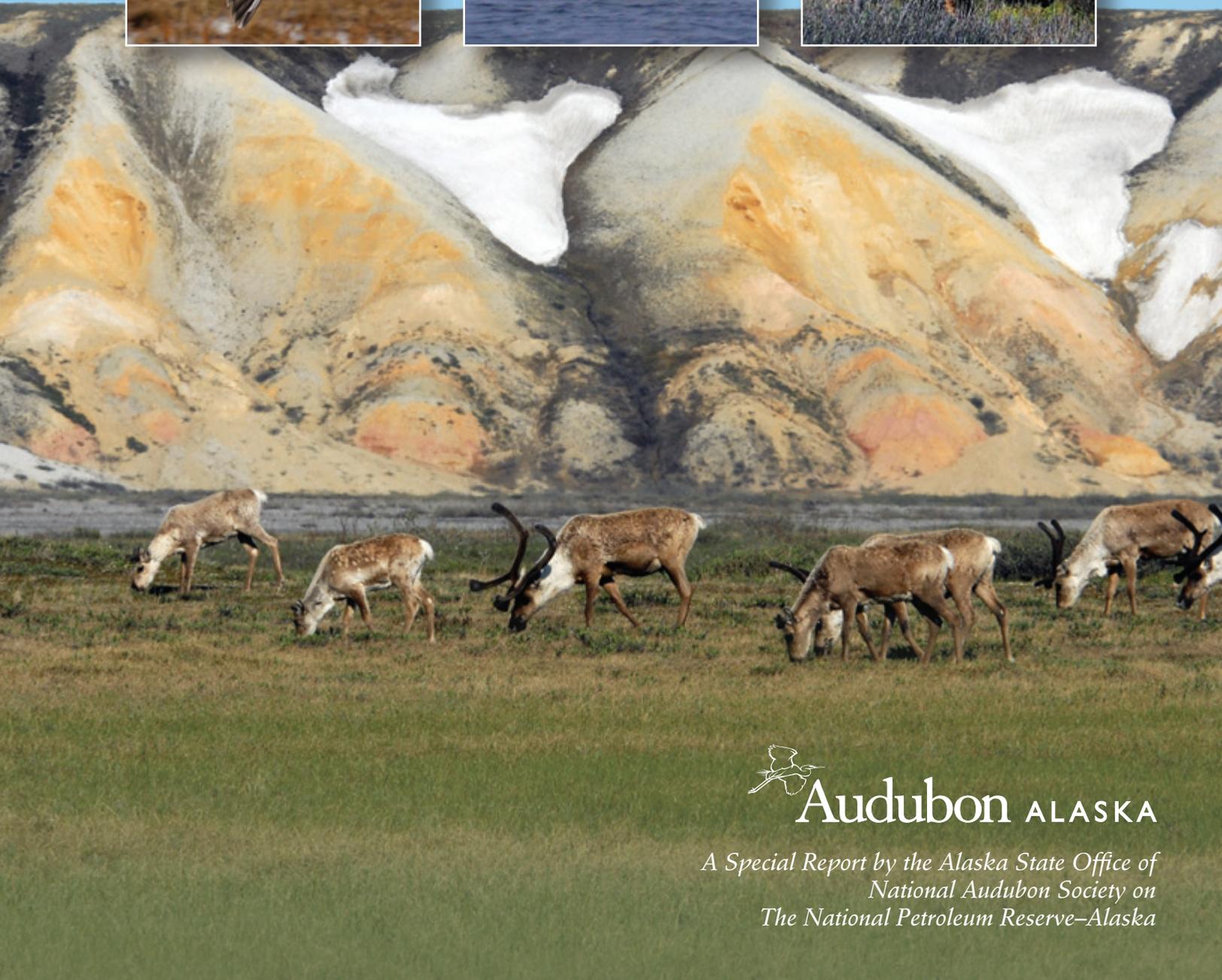


STRIKING A BALANCE IN AMERICA'S WESTERN ARCTIC:

The
**National Petroleum
Reserve—Alaska**



 **Audubon** ALASKA

*A Special Report by the Alaska State Office of
National Audubon Society on
The National Petroleum Reserve—Alaska*

Created in 1923 by President Warren G. Harding at the time when the Navy was converting from coal to oil, the National Petroleum Reserve–Alaska spreads across approximately one-third of Alaska’s North Slope. At more than 22 million acres, roughly the size of Indiana, the Reserve is the largest land management unit in the United States.

