

Lawsuit Against Trump Administration's Push to Drill in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Suit alleges the government is neglecting bedrock laws that protect land, water and wildlife

By [Environment America](#)

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Environment America along with other environmental organizations and the Gwich'in Steering Committee filed a lawsuit Monday against the Trump administration over plans to begin [oil and gas leasing](#) in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The suit argues that the government is running afoul of federal laws and regulations by failing to protect the land, water and wildlife in the refuge.

"Oil drilling and wildlife simply do not mix," said Steve Blackledge, senior director for Environment America's Conservation Program. "Not only will the Trump administration's slapdash and tragic plan threaten one of the world's most untamed wildlife areas, but it is also completely blind to the reality that, in 2020, dangerously extracting more fossil fuels from the ground is a fool's errand when clean renewable energy options are rapidly on the rise."

Set on Alaska's northern coast and often described as "America's Serengeti," the Arctic Refuge is a unique and astounding place. Covering approximately 19.3 million acres, it has no roads or other human infrastructure, making it a vital home for numerous notable wildlife species. These include the threatened polar bear, which den in the area affected by the plan, and migratory birds from all 50 states and six continents. The refuge is also used as a calving and nursery ground by the Porcupine Caribou Herd. The indigenous Gwich'in people have relied on these caribou as part of their way of life for thousands of years.

In contention is the refuge's 1.56 million-acre coastal plain, which has been sought-after land by the oil and gas industry for decades. With the Bureau of Land Management's [record of decision](#) released last Monday, lease auctions could begin in this area before the end of the year.

"The BLM's decision to violate lands sacred to my people and essential to the health of the Porcupine caribou herd is an attack on our rights, our culture and our way of life," said Bernadette Demientieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee. "We have lived and thrived in the Arctic for thousands of years. We have listened and learned from our elders, and we know we must stand united to protect future generations, and that means going to court to protect the caribou herd and sacred lands."

The lawsuit specifically charges that the government violated the Alaska National Interest

Lands Conservation Act, the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act, the Wilderness Act and the Endangered Species Act.

In addition to Environment America and the Gwich'in Steering Committee, the other plaintiffs are Alaska Wilderness League, Alaska Wildlife Alliance, Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society-Yukon Chapter, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, National Wildlife Federation, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, the Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society and Wilderness Watch. The plaintiffs are represented by Trustees for Alaska.

“Through the decades, our country has prioritized the extraction of resources far more than the protection of wild places, and yet through a little wisdom, a lot of hard work and a sprinkle of luck, this place remains free from the harms of industrial oil drilling,” said Blackledge. “We can’t let that change. While we wish common sense would prevail, we’re now turning to the courts to protect it.”

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