

Dear House Natural Resources Committee Chair Westerman and Ranking Member Huffman

CC: Members of the House Natural Resources Committee

For decades, the Arctic has been threatened by industry attempts to sacrifice clean air and water, lands, and wildlife for the benefit of oil and gas corporations. The catastrophically harmful language in this bill around the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Western Arctic is an unprecedented attack on these fragile ecosystems, wildlife, and Indigenous health, cultures, and livelihoods. As proposed, the bill elevates corporations over the American people, stripping the rights of Americans to hold the government accountable when they'd be harmed by resource extraction. As organizations committed to protecting America's public lands, keeping iconic wildlife populations healthy, and standing for Indigenous rights, **we urge you in the strongest of terms to oppose the numerous harmful provisions in the budget reconciliation bill targeting America's Arctic, which include:**

- Mandating four oil and gas lease sales in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
 - Mandating biennial lease sales in the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska (NPR-A)
 - Reinstating flawed management plans for both landscapes
 - Repealing protections for 13 million acres of valuable wildlife habitat in the Western Arctic (NPR-A)
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- Reinstating Arctic Refuge leases to an entity with no oil and gas development ability and a proven track record of natural resource project failures
 - Seeking to waive common-sense environmental review and the application of laws meant to protect our public lands and wildlife for leasing and development decisions
 - Attempting to block judicial review at each step of the leasing and development process
 - Attempting to give corporations that pay for NEPA analysis on their own projects a free pass to pollute, regardless of how legally or scientifically flawed their analysis is.

These provisions are a craven and cowardly way to exploit some of our most iconic public lands without review, accountability, or real process for Americans and experts to weigh in. This bill is trying to put the Department of Interior above the law when it comes to decisions relating to oil and gas industrialization of our nation's Arctic. We strongly encourage you to support any amendments to remove or constrain these fiscally irresponsible, undemocratic, and harmful provisions from the bill.

Beyond the major ecological concerns of drilling in the Arctic, mandated lease sales in the Refuge have already proven to be a financial failure — not once, but twice. A mandated lease sale under President Trump in 2021 generated less than one percent of the \$1.8 billion in projected revenue, and today no leases are currently held in the Refuge. Even worse, a second lease sale this past January did not receive a single bid. As Rep. Ryan Zinke (R-MT), former Secretary of the Interior, [recently stated](#): “I don’t think there’s a lot there, quite frankly, in the near term,” a sentiment backed up by [Goldman Sachs analysts](#) the last time this committee

mandated leasing in the Refuge, saying “immensely complex, expensive projects like the Arctic we think can move too high on the cost curve to be economically doable.”

A recent [report](#) from Taxpayers for Common Sense underscores this reality, showing that future lease sales, no matter how many you mandate or legislatively stack the deck in favor of development, would generate just \$3 million to \$30 million, or less than 0.001% of the \$4.5 trillion in tax cuts the reconciliation bill seeks to pay for. That’s not a credible offset or revenue raiser; it’s a dangerous distraction from real, meaningful fiscal solutions. No amount of lease sales in the Arctic Refuge are a viable pay-for in this bill.

Even industry knows that drilling in the Arctic Refuge is too risky; companies like Chevron and Hilcorp [paid millions to exit legacy leases](#) they had held for decades in the Coastal Plain, and nearly every major [U.S. and Canadian bank](#) and [insurer](#) have refused to finance drilling projects in the area. The only entity still expressing interest isn’t even an oil and gas company: the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), a state-owned corporation with a long record of speculative, [reckless spending](#) and [project failures](#) and no capacity to develop on the leases, would in this bill have its leases returned. Independent [reports](#) have confirmed that “most of [AIDEA’s] 26 projects have either produced no new jobs, floundered, or gone bankrupt.” Instead of investing in Alaskans, AIDEA has [cost the state](#) nearly \$10 billion since its creation, with little to show for that investment. This legislation would recklessly put AIDEA in the driver’s seat of oil and gas development in the Arctic Refuge.

