



Resolution #38

**Reinforcing Awareness about the Expansion of
Oil and Gas Production in the Arctic National
Wildlife Refuge**

Submitted by: Stephen Gibson & David Pak

Date: 10/27/25

Be it resolved by Operational Group, that the Polaris General Assembly formally supports the protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from renewed oil and gas drilling approval as of 10/23/25, by decreasing the current amount of 1.56 millions acres being leased to the former minimum required amount of 400,000 acres leased during the Biden Administration and by recognizing its environmental, cultural, and climate factors, and encourages legislative leaders to prioritize sustainable economic alternatives that can protect Alaska's future as a whole.

1. **Whereas,** on October 23, 2025, the U.S Department of the Interior (DOI) officially announced that the full 1.56 million acre coastal plain of Alaska National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR), in Northeast Alaska, will be reopened to oil and gas leasing and exploration¹,
2. **Whereas,** a statement from Kristen Miller, executive director of the Alaska Wilderness League said "Opening the entire coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge to drilling would destroy one of the most ecologically significant landscapes on Earth,"²,
3. **Whereas,** a statement from the executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee said "Opening up the entire coastal plain for oil and gas development threatens our Gwich'in people and our way of life," Moreland said. "We all know there's consequences that come with oil development: pollution, habitat destruction, increased human traffic, a rise of violence, drugs, missing and murdered Indigenous peoples."³,

- i. For the Gwich'in, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is recognized as “the sacred place where life begins,” especially for mother caribou giving birth while not being disturbed.
 - ii. Providing oil production leases will ultimately disturb the general process of life within the area.

4. **Whereas**, the Northeast region holds approximately 300–600 megatonnes of carbon in the near-surface (top ~3 m) permafrost and soils on the Coastal Plain, thus if drilling and associated infrastructure disturb this, it could release up to 1.1 - 2.2 gigatonnes of CO₂ into the atmosphere (equivalent to ~12-25% of the emissions from burning ~4.4 billion barrels of oil)⁴,

5. **Whereas**, the Arctic Refuge is home to over 250 major species of animals⁷,
 - i. For example, animals such as the caribou, bears, dall sheep, wolverines, wolves, various fish species, and over 200 species of birds,

6. **Whereas**, an example of harmful damage to wildlife is the Yellow Billed Loon, which their species will be forced to move out of their natural habitats/homes because of the expansion of oil production in the Arctic Refuge, one of the few protected areas untouched by oil production⁶;
 - i. ““So, hydrologic effects from the winter ice road building. Even if during the breeding season the winter roads are by definition, it’s not breeding season the winter. Roads have a lingering effect or a long-term effect throughout the course of the spring, that can affect the loon settling on the lakes and it can affect the water level lead to drastic water changes that might cause flooding of the nest or isolation of the nest,’ Senior

Conservation Biologist with The Wilderness Society Peter McKinley explained.”

7. **Whereas**, the Biden Administration did permit limited lease offerings in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, but only to comply with the required 2017 “Tax Cuts and Jobs Act” mandating such sales, and the minimum required 400 hundred thousand acre lease compared to the current 1.56 million acre lease, as well as no bidders competed for the land, (1.16 million acre difference)⁵;
 - i. The first lease sale for the ANWR coastal plain happened on January 6, 2021 (which received only three bidders: a state corporation, and two small other companies with no prior experience), during final days of Trump administration⁸,
 - ii. The second lease sale for the ANWR coastal plain (required by the 2017 act), was scheduled for January 2025, but reported zero bids received⁸,
8. **Whereas**, oil and gas development in the ANWR would require building gravel roads, pads, pipelines, and other industrial infrastructure on permafrost and tundra, which as a result can alter surface water flow, damage wetlands, and increase the risk of contamination to existing river systems such as the Canning, Hulahula, and Jaho rivers that drain the refuges coastal plain and support fish, birds, and subsistence communities⁹,
9. **Whereas**, historic oil spills such as the Exxon Valdez disaster can demonstrate that even single incidents of oil-transport or drilling can lead to detrimental, long lasting damage to coastlines, wildlife populations, and ecosystems, with for example, the spill released over 11 million gallons of crude oil, contaminated over 1,300 miles of shoreline, and killed hundreds of thousands of animals within Prince William Sound¹⁰;

Therefore, be it resolved by Operational Group, that the Polaris General Assembly formally supports the protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from renewed oil and gas drilling approval as of 10/23/25, by decreasing the current amount of 1.56 millions acres being leased to the former minimum required amount of 400,000 acres leased during the Biden Administration and by recognizing its environmental, cultural, and climate factors, and encourages legislative leaders to prioritize sustainable economic alternatives that can protect Alaska's future as a whole.

Action Statement: If passed by Polaris' General Assembly, this resolution will be brought to ASD's Student Advisory Board, where this resolution will be further discussed and developed, and will then be later brought to Spring AASG and the State Legislature.

Sources:

1. "US Interior Reopens ANWR Coastal Plain to Oil and Gas Leasing." *S&P Global Commodity Insights*, 2025,
www.spglobal.com/commodity-insights/en/news-research/latest-news/crude-oil/102325-us-interior-reopens-anwr-coastal-plain-to-oil-and-gas-leasing, Accessed 27 Oct. 2025.
2. Groom, Nichola. "US Reopens Alaska Wildlife Refuge to Oil and Gas Development." *Reuters*, 23 Oct. 2025,
www.reuters.com/sustainability/climate-energy/us-reopens-alaska-wildlife-refuge-oil-gas-development-2025-10-23/, Accessed 27 Oct. 2025.

3. Pilkington, Caitrin. "Outcry from Gwich'in Leaders over Potential Oil and Gas Drilling in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge." *CBC*, 27 Oct. 2025, www.cbc.ca/news/canada/north/canadian-northerners-react-to-oil-gas-drilling-in-arctic-national-wildlife-refuge-9.6954412, Accessed 27 Oct. 2025.
4. Schmitz, Oswald. "Why Drilling the Arctic Refuge Will Release a Double Dose of Carbon." *Yale E360*, 18 Feb. 2021, e360.yale.edu/features/why-drilling-the-arctic-refuge-will-release-a-double-dose-of-carbon, Accessed 27 Oct. 2025.
5. "Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR): An Overview." *Congress.gov*, 2025, www.congress.gov/crs-product/RL33872, Accessed 27 Oct. 2025.
6. Mattson, Justin. "Report: Near-Threatened Alaskan Species Could Be Impacted by Oil Drilling in Western Alaska." *https://www.alaskasnewssource.com*, KTUU, 18 May 2025, www.alaskasnewssource.com/2025/05/18/report-near-threatened-alaskan-species-could-be-impacted-by-oil-drilling-western-alaska/, Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

7. “Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.” *FWS.gov*, www.fws.gov/refuge/arctic/species, Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

8. “Arctic Refuge Lease Sale Yields No Interest | U.S. Department of the Interior.” *U.S. Department of the Interior*, 8 Jan. 2025, www.doi.gov/pressreleases/arctic-refuge-lease-sale-yields-no-interest, Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

9. “Impacts of Petroleum Development in the Arctic.” *USGS*, 2025, www.usgs.gov/publications/impacts-petroleum-development-arctic, Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

10. History.com Editors. “Exxon Valdez Oil Spill - 1989, Effects & Location | HISTORY.” *HISTORY*, 9 Mar. 2018, www.history.com/articles/exxon-valdez-oil-spill, Accessed 28 Oct. 2025.

Resolution passes with unanimous consent