

Dear President Obama,

As we mark the 50<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, we ask you to work toward formal Wilderness designation for the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge. We urge you to take executive action to give the Arctic Refuge the strongest protections available.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was first established as the Arctic National Wildlife Range on December 6, 1960 by President Eisenhower for its “unique wildlife, wilderness and recreational values.” For the past 50 years, this special place has provided vital habitat for wildlife and a haven for visitors amidst our disappearing natural heritage.

The Coastal Plain is the biological center of the Arctic Refuge and the birthplace of countless iconic species including wolves, grizzly bears, and caribou. Numerous species of birds begin their life each summer on this vast expanse of tundra and then journey to all 50 states and across six continents – including the Arctic tern, which has the longest migration of any bird on the planet. In the winter, polar bear mothers build dens on the Coastal Plain, where they give birth and nurse their young. The Coastal Plain is the most important land denning habitat for the threatened polar bear, and the US Fish & Wildlife Service recently proposed most of the Refuge’s Coastal Plain as critical habitat.

For thousands of years, the Gwich’in people have regarded the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge as “Iizhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit” or “The Sacred Place Where Life Begins,” because it has been the most frequently used birthing and nursery grounds for the migratory Porcupine Caribou Herd. This 100,000-member caribou herd is the foundation for the social, economic and spiritual fabric of the lives of the Gwich’in people.

Together with the Gwich’in people, conservationists have fought for decades to preserve this place as our nation’s last true wilderness refuge, but that fight is far from over. As our natural world is increasingly battered by climate change, fossil fuel development, and the demands of a burgeoning human population, the Arctic Refuge remains a last vestige of the world as it was. In light of these increasing threats, we must move decisively to protect the Arctic Refuge if we are to preserve it for future generations. Exploiting this natural treasure for oil and gas would fail to address our energy needs, destroy the wilderness values, harm wildlife and plant species and exacerbate climate change. Instead, we need to move toward a clean energy economy and protect our last remaining natural treasures, such as the Arctic Refuge.

As wilderness visionary Margaret Murie described the Arctic Refuge many years ago: “This area was to provide critical habitat for endangered experiences – experiences that should be the right of every generation. But its greater contributions to the future may be symbolic: an encouraging legacy of restraint. The Arctic Refuge stands as the commitment of the past generations to all succeeding generations - that America’s finest example of the world we did not alter or control will be passed on, undiminished.”

If we fail to protect the Arctic Refuge now, we will lose a place that represents a connection to the natural world that has been lost across most of the rest of our nation. On behalf of the millions of people represented by the organizations and businesses listed below, we urge you to advance the strongest legislative and administrative actions available for protecting the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge to ensure that it remains undiminished for future generations.

Sincerely,

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