



Written by [Bob Adelman](#) on January 26, 2015

Obama to Put Alaska's Wildlife Refuge Off Limits to Drilling

On Sunday the White House released a 58-second-long [YouTube video](#) of President Obama announcing that his Interior Department was about to present a "comprehensive plan" to "make sure that this amazing wonder [the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — ANWR] is preserved for future generations." That designation concerns the 1.5-million acre coastal plain of the ANWR, precisely the area that has been the focus of controversy since the late 1970s. It is said to have more than 10 billion barrels of recoverable oil beneath its surface, and has served as a political football between the oil industry and environmentalists ever since.



The reaction by Alaska Republican Senator Lisa Murkowski was instant:

It's clear that this administration does not care about us, and sees us as nothing but a territory.

I cannot understand why this administration is willing to negotiate with Iran but not Alaska.... We will not be run over like this. We will fight back with every resource at our disposal.

Murkowski, who chairs the Senate's Energy and National Resources Committee, which oversees the Interior Department's budget, added:

I have tried to work with this administration even though they've made it extremely difficult every step of the way. But those days are over. We are left with no choice but to hit back as hard as we can.

This move by the president should surprise no one who has watched the career of Barack Obama from his campaign position on ANWR in 2008 through December 2014. During his first presidential campaign he made clear his position:

I strongly reject drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge because it would irreversibly damage a protected national wildlife refuge without creating sufficient oil supplies to meaningfully affect the global market price or have a discernible impact on U.S. energy security.

In December, after voters rejected him and his extremist agenda in November, Obama declared that he would do whatever he could to work around the newly elected Congress to further his agenda.

ANWR is located on the north coast of Alaska, between the Beaufort Sea to the north, the Brooks Range to the south, and Prudhoe Bay to the west. Nineteen million acres in size, the area in question is less than one percent of the ANWR. And the proposed drilling sites involve less than 2,100 acres, a point supporters made in a slide presentation that recently went viral.



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Snopes reviewed that presentation and declared that it contained a mixture of truths and falsehoods. For instance Snopes admitted that the planned area of development was 2,100 acres, but when the Prudhoe Bay area was originally planned, it too was expected to be limited to just 2,100 acres. However, as Prudhoe Bay was developed, it expanded to a “total drilling footprint of 12,000 acres spread over 640,000 acres of the North Slope.”

The presentation claimed that wildlife would continue to flourish amid the drilling planned for the area, including photographs of elk, bear, and other wildlife co-existing with the development. True, said Snopes, but opponents presented evidence that such development activities have “caused an average of 504 [oil] spills per year since 1996 ... totaling more than 1.9 million gallons of toxic substances.”

Proponents made the case that the geography of the intended development is a flat, barren plain covered with snow most of the year, far away from the pristine virgin areas shown by opponents with their photographs. Those opponents countered that although the development might be limited in size, the impact of potential accidental spills “can have devastating effects far outside the limited areas in which they originally occur. “

Unless Murkowski can muster not only the backbone but the support of members of her committee to threaten successfully the Interior Department’s plans, drilling in the ANWR will be permanently prohibited. This is one more reminder of the prescience of the Founding Fathers, who knew from history that government always expands and freedom always contracts unless the government is restrained. As Thomas Jefferson famously said:

The two enemies of the people are criminals and government, so let us tie the second down with the chains of the Constitution so the second will not become the legalized version of the first.

A graduate of an Ivy League school and a former investment advisor, Bob is a regular contributor to The New American magazine and blogs frequently at www.LightFromTheRight.com, primarily on economics and politics. He can be reached at badelman@thenewamerican.com.



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