

## **RESTORING PROTECTIONS AGAINST OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT IN THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE**

Passed 225 - 193

### **SUMMARY:**

The House approved legislation to stop the government from opening the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to Big Oil by repealing the controversial arctic lease sale provision of the 2017 tax bill. (*September 12, 2019, Roll Call No. 530*)

### **BACKGROUND**

After over twenty years of failed efforts, the 115<sup>th</sup> Congress voted to authorize drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge—only after inappropriately attaching language to the partisan Tax Cuts and Jobs Act. In the new Congress, H.R. 1146 was introduced to restore protections against development in the Arctic's Coastal Plain.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge comprises approximately 19.3 million acres of public lands and waters in northeastern Alaska. Approximately 40 percent of the refuge was designated wilderness under the Eisenhower administration. The Coastal Plain, where drilling would occur under the 2017 law, is the biological heart of the refuge. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommended in 2015 that the Coastal Plain be forever protected by a wilderness designation. Oil development will irreparably damage this vital landscape. If not protected, the wilderness and habitat values will fall victim to an industrial complex, replete with oil spills, leaks and pollution. Pipelines, drill rigs, buildings and other infrastructure accompanied by the noise of industrial development would threaten iconic wildlife and imperil sensitive species that call the refuge home.

The Arctic Refuge contains vital denning habitat for the Southern Beaufort Sea polar bears, the most imperiled polar bear population in the world; crucial nesting habitat for hundreds of species of migratory birds from all 50 states and six continents; spawning streams for Dolly Varden and other valued fish species; and room to roam for caribou, wolves, muskoxen, Dall sheep, Arctic foxes and many other wildlife species. Most of the Arctic Refuge's Coastal Plain is designated critical habitat for federally threatened polar bears. Mother polar bears with cubs are increasingly dependent on this area as annual sea ice melts more quickly due to a warming climate. The Coastal Plain is also the principal calving ground for the nearly 200,000-strong Porcupine caribou herd, which migrates hundreds of miles to birth and raise their young in the refuge each year. The indigenous Gwich'in people depend on the caribou herd for their survival and way of life, making this both an environmental and human rights issue.

Rep. Jared Huffman (R-Calif.) introduced H.R. 1146, the Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act. If passed into law, H.R. 1146 would repeal Section 20001 of the tax bill (Public Law 115-97) that is allowing the government to lease drilling rights within the Refuge to large oil companies. The bill would restore the protections of the Alaska National Interest Lands

Conservation Act, conserving vulnerable wildlife and closing the Coastal Plain from drilling and development.

**OUTCOME:**

On September 12, 2019 the House passed H.R. 1146, the Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act, by a vote of 225 – 193. “Yes” was the pro-conservation vote.