

The arctic national wildlife refuge (anwr) in alaska



**ASSIGN
BUSTER**

The world is filled with many natural wonders, and one of these marvels is the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) in Alaska. Its 19.6 million acres comprise some of the last truly undisturbed wilderness, and the area has even been called the crown jewel of America's refuge system. This refuge is composed of a far-reaching stretch of tundra covered with marshes and lagoons and intertwined with rivers spectacularly positioned among the foothills of the snowcapped Brooks Mountain Range and the sparkling waters of the Beaufort Sea, presenting an awe-inspiring spectacle (Defenders of Wildlife, 2001a).

It was because of this beauty that ANWR was set-aside as government land. Originally, the North Slope of Alaska was only used for military purposes, and the public was not allowed on any of its 48.8 million acres during World War II. But in 1952-1953, some government scientists decided that this area of Alaska should become a conservation area. So, Fred Seaton, the Secretary of the Interior, made 8.9 million acres of the North Slope into the "Arctic National Wildlife Range" to protect it. A lot of oil was found throughout the North Slope in the following years, so many wanted to drill for oil in the Arctic National Wildlife Range.

In the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA - 1980), most of the Range plus more of the North Slope was designated as Wilderness and called the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. However, Section 1002 of ANILCA decided the part of the Range not considered Wilderness should be part of ANWR, although it must be researched before it was decided whether or not it should be designated as Wilderness or used for oil development. This

disputed section is called the 1002 Area (Alaska Wilderness League 2003a; Ecological Society of America, 2002; Gibbs, 2001; U.

S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2000b). Studies conducted in the 1002 Area showed that oil and gas development would cause great harm to its wildlife (U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2000b). Unfortunately, the oil companies do not seem to see the beauty of this wild area, only the possible profit in it. The oil industry would still like to drill in the 1002 Area (the Coastal Plain), an area of 1.5 million acres between the Arctic Ocean and the Brooks Range (Alaska Wilderness League 2003a; Ecological Society of America, 2002; Gibbs, 2001; Sierra Club, 2001).

However, the Coastal Plain is vital to the continued existence of many organisms and is full of life during the short spring and summer months, giving it the nickname "America's Serengeti" (Alaska Wilderness League 2003a; Alaska Wilderness League 2003b; Defenders of Wildlife, 2001b). The Porcupine River caribou herd of about 130,000 goes to the Coastal Plain on an annual basis to bear and nurse their young before migrating to warmer climates (Alaska Wilderness League 2003b; Gibbs, 2001; U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2000b; Roth, 1995).

Polar bears use it as their most vital denning area on land (Alaska Wilderness League 2003b; Roth, 1995). Musk oxen, grizzly bears, wolves, wolverines, foxes, golden eagles, and snowy owls assemble there to stalk their prey and build their dens. Dall sheep, whales, moose, 36 fish species, and eight other marine mammals thrive in the region, too. About 300,000 snowgeese also stop there in the fall to eat after coming from their nesting grounds in

Canada (Alaska Wilderness League 2003a; U. S. Fish & Wildlife Service, 2002).

Another 135 species of birds use the land to breed, nest, raise their young, feed, or rest before they migrate to areas throughout the United States and beyond (Alaska Wilderness League 2003b; Babbitt, 1995). The 1002 Area is home to a variety of wildlife. So, drilling should not occur in the 1002 Area because it would be detrimental to the animals living there. Oil development could hurt the wildlife in many ways. The emissions from aircrafts, scents of workers, and the noise of vehicles and other engines could displace the animals (Gibbs, 2001).

Roads and pipelines would also displace the wildlife because their normal routes would be blocked (Alaska Wilderness League, 2003b). Drilling would cause great harm to the animals that rely on the Coastal Plain of ANWR. Additionally, the 135 species of birds that nest and feed in the 1002 Area would be affected. Many of the birds would lose critical habitat, causing population declines for already small populations. Also, the oil fields would attract predators, further lowering their numbers (Audubon, 2002).

