

UNDERMINING CONSERVATION TO ADVANCE OIL AND GAS DRILLING IN THE ARCTIC REFUGE

Passed: 217-209

SUMMARY:

The House approved a Congressional Review Act resolution that would overturn protections for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's Coastal Plain, revoking protections for an iconic and pristine ecosystem and creating regulatory uncertainty (*November 18, 2025, Roll Call No. 295*).

BACKGROUND:

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the crown jewel of the National Wildlife Refuge System. It is one of North America's most biologically rich and pristine ecosystems. The Arctic Refuge is home to over 300 animal species, including iconic wildlife such as polar bears, caribou, muskoxen, foxes, and dozens of bird species that migrate from all 50 states and around the world. The Refuge is the most important land-based denning habitat for the imperiled Beaufort Sea population of polar bears; an increasing number of pregnant females birth and rear their cubs in the coastal plain due to melting sea ice. The Refuge also holds profound cultural significance for the Gwich'in, whose way of life depends on the Porcupine caribou herd. The Gwich'in call the Arctic Refuge's coastal plain "the sacred place where life begins."

The coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge is the subject of a decades long fight between those who seek protection of this vital habitat versus those who seek to explore its potential for oil. The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) protected the coastal plain from oil and gas development "until authorized by an act of Congress." For many years after ANILCA's enactment, Congress and the President declined to pursue drilling in the coastal plain. However, in 2017, Congress passed the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which instructed the Bureau of Land Management to establish an oil and gas leasing program with at least two lease sales in the Arctic Refuge's coastal plain. Both lease sales were failures, generating less than 1% of revenue projections. The Biden Administration issued a record of decision that restricted development of the coastal plain to the statutory minimum, protecting 1.56 million acres. Despite the lack of industry interest, the fight to protect the Arctic Refuge did not end here.

On October 10, 2025, Rep. Begich (R-Alaska) introduced H.J. Res. 131, a Congressional Review Act resolution to withdraw the Biden Administration's Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program Record of Decision. On October 23, 2025, the Trump Administration announced that it was issuing a new record of decision and reopening 1.56 million acres of the coastal plain to oil and gas leasing. Revoking protections for the Arctic Refuge's coastal plain via Congressional Review Act resolution would prioritize the oil and gas industry over conservation and undermine decades of bipartisan support for protection of the coastal plain.

OUTCOME:

On November 18, 2025, the House passed H.J. Res. 131, 217-209. “No” was the pro-conservation vote.