



THE  
WILDERNESS  
SOCIETY

# FACTS

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## Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

### **An Unparalleled Wilderness**

The 19.6 million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a spectacular wilderness of boreal forests, rugged mountains, sweeping tundra vistas, wild rivers, coastal lagoons, and barrier islands. Located in the northeastern corner of Alaska, the Arctic Refuge features a complete range of arctic and sub-arctic ecosystems and an extraordinary assemblage of wildlife. The Arctic Refuge is a place of unparalleled beauty, so wild and untrammled that one may walk for days without seeing signs of another human being.

There is no greater place in America to experience wild nature, hike, fish, hunt, raft, camp, or simply lose oneself to the natural rhythms of the land. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has called the refuge's 1.5 million-acre Coastal Plain "the center for wildlife activity" for the entire refuge. But the oil industry and its allies in the White House and Congress are lobbying hard to open this part of the refuge to oil drilling.

### **Wildlife**

Polar and grizzly bears, wolves and muskoxen are just a few of the more than 200 animal species that use the Coastal Plain. Millions of birds, representing some 125 species migrate to the Coastal Plain to nest, rear their young, molt, and feed. The Coastal Plain is not only the most significant on-shore polar bear denning habitat in the U.S., but also the most important habitat for the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

### **Indigenous People**

The Gwich'in (Athabaskan) people depend on this herd for their subsistence and culture, a relationship that has existed for thousands of years. The 129,000-member caribou herd has used the Coastal Plain as a calving area for millennia, traveling hundreds of miles from wintering grounds in Canada and the U.S. There is no alternative to this sensitive habitat for the caribou herd. The gathering of the herd following calving is a spectacle reminiscent of Africa's Serengeti and of the enormous herds of buffalo that once thundered across the Great Plains.

### **What Would Development Mean?**

Development in the Arctic Refuge would absolutely destroy the wilderness experience for all visitors. Opportunities for pristine camping, hiking, rafting, fishing, and hunting unlike anywhere else in North America would be lost forever if the Coastal Plain were turned into a sprawling oil and gas complex. Wildlife harassment and displacement would almost certainly result, threatening the Gwich'in subsistence.

The oil industry claims it can develop the Arctic Refuge in an "environmentally sensitive" manner and points to its history in Prudhoe Bay. But according to the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, oil companies are responsible for almost one spill every day of oil and other toxic substances. In fact, more than 1.7 million gallons of toxic substances have

been spilled in the last six years alone. Emissions of some air pollutants are twice as much as those from Washington, D.C.

### **The Effects of Opening the Arctic Refuge to Oil Drilling**

- Hundreds of miles of pipelines and roads leading to oil fields, oil pumping plants, power generating stations, airstrips, and other developments that would disturb and block the free movement of migratory wildlife.
- Helicopters, cargo planes, dump trucks, and bulldozers – the sights and sounds of heavy equipment would be almost constant for long periods.
- Living quarters, sewage treatment, and other infrastructure for hundreds of workers.
- Chronic spills of oil and other toxic substances onto the fragile tundra.
- Rivers and streambeds — key habitat for wildlife — stripped of millions of cubic yards of gravel for road, airstrip and drillpad construction. Enormous diversions of fresh water to support drilling at the expense of pristine rivers and wetlands.

### **How Much Oil and Natural Gas is Under the Refuge?**

Drilling in the Arctic Refuge would forever damage a national treasure but do next to nothing to address our energy needs. The U.S. Geological Survey estimates that the refuge is likely to yield less oil than the U.S. consumes in six months. At no time would oil from the refuge be expected to supply more than a few percent of America's demand.

The U.S. Department of Energy's Energy Information Administration (EIA) has concluded that drilling in the refuge would have a negligible affect, if any, on U.S. imports or oil prices. In its March 2004 report: "*Analysis of Oil and Gas Production in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge*," EIA found that:

- First oil production from the Arctic Refuge would not occur until ten years after such drilling is authorized
- Assuming that drilling in the Arctic Refuge was authorized today, approximately 300,000 barrels a day would be produced from the refuge in 2015—approximately 3/10 of 1 percent (0.3%) of world oil production that year—not enough to cause even a blip in oil prices. Oil from the refuge would only reduce the proportion of U.S. oil supply provided by foreign imports from 63% to 62% that year
- Oil production from the refuge would not peak until 20 years from now. At peak production in 2025, the refuge would make up approximately 7/10 of 1 percent (0.7%) of world oil production—still much too little to affect prices
- Oil production from the Arctic Refuge would begin declining after 2025 in volume and in percentage of world oil production

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