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Cc: [Schwartz, Melissa A](#)
Subject: Conservation Community CEO Letter Re: America's Arctic
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Attachments: [07_11_23 America's Arctic CEO Letter.pdf](#)

Good Morning –

Please find attached a letter to President Biden and Secretary Haaland, signed by 15 CEOs expressing strong support for bold conservation action in America’s Arctic. In advance of two imminent public processes aimed at more protections for both the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, we urge this administration to prioritize strong action to protect these ecosystems. This region hosts some of our nation’s last remaining opportunities to protect ecosystems at a landscape level, on a scale that is unparalleled in our nation. We look forward to working with you on these priorities, which will significantly contribute to our nation’s America the Beautiful goals and can leverage the critical role that the Arctic, along with all of our public lands, must play in addressing the climate crisis.

We look forward to opportunities to discuss these priorities in more detail in the upcoming weeks.

Please let me know if you have any questions. Thank you for all that you do!

Best,
Kristen

**ALASKA
WILDERNESS
LEAGUE
AND AFFILIATE
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July 11, 2023

Joseph R. Biden
President of the United States
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, DC 20500

Deb Haaland
Secretary
US Department of the Interior
1849 C Street NW
Washington, DC 20240

Dear President Biden and Secretary Haaland,

America's Arctic affords your Administration the unprecedented opportunity to make continued substantial progress on your climate and conservation goals and commitment to Indigenous communities. This vast and intact region is home to Indigenous people who have a spiritual and life-giving connection to millions of acres of culturally and biologically rich land, largely untouched by industrial development. Both the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge) and the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve) provide some of our nation's last remaining opportunities to protect ecosystems at a landscape level, on a scale that is unparalleled in our nation.

Taken together, the recommendations below create a pathway for your Administration to seize this opportunity for progress on climate, conservation, and biodiversity on behalf of the Indigenous communities who call it home and on behalf of a nation that continues to demand progress on these shared goals in a region where your Administration's most recent policy decisions drew national attention. The recommendations would ensure durable protections for the most ecologically and culturally important sites in the Arctic and would showcase a new approach for addressing fossil fuel extraction on federal public lands.

ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE:

We greatly appreciate your swift action to protect the Refuge upon taking office and to conduct a robust review of the legal problems with the Trump-era Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program. However, much work remains to be accomplished before a potential lease sale at the end of 2024.

We urge cancellation of the seven remaining leases from the first Refuge lease sale. In the past year, all entities that bid, except the state of Alaska's development corporation – the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority – have relinquished their leases on the Coastal Plain. The Department of the Interior has already identified fundamental legal errors with the leases, and those leases should be canceled.

Equally important is completing the current process to address the legally flawed Leasing Program and ensure compliance with the National Environmental Policy Act and numerous other laws. The revised leasing program must provide the highest level of protection for the biodiversity and cultural resources of the Coastal Plain, include a robust assessment of the climate impacts of leasing and its compatibility with U.S. climate goals, and be completed in time to allow your Administration to hold a lease sale under maximally protective terms.

Widespread and strong public support exists for protecting the Arctic Refuge and the crucial resources it provides to the people whose lives it sustains. Canceling the remaining leases and finalizing a highly protective program will also ensure space to co-create long-term, Indigenous-led conservation for the Coastal Plain.

NATIONAL PETROLEUM RESERVE-ALASKA:

We appreciate your decisive action to reinstate protections that the Trump Administration rolled back for the Reserve, and we applaud plans to strengthen those protections for Special Areas through the impending Reserve conservation rulemaking. Your Administration should expand Special Areas and adopt new ones to build even greater protections for the entire Western Arctic.

That still leaves the urgent problem of the already identified 4.6 billion barrels of oil poised to be extracted from the Reserve's already leased lands that will jeopardize our nation's climate commitments for decades to come.

Protections must cover both unleased and leased lands. If the proposed regulations address only unleased areas, they will not prevent the sprawl of industrialization already unlocked by the Willow Project. Consider the massive Peregrine oil project in the region, which as of today could move forward at any time and could be nearly twice the size of Willow. Other prospects stretch across the Reserve, including in sensitive habitats within Special Areas. They represent a significant threat to this region and its people, and will only exacerbate the climate crisis. Your Administration can take bold action to preserve the rich biodiversity of this region, to honor our global climate commitments, and to safeguard subsistence resources for Alaska Native communities who have relied on these lands, waters, and wildlife to support their way of life for millennia.

