



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: January 25, 2015

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Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Receives New Protections

Refuge Association Applauds Wilderness Recommendations

WASHINGTON, DC (Jan. 25, 2015) – The Obama administration has announced new protections for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. President Obama announced he will recommend to Congress that 12.28 million acres of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, including the coastal plain, be designated as Wilderness – the highest level of protection for public lands. If Congress chooses to act, it would be the largest ever wilderness designation since Congress passed the Wilderness Act over 50 years ago.

The President’s announcement came as Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell released a revised Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP), a 15-year plan that details how the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is to be managed.

“The coastal plain of Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the last places on earth that has been undisturbed by humans, and we owe it to our children and their children to permanently protect this invaluable resource,” said David Houghton, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. **“I applaud the President, Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for making the right decision based on compelling science and extensive public input to protect the coastal plain and other areas of Alaska’s Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from future development.”**

With its unique wildlife, unspoiled wilderness where natural processes reign, cultural heritage that bespeaks its importance to Alaska Natives, and important habitat for hundreds of Arctic wildlife species, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the crown jewel of the National Wildlife Refuge System and one of the most important protected areas.

The Comprehensive Conservation Plan recommends wilderness designation of three Wilderness Study Areas, the Coastal Plain along the Beaufort Sea, the Western Brooks Range and the Porcupine Plateau, encompassing nearly all non-wilderness lands inside the refuge. Although only Congress can designate Wilderness, a Presidential wilderness proposal means the areas will be managed as wilderness until formal Congressional designation.

The 19.8 million acres that comprise the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are also home to Native Alaskans, including the Inupiat and Gwich'in, and the resources of the refuge sustain these populations and protect their indigenous traditions and way of life.

“This is one of the last remaining places on the planet where enormous herds of Arctic caribou roam free, and where musk oxen, polar bears, wolves and grizzly bears can still thrive,” Houghton said. **“Wilderness not only protects these Arctic wildlife species, but it also protects the cultural values of Alaska Natives and the conservation values shared by the vast majority of Americans.”**

For more than 30 years, the Arctic Refuge’s coastal plain has been at the center of an ongoing debate over oil and natural gas drilling. Designating the coastal plain and other areas of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as wilderness will ban oil and gas drilling, and other development in those areas.

The Refuge Association strongly supports the Service’s new conservation plan with its wilderness recommendations and we urge Congress to implement the Service’s recommendation and President



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Obama's proposal by passing legislation that establishes additional wilderness for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

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The National Wildlife Refuge Association is the only independent nonprofit that promotes and protects the world's largest wildlife conservation network: the National Wildlife Refuge System.
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