

SPARING THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE FROM INDUSTRIALIZATION

Failed: 48-52

SUMMARY:

The Senate rejected an amendment proposed by Senator Cantwell that would have protected the Arctic Refuge from oil and gas drilling. (*October 19, 2017, Roll Call No. 243*)

BACKGROUND:

The anti-wildlife majority in Congress included a provision in the budget process that authorizes an oil and gas program in the pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Senator Cantwell offered an amendment on the floor of the Senate that would have stricken the Arctic Refuge drilling provision from the federal budget. Unfortunately, it failed to pass.

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, is the biological heart of the refuge, and 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. The wilderness and habitat values will be destroyed by 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 nesting habitat for hundreds of species of migratory birds from all 50 states and six continents; the most important onshore denning habitat for threatened polar bears in the United States; 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.

OUTCOME:

On October 19, 2017, the Senate failed to agree to Senator Cantwell's amendment (S. Amdt. 1301 to S. Amdt. 1116 to H. Con. Res. 71) to strike Arctic Refuge drilling from the budget by a vote of 48 to 52. "Yes" was the pro-conservation vote.