



Fulfilling a Conservation Vision for Alaska



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An agenda for federal public lands and waters on and offshore of Alaska

Alaska Wilderness League leads the effort to preserve Alaska's wilderness by engaging citizens, sharing resources, collaborating with other organizations, educating the public, and providing a courageous, constant and victorious voice for Alaska in the nation's capital.

The League's singular focus to protect Alaska's federal public wild places is unique in the conservation community. Our work brings together a diverse gathering of advocates to fight back every attempt of those with entrenched, and often short-sighted, interests which threaten to damage or destroy this incomparable land - along with the livelihood of its people and wildlife who have thrived there for centuries.



Moving Forward: 2009

When it comes to the environment, the next president must lead the United States in a new direction, by reinvigorating our nation's historical respect for bedrock conservation ethics.

The Alaska Wilderness League has a history of successful bipartisan advocacy for the protection of federal public lands and waters on and offshore of Alaska. The League prepared this document to encourage a new agenda for those public lands and waters; one that will benefit all Americans, including those people who most directly rely on the health and diversity of these ecosystems.

The League has spent the past eight years working tirelessly against the environmentally devastating policies of the past. Our work was instrumental in the most definitive environmental victory of this era: Preventing an avalanche of attempts to open the iconic Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development. At the same time, the League fought hard to stop oil and gas development in discrete and ecologically critical parts of the Western Arctic near Teshekpuk Lake, and led the effort to stop wasteful taxpayer spending on logging in the Tongass National Forest.

Despite these successes, change is still acutely important for the millions of acres of public land and waters on and offshore of Alaska. The League is now looking toward a future in which success is defined not only through what damaging policies of the past are reversed for these lands and waters, but also through what proactive protections are enacted and implemented.

This document outlines important administrative and legislative priorities for Alaska's federal public lands and waters. These efforts will do more than preserve our nation's wilderness heritage; they also will enhance our response to climate change, both by addressing the causes of climate change and helping to make our environment more resilient to its effects.

Additionally, many of the actions described herein – especially those related to the Arctic land and waters of the United States -- are best considered as elements of a new and comprehensive energy and climate change policy, assuming, as the League does here, that such a policy will be a priority of the new administration and Congress.



The actions presented in this document will be supported by grassroots advocacy and public education efforts of the League and its historical working partners within the larger environmental community and Alaska.

Bringing together a diverse group of stakeholders, these efforts will allow the new administration and Congress to move beyond the divisiveness that has defined the debate about, and impeded effective management of, public lands and waters on and offshore of Alaska.

With that preface, the League will work to achieve a more balanced approach to management of these federal lands and waters generally by following these benchmarks:

- Identifying and conserving the remaining undeveloped lands and waters with the highest natural and wilderness values;
- Fostering a transition away from unsustainable development;
- Protecting and restoring lands to address risk and damage from past and current development;
- And empowering local communities to have meaningful input into federal land management.

The specific actions listed in this document each follow one or more of these benchmarks, and are provided with general timelines for their implementation.

These actions will secure healthy and vibrant federal lands and waters on and offshore of Alaska, preserve unrivaled recreational opportunities for Alaska residents and visitors alike, provide valuable tools in the fight against climate change, and, in many cases, support sustainable local jobs and economic opportunities. By taking these actions, we can fulfill the conservation potential that these federal public lands and waters offer to the United States.



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The public debate over the future of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the iconic environmental issue of our time. For the past eight years, the fight to protect the Refuge has become a symbol for those who believe that our energy future should not prioritize drilling at all costs.

While the League appreciates that our nation's energy future will include oil and gas development, we strongly believe that tomorrow's energy policy must reprioritize our historic tradition of protecting the most significant and threatened of our public lands. Given the exceptional ecological significance of the Arctic Refuge, together with its high profile in the conscience of American citizens, we believe that stronger protections for the Arctic Refuge should be an integral part of the larger energy package expected early in the next administration and Congress. Swift, immediate action toward protecting the Arctic Refuge, both vocally, and in the context of a larger energy proposal, would send a decisive message that the new administration and Congress have the courage of their convictions, and will meet 21st century challenges with modern solutions, rather than solutions that destroy the heart of our public lands legacy.

National Monument – Use the Antiquities Act to designate the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as a National Monument within an anticipated comprehensive energy proposal. *Timeline:* Concurrent with preparation of comprehensive energy and environment plan.

