

For Immediate Release**July 12, 2005**

WLF URGES COURT OF APPEALS TO APPROVE OIL AND GAS LEASES IN ALASKA

(Northern Alaska Environmental Center, et al. v. Norton)

WLF filed a brief in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit urging the court to affirm a lower court ruling that upheld the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for the oil and gas leasing program for the Northwest Planning Area of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). WLF argued that the FEIS was more than sufficient to satisfy environmental laws, including the Endangered Species Act (ESA). WLF further noted that any oil and gas production, which is at least ten years away, would disturb less than 1,900 acres of the surface area of the Northwest Planning Area, or 0.02 percent of the 8.8 million acre oil reserve. Furthermore, significant measures would also be taken to mitigate any harm to wildlife and the environment.

WLF informed the court that increasing domestic oil exploration and production are vital to our national security inasmuch as the United States imports over 60 percent of its oil from foreign countries, which is a dramatic increase from 36 percent after the oil crisis of 1973. "It's imperative that the United States develop domestic sources of petroleum and be less dependent on foreign sources of oil, especially because of the dangerous geopolitical situation," said Paul Kamenar, WLF Senior Executive Counsel. "After all, this vast area was designated by Congress to be an oil reserve, not a wildlife preserve," Kamenar added.

Environmental groups, including the Sierra Club, Audubon Society, and Center for Biological Diversity, are trying to stop oil leases from being issued. Oil leases are only the first stage of the long production process. The second stage is exploration and the third is actual production if oil is found. If the court of appeals reverses the district court and agrees with the environmental groups that site specific impact statements are required now for each lease tract, that result could effectively stop oil exploration in the area. As WLF argued in its brief, if that were to happen, that would effectively make resource development all but impossible, and make good the pejorative name associated with the purchase of Alaska from Russia in 1867 - "Seward's Folly." Oral argument in the case is scheduled for this September, with a decision expected shortly thereafter.

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For information, contact WLF Senior Executive Counsel Paul Kamenar at 202-588-0302. WLF's brief is posted on its website at www.wlf.org.