

The Honorable Senator John McCain

U.S. Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

May 10, 2005

Dear Senator McCain,

The Sonoran Audubon Society appreciates your leadership and foresight in voting to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil development, but we are deeply disappointed in your vote for a budget resolution that would allow drilling in the Refuge. As you know, the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge is the last 5% of Alaska's North Slope that is not already open to oil exploration, and this area has extraordinary value as an intact ecosystem. The millions of birds that visit the refuge link it with people throughout our country and the world, as their migratory journeys take them to each of the 50 states and to six continents.

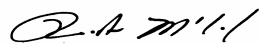
The potential loss of birds and wildlife that would follow oil development would diminish the Refuge's value to everyone, including subsistence hunters, backyard birdwatchers, scientists, and outdoor enthusiasts throughout the world. The construction and operation of a sprawling industrial complex (drilling pads, roads, pipelines, impoundments, gravel mines, solid waste disposal sites, and airports) would result in inevitable loss, fragmentation, and degradation of habitat on the narrow coastal plain. In addition to habitat loss, oilfields attract predators that prey on birds. Populations of predators such as Glaucous Gulls, Ravens, and Arctic Foxes increase around areas of human activity in oilfields, which would result in increased predation on ground nesting birds.

Human activity would also disrupt birds. Trucks, airplanes, helicopters, barges and boats may disturb sensitive species of birds. Numerous species are highly sensitive to disturbance, especially by aircraft, and displacement from their feeding grounds would result in birds being unfit for migration and result in reduced winter survival.

Finally, every year there are hundreds of spills of oil and other toxic substances on the North Slope oil fields. Since oil destroys the insulating properties of feathers, birds that come in contact with it usually die. If a large spill of crude oil were to reach marine lagoons on the Beaufort Sea coast, tens of thousands of water birds such as King Eiders, loons, and phalaropes could be killed. Thousands of shorebirds gathering in river deltas and coastal meadows would also be at risk.

The Arctic Refuge is the wildest place left in America. The coastal plain, known as "America's Serengeti", is home to the 127,000-strong Porcupine Caribou herd, musk oxen, three species of bear including polar bears, 130 species of birds, and a myriad of other creatures. Yet this land and the web of life it supports are fragile. Thank you for your past votes to protect the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and please oppose any final budget resolution that would allow oil drilling in the Refuge.

Sincerely,



Robert A. McCormick,  
President  
Sonoran Audubon Society