**Talking Points for a Senate Amendment Prohibiting the Interior Department from Using Funds to Authorize Incidental Take of Polar Bears During Oil and Gas Activities in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge**

**Topline**

* The amendment stops the Trump Administration from giving oil companies license to expedite the elimination of the world’s most imperiled polar bear population.
* Drilling in the Arctic Refuge would accelerate the demise of the world’s most threatened polar bear population. Support this amendment to help save imperiled U.S. polar bears and discourage oil companies from drilling in the Arctic Refuge. Given the near certainty that oil exploration and development activities will kill polar bears, oil companies will be less likely to proceed without the permits denied under this amendment.

**Additional Points**

* The amendment prevents the Trump Administration from ignoring the science and granting oil companies a license to kill or harm members of a polar bear population that simply cannot sustain further mortality if it is to continue to survive on this planet. Our nation is great enough to protect its magnificent wildlife, including the imperiled polar bear population that depends on the Arctic Refuge for its continued existence.
* The Trump administration’s expedited plan to turn the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge into an industrial oil field has ignored science, turned a deaf ear to public opinion, and attempted to circumvent our fundamental conservation laws every step of the way. The planning process isn’t just flawed, it’s been made a mockery in the name of energy dominance and political expediency.
* Perhaps the most egregious example of this administration’s distortion of science and subversion of environmental laws in its rush to sellout to Big Oil is the ongoing effort to hide the impacts of seismic testing, drilling and development on the imperiled polar bears that use the refuge as an important birthing area. This population of polar bears is the most imperiled on the planet, according to testimony given to the House in March of this year by leading polar bear scientist Dr. Steven Amstrup.
* The coastal plain is the most important onshore denning habitat for polar bears in the United States; approximately 77 percent is designated critical habitat for this threatened species, protected under the Endangered Species Act and the Marine Mammal Protection Act. Mother bears are increasingly coming ashore to birth and care for their newborn cubs due to the climate driven loss of sea ice.
* Scientists have repeatedly stated that oil and gas activities in this vital habitat could cause injury and death to mother bears and cubs that could threaten the survival of the Southern Beaufort Sea population. According to Dr. Amstrup’s March testimony, “. . . maximizing survival potential for every single cub is essential in maximizing opportunity for polar bears in this region to persist.” **With as few as 900 of these animals remaining, the death of even one polar bear from fossil fuel development is too many.**
* Industrial activities including seismic testing, drilling, infrastructure development, facilities operation, traffic and even the mere presence of humans could cause mother polar bears to abandon their dens, leaving their cubs to perish and sending the species into further decline. Worse, 90,000-pound thumper trucks could even run over dens, crushing bears to death inside. Oil spills could poison bears that eat contaminated prey or simply groom their oiled fur. Essential denning habitat would be destroyed.
* Yet the Trump administration has endeavored to hide these impacts from public scrutiny. As reported this summer in Politico (<https://www.politico.com/interactives/2019/trump-science-alaska-drilling-rush/>), the work of government scientists was altered to downplay the impacts of oil and gas development in the refuge. And the Department of Interior has declined to conduct any new wildlife studies to inform the process despite biologist’s concerns that key data is outdated or missing.
* How many barrels of oil is a polar bear worth? That is the question. To me, and to the majority of Americans, they are priceless. It is time to end this charade. It is time to turn back the clock and restore protections to these treasured public lands for the animals and communities that depend on them. Save the polar bear.

**Background on Polar Bears and Threatened Fossil Fuel Development**

* A Population in Peril: Polar bears were listed as threatened throughout their range under the Endangered Species Act (ESA) in 2008, due to existing and projected loss of sea ice habitat. A 2015 report by the International Union for the Conservation of Nature found a [“high probability”](https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2015/nov/19/climate-change-is-single-biggest-threat-to-polar-bear-survival) that polar bear populations will **decrease 30% worldwide** by 2050 due to sea ice loss. Of nineteen global sub-populations of polar bears, the Southern Beaufort Sea (SBS) population is considered the most imperiled of all, having already decreased 25-50% since the 1990s to an estimated 900 animals now.
* Critical Polar Bear Habitat: 77% of the Arctic Refuge coastal plain consists of designated critical polar bear habitat. This area is especially important to SBS bears for denning, and increasingly important for other life functions including roaming, foraging and resting. It will only become more important in the coming decades as the sea ice continues to vanish. While a long-term polar bear conservation strategy must include reducing carbon emissions, protecting the coastal plain habitat is critical to conserving and recovering the imperiled SBS stock in the near-term. The proposed oil and gas leasing and development would impact virtually all of this key habitat.
* Exacerbating the Problem: In the words of polar bear expert Dr. Steven Amstrup, “Until society takes the necessary actions to halt the rise of atmospheric greenhouse gas concentrations, which is the only way to stop warming and stabilize sea ice, conserving onshore habitat for polar bears will be of utmost importance to preserving this species.” Drilling in the coastal plain both increases the emissions causing sea ice loss and destroys key terrestrial polar bear habitat.
* Ignoring Science: Dr. Amstrup stated that even pre-development exploration activities are “virtually assured of impacting denning females with **likely fatal consequences**,” while full-scale development would clearly further fragment and reduce critical habitat. This in turn will add further energetic costs – e.g., greater distances traveled to find food - to those already caused by sea ice loss. BLM has ignored these and other concerns raised, concluding instead that “the effects of reduced use of habitats near oil and gas facilities likely would be minimal.”
* Unacceptable Impacts: The “Reasonably Foreseeable Development Scenario” used by BLM to assess the impacts from drilling anticipates oil production facilities covering hundreds of square miles throughout the coastal plain. It would NOT be a 2000-acre development. BLM envisions three large central oil processing facilities, connected by **hundreds of miles** of roads, oil pipelines, water pipelines, drilling pads, airstrips, storage tanks, communications centers, housing facilities, a saltwater intake plant, and much more. Industrialization of key habitat on this scale “will cause disturbance and potentially lethal impacts to polar bears on the coastal plain,” according to Dr. Amstrup, and is clearly inconsistent with the goal of protecting critical habitat and recovering polar bears.
* Dr. Steven Amstrup’s full March testimony can be found at: <https://naturalresources.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Testimony%20-%20Polar%20Bears%20International%20-%20Amstrup.pdf>