox: Furry Fashionistas from the Ice Age Musk oxen, survivors from the Pleistocene Ice Age, have staged a triumphant return in Alaska. Sporting a double-layered coat, they navigate blizzards and sunless stretches with ease. Their qiviut, a luxurious undercoat, is prized for its warmth and softness. With additional thermal regulation techniques to conserve their core temperature, more than 5,000 of these furry fashionistas flourish in Alaska.

The Wonderful World of Arctic Ice Worms You might think a glacier would be a fairly lifeless place, but the Arctic ice worm has made them their perfect home. Related to earthworms, it's estimated that nearly five billion ice worms can live in a single glacier. But, unlike their temperate cousins, ice worms perish if exposed to even a few degrees above or below freezing.

Stoats: Skilled Showmen and Savvy

Stalkers Stoats, also known as ermines, belong to the weasel family and are closely related to mink, martens and wolverines, as well as both river and sea otters. They are quick and feisty creatures who must eat at least 40 percent of their body weight every single day. The stoat is always on the hunt.

*Learn more about all these Arctic animals, and watch videos of each, by visiting our blog here: AlaskaWild.org/ArcticAnimals.**

Member Spotlight: Don Janes

Lois Norrgard, National Field Organizer and JEDI Manager

In the spirit of giving this holiday season, all of us at Alaska Wilderness League would like to share a hearty note of gratitude to you and so many others in your community who make our work possible. We also want to highlight and give thanks to one longstanding member, Don Janes, who has generously shared his story of how he got involved in protecting Alaska's wildest places many years ago. If this inspires you to share your story too, don't hesitate to reach our membership team at Membership@AlaskaWild.org.



Multiple trips to Alaska inspired longtime member Don Janes to get involved in protecting its wild places. Alaska Wilderness League

From Don:

I have been to Alaska close to ten times — most often for fishing, but also twice for sightseeing, and once for a cruise.

The scenery is impressive, and so is the fishing. In the Tongass in particular, Alaska does an excellent job of fishery management, such that even relatively unskilled fishermen like me can catch salmon and halibut.

However, twice while flying into a fishing lodge, we

saw large areas of clearcut forest in the coastal rain forest. And when we were on a cruise ship in beautiful Glacier Bay, we saw another cruise ship putting out a lot of black smoke.

*So Alaska has things that need change, and that is what you in Alaska Wilderness League do best, and why I support your work.**



Give Wildly This Holiday Season

Make sure to get your tax-deductible donation to Alaska Wilderness League before December 31 to take advantage of a rare matching gift opportunity. Learn more at AlaskaWild.org/NSNMatch.

Ways To Support Alaska Wilderness League

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 .
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 .
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 .
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. Visit AlaskaWildLegacy.org to get your free planning resources today.