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Comment: PRESERVE WILD PLACES

1

This land belongs to the people of the US (incl. the Inupiak Eskimos), not OIL COMPANIES.

2

The administration now proposes to lift nearly all restrictions to drilling in a 4.6-million-acre area in the western Arctic. The area supports extraordinary wildlife populations that, in turn, have supported Alaska Native people for thousands of years.

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These are precious unique, pristine areas that have existed for eons and continue to give sustenance to many many forms of life and a sense of exaltation to all humans with the humility, grace and openness to witness the beauty and wonder of creation.

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We need a balanced approach to management here to protect the most sensitive areas, resources and cultures.

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THE CURRENT PROPOSAL WOULD ELIMINATE NEARLY ALL THE CURRENT PROTECTIONS.  
for critically important wildlife habitat. It would:

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- Open 96 percent of the northeast planning area to oil and gas development (up from 87 percent today);
- Reduce protection for critical wetland habitat of Teshekpuk Lake by 75 percent;
- Allow all environmental regulations to be waived for economic reasons; and
- Allow permanent gravel roads for exploration and development and allow gravel extraction, pipelines and road crossings in sensitive buffer zones.

007  
Teshekpuk  
Lake

TESHEKPUK LAKE: NO EQUAL ON THE PLANET

Scientists rate Teshekpuk Lake area as one of the most important Tundra-Wetland ecosystems remaining in the world. It comprises coastal LAGOONS, deepwater LAKES, sedge grass MEADOWS and braided RIVERS and STREAMS. This habitat provides critical calving grounds for the 45,000-strong Teshekpuk Lake CARIBOU herd.

POLAR BEARS find a place here, too, wandering the coastal areas of the Lake in the warmer months. So do people. The INUPIAT ESKIMOS HAVE LIVED IN HARMONY WITH THIS LAND FOR 8,000 years, depending upon the area's CARIBOU, GEESE and bowhead WHALES. The administration's drilling plan would reduce protection for the caribou by 75 percent and put that ancient subsistence way of life at risk.

008  
Socio-  
cultural

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TEEMING WATERFOWL

Perhaps the most astonishing feature of the area, though, is its waterfowl. GEESE in the tens of thousands come to the area: BRANT, greater white-fronted, Canada and snow GEESE. The geese, including as many as 30 percent of all Pacific black brant, seek these

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remote wetlands for safety during a very vulnerable time: molting season when the birds are flightless.

The Interior Department's own data, gathered between 1999 and 2003, report that an average of 47 percent of the brant and 44 percent of the white-fronted geese now molt on waters that would be open wholly or partly under the administration's proposal.

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**LONG-DISTANCE TRAVELERS**

Other species that come to the Teshekpuk Lake region in large numbers include Steller's EIDER, northern PINTAILS, tundra SWANS and rare yellow-billed LOONS. Some will migrate as far south as the Antarctic.

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Humans, bears, caribou, waterfowl, all would suffer under the BLM's drilling plan.

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PLEASE NOTE: A National Academy of Sciences report details the risk. "Cumulative Effects of Oil and Gas Activities on Alaska's North Slope," issued in March 2003, documents significant environmental and cultural effects that have accumulated as the result of three decades of oil development on the North Slope.

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The latest rollbacks become even more difficult to accept when you consider that 87 percent of the northeastern Reserve is already open to leasing and 1.4 million acres are under lease and being explored! Must we sacrifice Teshekpuk Lake as well?

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**PLEASE RETAIN ALL EXISTING PROTECTIONS FOR THIS AREA!** If any changes are made, it should be to preserve MORE, not FEWER nature preserves, with STRONGER PROTECTIONS...

PLEASE - Don't sacrifice this unique and amazing national treasure....

The current proposal would jeopardize a globally significant ecological resource.

Please choose Alternative A, the No Action Alternative, in this plan.

THANK YOU!  
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Attached: None