Other studies around the other Alaskan oil fields have shown tundra swans to nest over 650 feet from the roads (Gibbs, 2001). Many of the other migratory birds are also sensitive to disturbances, and oil production in ANWR would interrupt migration patterns that have been occurring for many years (Alaska Wilderness League 2003b). The migratory species would carry the effects with them throughout the world (UNEP, 2001). Caribou are also sensitive to

disturbances. Caribou with young stay at least 2.5 miles away from roads (Gibbs, 2001).

So, the caribou would be pushed into the foothills of the Brooks Range, an area with more predators (Ecological Society of America, 2002). A computer model estimated that calf survival would be reduced about 14 percent by oil production in ANWR (Gibbs, 2001). And, the U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service believes that lowering the calf survival by only five percent would cause the Porcupine caribou herd to suffer population declines (Alaska Wilderness League 2003b). The musk oxen's population would also drop, too. They live on the Coastal Plain year-round (Montgomery, 2003).

They need to conserve their energy and move very little to live on the Coastal Plain in the winter because there is little to eat, and it is very cold. The musk oxen would be forced off of the 1002 Area by drilling, and the Department of the Interior thinks this would lower their population 25 to 50 percent (Alaska Wilderness League 2003). The polar bears need the Coastal Plain to continue their current population numbers as well. It is needed for pregnant polar bears to nest upon and raise their cubs. The cubs need to be protected in their dens for three months.

Any sort of disturbance would cause them to leave their dens early, which would harm their newborn cubs (Alaska Wilderness League 2003b). Bowhead whales also migrate past the Coastal Plain. They are needed by the Kaktoviks (the people indigenous to the North Slope) for food and cultural activities. However, the oil development occurring presently has already displaced them 9 to 15 miles from any noise (Montgomery, 2003). So, the

Kaktoviks need areas without drilling to continue their subsistence way of life. Furthermore, all of the aquatic animals (including bowhead whales and polar bears) would be greatly harmed by an oil spill.

Development in the waters is not significant as of yet, but if more development occurs on land, then more development may occur offshore. Many animals are very vulnerable to the effects of an oil spill, so more development should not occur (Montgomery, 2003). In addition to harming wildlife, oil development would harm the physical environment as well. The drilling west of the refuge (near Prudhoe Bay) has already done considerable damage. It has turned 400 square miles of undisturbed wilderness into 1500 miles of roads and pipelines, 1400 wells, three airports, 17 sewage treatment plants, and hundreds of large waste pits.

The drilling has discharged into the environment more than 43,000 tons of nitrogen oxides each year, contributing to smog and acid rain production, and 100,000 metric tons of methane that leads to global warming. There have been about 1,600 spills containing 1.2 million gallons of oil, diesel fuel, acid, drilling fluid, and many other harmful substances between 1994 and 1999 (Indigenous Environmental Network, 2001). There is about one spill each day (Alaska Wilderness League 2003c). All of this could occur in ANWR if the oil companies get what they want.

And, you would think that there must be a gold mine of oil under the 1002 Area if they would sacrifice such an important area of land. However, the U.S. Geological Survey predicts there is only enough oil beneath the Coastal Plain to sustain the energy needs of America for six months (Alaska

Wilderness League 2003a; Alaska Wilderness League 2003c). The Department of the Interior has estimated that " there is only a one-in-five chance of finding any economically recoverable oil in the refuge" (Roth, 1995).

It is not worth ruining a pristine wilderness supporting many animals for very little oil that may not even be " economically recoverable. " Not only is there little oil under the Coastal Plain, it is also found in only small accumulations rather than one large oil field (like Prudhoe Bay). So, there would have to be more development areas, increasing the effect on the wildlife and environment (Ecological Society of America, 2002). Overall, the drilling would cause a lot of damage. A pristine wilderness would be turned into a noisy, polluted, developed area.

Millions of species of animals would be harmed. They would no longer be able to use the Coastal Plain to feed, mate, nest, and hunt. They would be forced onto marginal lands, and their numbers would be negatively affected (Alaska Wilderness League 2003b; Gibbs, 2001; U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 2000b). And, the drilling could cause many environmental problems, including global warming, smog, and acid rain (Indigenous Environmental Network, 2001). Plus, the drilling would not even solve the energy problems in the U. S. So, drilling in ANWR should be prevented!