Wilderness Bill – Support and pass Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Coastal Plain Wilderness Bill. *Timeline:* Two to four years

Wilderness Management – The Bush Administration derailed efforts to modernize this policy, and it should be resurrected to ensure that the integrity of our wilderness does not suffer from neglect or mismanagement. A new administration should prepare and implement a protective Wilderness Stewardship Policy that applies to the Arctic Refuge and other Refuge lands in Alaska. *Timeline:* Two years



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Outer Continental Shelf offshore of Alaska *Beaufort, Chukchi, Bering Seas*

The Bush Administration pushed through a massive and risky expansion of oil and gas activities in the federal waters off Alaska, going from roughly 9.4 million acres of open area in the Beaufort Sea to 33 million acres; from zero to 40 million in the Chukchi Sea; and from zero to 5.6 million in the Bering Sea. They did this in the face of stringent opposition



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from expert federal agencies, scientists, local communities and governments, conservation groups and others, and despite the lack of even basic baseline information on the environment of these waters, and how climate change has and likely will impact them.

Executive and Legislative Suspensions – Establish a time out of oil and gas activities in the Arctic Ocean and Bering Sea pending completion of a comprehensive energy plan, baseline environmental studies, and compliance with other conditions of the Polar Bear Seas and Bristol Bay Protection Acts. *Timeline:* Six months

Executive Planning – Develop a comprehensive conservation and energy plan for the Beaufort, Chukchi and Bering Seas, and terrestrial areas of America's Arctic. *Timeline:* Eighteen months

Ocean Governance – Overhaul U.S. ocean governance to address human activity in oceans, including Beaufort, Chukchi and Bering Sea components. *Timeline:* Two years. Pending completion, advocate for a freeze on the expansion of oil and gas, shipping, commercial fishing and mining activities. *Timeline:* Six months

International Governance – Establish U.S. leadership for a comprehensive international framework agreement among Arctic Nations and indigenous peoples that provides for protection of biological and subsistence resources from new and expanding development activities in the Arctic. Support U.S. accession to U.N. Law of the Sea in U.S. Senate. *Timeline:* Two years



National Petroleum Reserve, Alaska

Despite its name, the National Petroleum Reserve, Alaska, which is a 23.5 million acre swath of federal public land located in the Western Arctic, has rich and important wild lands and wildlife. While oil and gas activities have a place in the Reserve, a balanced approach is essential. Management of this area must include



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permanent protection of its most special places and values, including subsistence resources used by Alaska Native residents. Unique and sensitive lands within the Reserve include Teshekpuk Lake, Colville River, Southern Ikpikpuk River, Pik Dunes, Peard Bay, Dease Inlet-Mead River, Kasegaluk Lagoon, and the Utukok River Uplands, as well other areas that might be identified by the Department of Interior. Oil development that does occur must adhere to strict environmental standards, including those related to operations, cleanup and restoration.

Administrative Withdrawal — Permanent administrative withdrawal of Teshekpuk Lake and 450,000 acres of habitat now under 10 year deferral. Suspension of new leasing in other special areas while their natural values are assessed and protected. *Timeline:* One year

Protection Bill - Pass legislation for the permanent protection of Teshekpuk Lake and associated wildlife habitat areas, and withdraw other special areas from development pending mandated study and recommendations to Congress. Selected buy-back of some leases within areas recommended for statutory protection. *Timeline:* Two years

Strict Protection and Enforcement — Oil and gas activities should include environmental protections that will be applied and strictly enforced. *Timeline:* Ongoing



Tongass National Forest



The Tongass National Forest contains the largest remaining expanse of old-growth, coastal, temperate rainforest in the world. It is one of the few places remaining on earth where old growth forests, brown bears, whales and wild salmon still thrive. It is also home to

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diverse coastal towns and communities that depend on the forest's resources for their way of life. Although more than half of the highest value, old-growth forest has been clear cut, the Tongass continues to boast significant reservoirs of abundant, healthy and intact landscapes. Unlike most of our public forests in the lower-48 states and coastal temperate rainforests around the world, our nation still has the opportunity to manage and conserve the Tongass on an ecosystem scale.

Temporary Administrative Moratorium – Establish a time-out on project planning, logging, or other resource development within identified high-value intact watersheds until a thorough review is conducted of: 2008 Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan Amendment, Record of Decision (1/23/08); Appeal Decision by Associate Deputy Chief for the National Forest System (8/22/08); Discretionary Review of TLMP Appeal Decision by Undersecretary Mark Rey (9/17/08). *Timeline:* One year

Defer Clear-Cut, Old-Growth Logging – Safeguard old-growth within identified high-value, roaded watersheds until completing on-site watershed scale reviews, prioritization of restoration needs, and inventory of economic young growth. *Timeline:* Immediate

FY2010 Budget – Submit a proposed budget to Congress which reprioritizes funding to support new and expanded research and management programs for fish and wildlife, recreation and wilderness, habitat and stream restoration, and second-growth forestry.

