

## MEMO

**TO:** National media

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**RE:** Arctic drilling acreage by the numbers reveals the oil sector overreach

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### Millions of Arctic Acres Available to Industry

Even as Congress considers opening up the Arctic refuge to drilling, what drilling backers don't mention is that nearly **27 million acres** of Arctic Alaska are already available to the oil and gas industry.\* This includes 10.3 million acres in the Western Arctic that the [BLM announced it is putting up for bids](#) in a lease sale scheduled for December 6.

For the oil industry's allies in Congress, however, 27 million acres is not enough. They also want to drill in [one of the last pristine, untouched places we have left](#): the 1.5 million-acre coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge.

Here's how the acreage breaks down:

- 15 million acres are open for leasing on state lands on Alaska's North Slope, including 3.5 million acres already under lease.
- 11.8 million acres are available for leasing in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, including 1.3 million acres already under lease.

With only 5 million leased out of the 26.8 million acres available, *more than 22 million acres remain unleased.*

### Americans Support Protection for the Arctic

Not surprisingly, this drilling campaign strikes the vast majority of Americans as an unbalanced approach. Which is why for years, the voting Americans who have been polled have consistently said they oppose Arctic drilling. They believe some places should be conserved and left pristine.

In a survey conducted last December by Hart Research for the Center for American Progress, two-thirds of respondents said they [oppose efforts to open the Arctic Refuge to drilling](#). (Question 10, Page 7)

Both houses of Congress recently approved budget resolutions that pave the way for oil drilling there, posing a major threat to the refuge after nearly four decades of bipartisan support for protecting it. That legislation will be the subject of a Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee [hearing this Thursday at 9:30 a.m.](#) Eastern.

## **Leased But Unused Acreage**

Oil companies are barely using the leased acreage. According to the Center for American Progress, the industry is drilling on less than two percent of the federal lands it already has leased in Alaska.

Leased but unused federal lands are not unusual. [BLM data acquired by The Wilderness Society](#) in 2015 showed that the *oil and gas industry was hoarding 3.25 million acres of federal land under suspended leases* instead of developing them and paying royalties to taxpayers.

There is no justification for attempting to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for leasing, but with a pro-drilling president and Republican control of Congress, drilling advocates see an opportunity to strip protections from the crown jewel of our [National Wildlife Refuge System](#).

Congress is manipulating the budget process with the goal of including Arctic Refuge drilling in a must-pass budget reconciliation package that would [require a simple 51-vote majority in the Senate](#).

For nearly 40 years Congress and the American people have rejected the oil industry-backed effort to drill in the sacred lands of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and this provision has no place in the budget today.

At more than 19 million acres, the Arctic Refuge is America's largest wildlife refuge. Its coastal plain—stretching north from the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean—provides vital denning habitat for endangered polar bears and is the calving ground of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which contains nearly 200,000 animals.

President Obama recognized the values of the Arctic Refuge in 2015 when he [recommended that virtually all of the refuge](#) be protected as designated wilderness.

## **Devastating Impacts of Oil Drilling**

Oil and gas drilling would have devastating impacts on this pristine and fragile ecosystem, caused by the massive infrastructure needed to extract and transport oil. Drilling the Arctic is risky, would fragment vital habitat and chronic spills of oil and other

toxic substances onto the fragile tundra would forever scar this now pristine landscape and disrupt its wildlife.

Drilling in the Arctic Refuge is not a budget issue. It has been estimated that the revenue generated by selling off our nation's most iconic wild place would offset less than 1 percent of our increased deficits—but even **those estimates are highly inflated.**

**Estimated revenues from drilling in the refuge would require companies to bid an average of \$2,400 for every single acre of the 1.5 million-acre coastal plain. That's more than 10 times the average lease sale bid on Alaska's North Slope (about \$168/acre).**

It is important to note that if lease sales occurred and the projected revenue targets were not met, oil drilling in the Arctic Refuge would actually add to the deficit.

The Arctic Refuge is a national treasure, and it is [too wild to drill](#).

This could be our last opportunity to save a vast, intact wilderness tract that is home to iconic species like [polar bears](#), wolves and caribou. Generations of Americans have opposed drilling in the Arctic Refuge, and now we must protect it for generations to come.

\* Based on data from the U.S. Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management, and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources, Division of Oil and Gas.