

## MEMO

**TO:** Seattle Times Editorial Board

**FROM:** Tim Woody, Alaska Communications Manager, The Wilderness Society,  
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**RE:** The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

**DATE:** October 26, 2017

Taking another step toward President Trump's goal of selling off one of our last pristine, untouched places, both houses of Congress recently approved budget resolutions that pave the way for oil drilling in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The stakes for this wild landscape have never been higher, and we want to urge you to editorialize as soon as possible that **this assault on America's public lands is unacceptable, and Congress must remove Arctic Refuge drilling from federal budget legislation.**

This is a blatant attempt to hijack the budget reconciliation process and use its expedited procedures to undermine more than 30 years of protection for the iconic Arctic Refuge, where drilling has been repeatedly rejected by Congress and the American people.

Showing how far he is willing to go to give special treatment to the oil and gas industry, President Trump in May released [a proposed budget](#) that explicitly calls for oil drilling in the iconic [Arctic National Wildlife Refuge](#), presenting the biggest threat to the refuge in many years. This idea is simply a reward for oil companies and anti-conservationists who view America's public lands as a fast track to private profiteering for a handful of special interests.

Following up on Trump's budget proposal, Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke on May 31 [signed a secretarial order](#) requiring the United States Geological Survey to update its estimates of technically recoverable oil and gas in the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge.

For more than 30 years Congress and the American people have rejected the oil industry backed effort to drill in the sacred lands of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and this provision has no place in the budget today.

At more than 19 million acres, the Arctic Refuge is America's largest wildlife refuge and provides habitat and birthing grounds for native caribou, polar bear and migrating birds from across the globe, and a diverse range of wilderness lands. Its coastal plain—

stretching north from the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean—provides vital denning habitat for endangered polar bears and is the calving ground of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which contains nearly 200,000 animals.

Oil and gas drilling would have devastating impacts on this pristine and fragile ecosystem, caused by the massive infrastructure needed to extract and transport oil. Drilling the Arctic is risky, would fragment vital habitat and chronic spills of oil and other toxic substances onto the fragile tundra would forever scar this now pristine landscape and disrupt its wildlife.

**We urge you to report on the dangers of oil exploration in the Arctic Refuge, and the importance of protecting it as wilderness for future generations of Americans.**

Pro-drilling members of the Senate have hijacked the federal budget process with the goal of needing a mere 51 votes to sell off the fragile coastal plain of the refuge to the highest bidder. It is imperative that Congress gets a clear message: The majority of Americans want the Arctic Refuge to remain protected. That is why your editorial is so timely and important.

Drilling in the Arctic Refuge is not a budget issue. It has been estimated that the revenue generated by selling off our nation's most iconic wild place would offset less than 1 percent of our increased deficits—but even **those estimates are highly inflated.**

Estimated revenues from drilling in the refuge would require companies to bid an average of \$2,400 for every single acre of the 1.5 million-acre coastal plain. That's more than 10 times the average lease sale bid on Alaska's North Slope (about \$168/acre).

It is important to note that if lease sales occurred and the projected revenue targets were not met, oil drilling in the Arctic Refuge would actually **add to the deficit.**

The Arctic Refuge is a national treasure, and we have a moral obligation to protect it for our children and grandchildren. It is an amazing, wild and diverse landscape stretching from south of the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean.

The Arctic Refuge was set aside for protection decades ago because of the critical ecological value it holds. **It has always been off limits to oil and gas development** and should remain that way permanently. Of the 19 million acres already set aside as the refuge, seven million are designated as wilderness, the highest degree of protection available in the U.S.

This vast, wild place encompasses five distinct ecological regions, including the lagoons, beaches and salt marshes of coastal marine areas; broad expanses of low-lying plants on the coastal plain; windswept alpine tundra in the Brooks Range; interior highlands where arctic plants transition to boreal forest; and the tall spruce, birch, and aspen of

the northern boreal forest. This varied habitat allows 42 fish species, 37 land mammals, eight marine mammals, and more than 200 migratory and resident bird species to thrive—including the most diverse and stunning populations of wildlife in the Arctic.

Researchers visit the refuge to study wildlife behavior, climate change and how plants and animals cope with a warming environment. Alaska Natives engage in subsistence activities such as hunting and fishing, which also bring sportsmen to the refuge. And the rivers, mountains and tundra attract visitors from around the world for recreational pursuits, like float trips, photography, hiking and viewing wildlife.

**After a lengthy scientific review that incorporated much public input, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service [recommended in 2015](#) that most of the non-designated wilderness lands in the Arctic Refuge be designated wilderness. The agency received nearly a million public comments in support of this action, including from scientists, biologists and researchers. The Arctic Refuge is simply [too wild to drill](#).**

This could be our last opportunity to save a vast, intact wilderness tract that is home to iconic species like [polar bears](#), wolves and caribou. Generations of Americans have opposed drilling in the Arctic Refuge, and now we must protect it for generations to come.