Timeline: February 2009



Tongass National Forest *Continued*

Provide Long-Term Direction to the Forest Service

- Assess lands with high ecological and community values, and determine if additional acres should be recommended to Congress for additional wilderness or other conservation designations, allocated to non-development LUDS, or prioritized for habitat and stream restoration.
- Establish a smaller, more economical land base to meet the needs of the current and established timber industry operating within the Tongass.
- Inventory young growth stands and determine priorities for collaborative stewardship and commercial harvest to expedite the transition from old-growth logging to young-growth management.
- Sunset clear-cutting of, and road construction within, old-growth forests lands.

Timeline: Long-term



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Tongass Communities and Conservation Bill – Pass southeast Alaska regional legislation which provides permanent protection of watersheds with important biological, social and other values throughout the Tongass, restores high-value watersheds and streams previously damaged by logging and development, and permanently transitions the timber industry out of a reliance on old-growth logging to a sustainable second-growth timber program.

Timeline: Four years

Climate Change - Include Tongass National Forest within climate change legislation proposals and administrative carbon sequestration options.

Timeline: Tied to timing of overall climate change policy.



The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is obligated under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) to identify, inventory, and assess BLM lands in Alaska for protections – including prohibiting mineral development - to ensure the public's best interests are served. BLM manages approximately 53 million acres of land

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in Alaska that require such review under ANCSA. BLM has not conducted the required studies and has instead moved aggressively under the Bush administration to recommend opening nearly 30 million acres of land to mineral development with almost no protections for critical habitat and existing land uses. The actions recommended here would restore the legal balance to BLM's Alaska decision making.

Department of Interior Policies – Enact an overall conservation policy for BLM lands in Alaska and reverse harmful BLM policies, such as the Norton “no more BLM wilderness” directive. Ensure that meaningful and enforceable new mitigation measures are adopted to protect sensitive resources from development that does occur. *Timeline:* One year

Wild and Scenic Rivers – Ensure the proper inventory and designation of wild and scenic rivers. *Timeline:* Two years

Resource Management Plans – Identify and protect extraordinary natural values of BLM lands in Alaska. *Timeline:* Ongoing

Legislative Oversight Effort – Investigate why BLM has not conducted the inventories and reviews required under the ANCSA, while continuing to move forward with land management decisions that conflict with ANCSA and the public's best interests. Prevent the opening of 100 percent of BLM lands in Alaska to mineral development. *Timeline:* Ongoing





The devastating impacts from over 30 years of oil and gas development and global climate change, together with aggressive plans for new development, are threatening the future of the cultures that have inhabited the Arctic region for thousands of years — long before it became America's Arctic.



Local communities in

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other parts of Alaska face similar threats. Citizens of the Arctic and other at-risk ecosystems have a right to a safe, healthy, productive, and sustainable environment for all. Alaska Wilderness League is committed to honoring the human rights and traditional values of indigenous and other communities, as well as our shared interest in protecting critical areas for future generations, by fostering the meaningful participation of people from these communities in government decision making.

Empower Communities – Ensure meaningful federal engagement of local communities in permitting of development activities. *Timeline:* One year

Independent Industry Oversight – Establish, through administrative or legislative efforts, independent citizen oversight of Trans-Alaska Pipeline and North Slope oil and gas activities. *Timeline:* Two years

Health Impact Assessment – Advocate for new Council on Environmental Quality policies or regulations on Health Impact Assessments, and require the implementation of Health Impact Assessments during federal actions in Alaska.

Timeline: One year



Executive Attention on Alaska

More than ever, Alaska is at the crossroads of America's environmental and energy future. Federal agencies manage millions of acres of federal public lands and waters on and off-shore of Alaska, as well as review and grant permits for development activities throughout the public lands of the state. These federal actions should be closely integrated with the nationwide effort to address the impacts of climate change.

Administrative Structure and Position(s) – Create an Arctic interagency task force to inventory agency actions affecting the Arctic region and provide coordinated input into critical federal land and ocean issues in Alaska. Ensure that special assistants to the secretaries of all major federal agencies that have an impact on public lands in Alaska and neighboring offshore areas – Interior, Commerce, Agriculture— have a vested interested in the sustainable management of these vital lands and waters. *Timeline:* One year





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