In addition to being a fiscal failure, Arctic drilling would cause irreversible damage to one of America’s most iconic, ecologically significant, and fragile landscapes. The Arctic is home to caribou, polar bears, musk oxen, and millions of migratory birds. Even preliminary activities like seismic testing, which involves massive convoys of 90,000-pound trucks and industrial equipment, leave scars on the tundra that last forever, destroy vegetation, and threaten critical wildlife habitat, such as crushing polar bear dens and causing mothers to abandon their cubs. Provisions in this bill would limit the review of seismic proposals to just 30 days and waive judicial review, fast-tracking approval of even the most ecologically destructive proposals. This bill seeks to strip away updated protections for more than 13 million acres in the five designated Special Areas in the NPR-A, the largest unit of public land in the country: Teshekpuk Lake, Utukok River Uplands, Colville River, Kasegaluk Lagoon and Peard Bay would all lose critical protections at a time when the Western Arctic caribou herd have declined over 50% in just twenty years.

The impacts of this destruction would be most felt by the Indigenous peoples who rely on subsistence throughout the Arctic. The lands in and around the Arctic Refuge have sustained the Gwich’in since time immemorial. Their cultural traditions, spirituality, and ability to hunt and provide for their families are deeply tied to the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Drilling in the Arctic Refuge is not just environmentally reckless; it is an existential threat to the Gwich’in way of life. Inupiat communities of the Western Arctic also rely on caribou and other wildlife there for subsistence in another area where store-bought food is prohibitively expensive.

Congress should not revive a failed, unpopular, and destructive policy in pursuit of speculative, unlikely revenue. We strongly urge you to reject any renewed effort to mandate lease sales in the Arctic Refuge in this bill. Similarly, Alaska's Western Arctic deserves stronger protections for clean air, lands, water, and wildlife, and not expedited extraction as proposed. These provisions will fail to deliver meaningful revenue, and they are rightfully opposed by the American people, [two-thirds of whom](#) oppose drilling in the Refuge and the millions who spoke up against development in the Western Arctic. We urge you to remove these harmful provisions and stand with those in Alaska and across our nation who believe these irreplaceable landscapes should remain protected for generations to come.

Sincerely,

Alaska Wilderness League

350 Bay Area Action
Animal Welfare Institute
Arctic Audubon Society
Arctic Defense Campaign
Braided River
California Indian Environmental Alliance
Californians for Western Wilderness
Center for Biological Diversity
Center for the Blue Economy
Climate Hawks Vote
Climate Justice Alliance
Coalition to Protect America's National Parks
Coalition to Protect New York
Conservation Lands Foundation
Conservation Northwest
Conservatives for Responsible Stewardship
CPAWS Yukon
Dayenu: A Jewish Call to Climate Action
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice
EcoFlight
Endangered Species Coalition
Food and Water Watch
Food and Water Watch
Friends of the Boundary Waters Wilderness
Friends of the Earth
Great Old Broads for Wilderness
Greenpeace USA
Gwich'in Steering Committee
Honor the Earth
Indigenous Environmental Network

International Indian Treaty Council
Kettle Range Conservation Group
League of Conservation Voters
Minnesota Division, Izaak Walton League of America
National Wildlife Refuge Association
New Mexico Wild
Next 100 Coalition
No Drilling on Indigenous Lands (NDIL)
Northeastern Minnesotans for Wilderness
Northern Alaska Environmental Center
Ocean Conservation Research
Ocean Defense Initiative
Partnership for Policy Integrity
Patagonia
Physicians for Social Responsibility
Save the Manatee Club
Seventh Generation Fund for Indigenous Peoples
Sierra Club
Soda Mountain Wilderness Council
Southern Utah Wilderness Alliance
Standing Trees
The Joy Trip Project
The Ocean Project
The Wilderness Society
Trustees for Alaska
Tuleyome
Turtle Island Restoration Network
Western Watersheds Project
Wild Hope
Wildlife for All
Wyoming Wilderness Association
Wyoming Wildlife Advocates