We therefore urge you to swiftly develop an approach to oil and gas permitting that aligns with climate imperatives. As a first step, we recommend that your Administration assess the compatibility of the Reserve's oil and gas program with U.S. climate commitments. While the assessment of Arctic oil extraction and impacts takes place, your Administration should not lock in approval of any further Arctic exploration or development projects. Embracing this opportunity is vital for the future of America's Arctic.

These actions, along with consideration of additional long-term protective actions for both the Refuge and Reserve, would align with the exceptional climate achievements that your Administration has accomplished. A sobering energy forecast from the U.S. Energy Information Administration (EIA) recently warned that our domestic oil and gas production would increase steadily in the coming decades, despite the Inflation Reduction Act (IRA). According to a “high oil and gas supply” scenario included with EIA’s forecast, half of the CO2 reductions from the IRA could be wiped out within a decade if U.S. oil and gas supplies are higher than expected, which means that all of the IRA’s climate benefits could be erased. It is no secret that high-cost Arctic oil projects are extremely complex, taking 10+ years from the start of exploration to reach production. On top of providing no immediate relief to high gas prices for Americans today, this also means that Arctic oil production will ramp up at a time when it will be even more critical to abandon our reliance on fossil fuels.

Indigenous peoples’ livelihoods, well-being, subsistence rights, and food sovereignty depend on a healthy and interconnected panarctic closely tied to the sea. This Administration can continue to uphold commitments to Tribal Nations by mitigating Arctic oil and gas developments and negative impacts from increased shipping in the Arctic as sea ice declines. Coastal communities continue to be at risk of eroding into the ocean, and as a nation, we are reminded that the climate crisis is not biased to one region but is interconnected across the globe. We look forward to working together in the Arctic to support an Indigenous-led conservation model that would promote sustainable land management by recognizing traditional knowledge and stewardship, fostering collaboration between stakeholders, and building capacity within Indigenous communities to participate in decision-making processes.

We encourage you to take hold of the tremendous opportunity in America’s Arctic to protect tens of millions of acres of unparalleled biological and cultural resources, which will significantly contribute to your America the Beautiful goals and leverage the critical role that the Arctic, along with all of our public lands, must play in addressing the climate crisis. Protecting America’s Arctic will demonstrate that the United States lives up to its commitment, as a participant in the international Arctic Council, to mitigate climate disruption and help safeguard the life, health, and wellbeing of Arctic Indigenous communities.

Thank you for your consideration, and we look forward to discussing these opportunities in the weeks to come.

Sincerely,

Elisabeth Balster Dabney

Executive Director, Northern Alaska Environmental Center

Manish Bapna

President and CEO, Natural Resources Defense Council

Helen Cherullo

Executive Director, Braided River

Victoria Clark

Executive Director, Trustees for Alaska

Abigail Dillen

President, Earthjustice

Ryan Gellert

CEO, Patagonia

Sara Husby

Executive Director, Great Old Broads for Wilderness

Ben Jealous

Executive Director, Sierra Club

Janet MacGillivray

Executive Director, Seeding Sovereignty

Kristen Miller

Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League

Gene Karpinski

President, League of Conservation Voters

Erich Pica

President, Friends of the Earth U.S.

Marilyn Sigman

President, Board of Directors, Friends of Alaska Wildlife Refuges

Jamie Williams

President, The Wilderness Society

Wendy Wendlandt

President, Environment America

CC:

John Podesta, Senior Advisor to the President for Clean Energy Innovation and Implementation

Ali Zaidi, Assistant to the President and National Climate Advisor

Matt Lee-Ashley, Chief of Staff, Council on Environmental Quality

Tommy Beaudreau, Deputy Secretary of the Interior

Laura Daniel-Davis, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Land and Minerals Management

Tracy Stone-Manning, Director, Bureau of Land Management

Rachel Taylor, Chief of Staff, Department of the Interior

Raine Thele, Senior Advisor for Alaska Affairs and Strategic Priorities, Department of the Interior

Shannon Estenoz, Assistant Secretary for Fish and Wildlife and Parks

Martha Williams, Director, United States Fish and Wildlife Service

Kate Kelly, Deputy Chief of Staff, Policy, Department of the Interior