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November 13, 2017

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski
Chairman
Senate Committee on Energy and
Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell
Ranking Member
Senate Committee on Energy and
Natural Resources
511 Hart Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell:

On behalf of the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), I am writing to express strong opposition to legislation that would allow oil and gas exploration and development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Refuge).

The Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS) saves wildlife and wild places worldwide through science, conservation action, education, and inspiring people to value nature. To achieve our mission, WCS, headquartered at the Bronx Zoo, harnesses the power of its Global Conservation Program—in nearly 60 nations and in all the world’s oceans—and its five wildlife parks in New York City, visited by 4 million people annually. In Alaska, WCS’s Arctic Beringia Program and its field efforts are working on the ground with local partners to find workable conservation solutions that allow development, where appropriate, while mitigating the impacts of transportation and industrial activities in the quickly changing Arctic that affect wildlife and their habitats, as well as the food and economic security of local residents.

WCS’s conservation legacy in the Arctic Refuge goes back more than half a century. On an exploratory field survey co-sponsored by WCS, graduate student George Schaller, whose later work with WCS established him as the pre-eminent field biologist of our time, accompanied the famed Murie Expedition into northeastern Alaska. The expedition’s findings prompted the Department of the Interior under the Republican Eisenhower Administration to set aside this dramatic landscape in 1960.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is home to a wide variety of wildlife and roughly 700 kinds of plants, 200 bird species, 47 mammal and 42 fish species can be found there. The Refuge provides critical habitat and migration passage for a diverse array of wildlife, including caribou,

muskoxen, wolverines, Arctic foxes, lemmings, gyrfalcons, ptarmigans, and a vast international assemblage of migratory birds that breed there in the summer. In addition, the coastal plain has the highest density of denning polar bears in Arctic Alaska.

As you know, the refuge also includes the 1.5 million acre "1002 area" adjoining the Arctic Ocean. This part of the Arctic slope extending northward from the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean is a critical site for polar bears to make their dens and give birth. It is also the calving ground of one of America's largest caribou herds, which migrates widely through the region and is an essential subsistence and cultural resource for local communities.

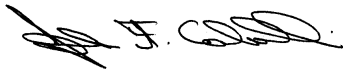
Given the United States is one of the eight Arctic Council members, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge also represents the most significant protected landscape we have in the Arctic. The area helps fulfill numerous needs as articulated by the Arctic Council's working groups such as the Conservation of Arctic Flora and Fauna.

Even though vast portions of the Arctic slope and coastal waters of northern Alaska are already open for oil leasing and drilling, I understand that the Committee is expected to soon consider legislation that would open this area as well. I urge the Committee to reject this legislation. WCS understands the need for economic opportunity in Alaska and supports responsible development in other areas of the North Slope, but the unique quality of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge warrants protection from energy development.

Opening this area to oil and gas development, no matter how minimal, would fundamentally change the nature of this place from one of the last truly wild landscapes in our country to one where the spread of human development is felt and will result in long-term damage to this national treasure.

I appreciate the Committee's consideration of our views and urge the rejection of any legislation that would open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to energy development.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John F. Calvelli". The signature is stylized and written in cursive.

John F. Calvelli
Executive Vice President, Public Affairs