



THE WILDLIFE SOCIETY

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Final Position Statement

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

The Arctic National Wildlife Range was established in 1960 to preserve unique wildlife, wilderness, and recreational values. In the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980 (ANILCA), Congress enlarged the Range to 19.6 million acres, renamed it the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and designated 8 million acres of mountains, foothills, and coastal plain as Wilderness. ANILCA established the following purposes for the Arctic Refuge:

1. To conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, the Porcupine Caribou Herd, polar bears, grizzly bears, muskoxen, Dall sheep, wolves, wolverines, snow geese, peregrine falcons and other migratory birds, Dolly Varden, trout, grayling, whitefish, and burbot.
2. To fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats.
3. To provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs i and ii, the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents.
4. To ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph i, water quality and necessary water quantity within the Refuge.

Section 1002 of ANILCA required the Secretary of the Interior to assess the petroleum and wildlife values of a 1.5-million-acre portion of the Arctic Refuge coastal plain often referred to as the 1002 Area. Section 1003 of ANILCA reserved the decision of whether to allow oil and gas leasing and production or development leading to production within that area to Congress. The necessary assessments of the 1002 Area are complete and indicate it may contain substantial amounts of oil and gas, and that it is of vital importance to many wildlife species.

At the request of Congress, the National Research Council (NRC) of the National Academy of Sciences evaluated the cumulative environmental effects of oil and gas activities on Alaska's North Slope and published a report in 2003. The NRC stated that "The effects of North Slope industrial development on the physical and biotic environments and on the human societies that live there have accumulated, despite considerable efforts by the petroleum industry and regulatory agencies to minimize them...Continued expansion is certain to exacerbate some existing effects and to generate new ones..."

Based on limited knowledge and understanding of the cumulative effects of oil and gas exploration and development on Alaska's North Slope, and the difficulty of accurately predicting

the timing or extent of potential development scenarios, it is challenging to quantitatively predict the long-term, cumulative effects on the wildlife and ecosystem processes of the Arctic Refuge's 1002 Area. Thus, it is unlikely that a mitigation plan could be developed with any degree of certainty. We believe it is prudent to more fully understand these effects before risking development of other, more sensitive areas. The NRC report identified a list of gaps in current knowledge regarding effects of oil development on wildlife.

Studies of wildlife and vegetation on the 1002 Area of the Arctic Refuge during past decades have provided considerable information on structure and function of an arctic tundra ecosystem that has been relatively undisturbed by human activities. Few arctic areas have baseline data as extensive as the 1002 Area. There is considerable scientific and cultural value in maintaining undisturbed arctic regions where effects of long-term global changes can be identified and distinguished from localized human influence.

The Wildlife Society believes that the 1002 Area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is an area critical to the abundance and diversity of wildlife in the entire Refuge, as well as some populations of both national and international importance. Furthermore, this area possesses significant cultural, aesthetic, recreational, and scientific values in its present state. Industrial activities that are expected to occur as a result of petroleum exploration and development are likely to have significant negative effects on these values, including introduction of invasive species and habitat fragmentation. Adverse effects on some wildlife species of petroleum development at existing oil fields on the North Slope have not been avoided, and the unique aspects of wildlife resources and the environment of the 1002 Area are such that mitigation of the impacts of oil development may not be possible. Additionally, the long-term, cumulative effects on wildlife resources are unknown.

The policy of The Wildlife Society with regard to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is to:

1. Urge the preparation of a comprehensive plan for development on the North Slope, which is necessary for an adequate assessment of potential environmental effects and for comparing costs vs. benefits of development.
2. Support continued research on the 1002 Area in the absence of oil and gas production, which may be especially important as a scientific benchmark because rates of warming in the Alaskan arctic are generally higher than in other regions.
3. Encourage maintaining part of Alaska's Arctic Coastal Plain in an undeveloped state for long-term studies of the effects of climate change in the Arctic on wildlife resources and ecosystem processes.

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