From tall mountain peaks and rolling foothills to coastal wetlands, the Reserve contains a variety of vast, intact landscapes that support prolific wildlife populations. Two of Alaska’s largest caribou herds migrate to their calving grounds here. In turn, the caribou draw a diversity of Arctic predators, such as grizzly bears, wolves, and wolverines. Millions of migratory birds from across the continent, including large numbers of waterfowl, rely on the Reserve’s extensive wetlands. The cliffs along several rivers host phenomenal densities of nesting raptors (birds of prey). The coastal lagoons and shores sustain marine mammals such as polar bears, beluga whales, walrus, and ringed and spotted seals. More than 40 Alaska Native communities in northern and western Alaska depend upon the Reserve for irreplaceable opportunities to harvest subsistence foods.

Congress has long recognized the importance of protecting special areas within the Reserve. In 1976, Congress enacted the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act, transferring management of the Reserve from the Navy to the Department of the Interior and mandating protection of the area’s exceptional surface values.

Congress has directed the Secretary of the Interior to provide “maximum protection” to areas of the Reserve with “significant subsistence, recreational, fish and wildlife, or historical or scenic value....”

THE NATIONAL PETROLEUM RESERVE-ALASKA IS ROUGHLY THE SIZE OF INDIANA.



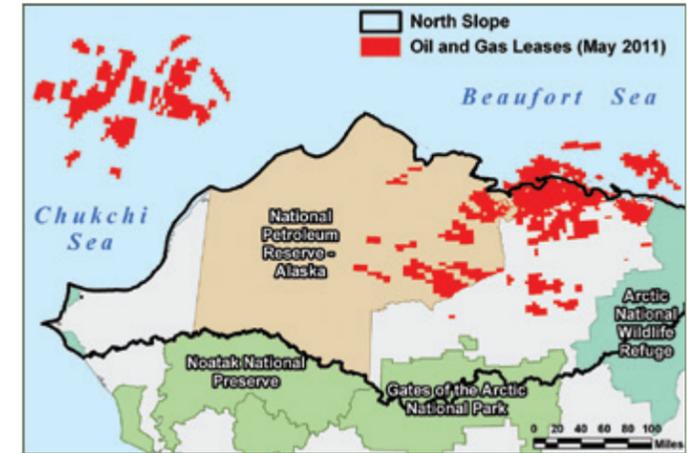
INDUSTRIAL DEVELOPMENT IN AMERICA’S ARCTIC

Since the discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay in 1968, North Slope development has grown from a single operational oil field to a sprawling industrial complex extending across 100 miles of America’s Arctic. Leaseholders have developed more than 30 major oil fields with more than 5,500 exploration and production wells on approximately 390 gravel pads. Connected by about 500 miles of road and 600 miles of pipeline, and supported by some 20 airstrips, various production plants, processing facilities, and refineries, this infrastructure has used in excess of 50 million cubic yards of gravel mined from North Slope rivers and tundra.

This industrial development has permanently transformed the North Slope and is projected to continue far into the future. Documented effects include displacement of wildlife, air pollution, water pollution, increased predation on bird nests by predators attracted to development, elimination of wilderness values, and the loss of significant subsistence opportunities across the coastal plain between the Canning River to the east and the Colville River to the west. Incremental industrialization is now spreading west with proposals to establish, for the first time, permanent new infrastructure on federal public lands inside the Reserve.

The Reserve: Estimated Undiscovered Oil and Gas Resources

In October 2010, the United States Geological Survey (USGS) reported a dramatically smaller assessment of oil and gas resources within the Reserve than its prior 2002 estimates. Through seismic surveys and results from more than 30 exploration wells, USGS documented an “unanticipated and abrupt transition from oil to gas just 15–20 miles west of the Alpine oil field” as well as “poor reservoir quality in key formations.”



OIL AND GAS LEASING IN AMERICA’S ARCTIC. OIL AND GAS DEVELOPMENT LEASES COVER LARGE PORTIONS OF AMERICA’S ARCTIC, BOTH ONSHORE AND IN THE ARCTIC OCEAN. THERE HAVE BEEN TEN LEASE SALES IN THE RESERVE SINCE 1982, WITH NEARLY 6.8 MILLION ACRES LEASED.

The USGS revised recoverable oil estimate is 986 million barrels; this is a tenfold reduction from its previous estimate of 10.5 billion barrels. Areas previously believed to offer the greatest oil potential “are now thought to have limited undiscovered oil potential.” USGS also revised its estimated recoverable gas from 61,352 to 52,839 billion cubic feet. Consistent with the USGS findings, there were no plans to drill exploration wells in 2011.

The Reserve provides the opportunity to balance protection of high-value habitats with the role of meeting the nation’s energy needs.



ON ALASKA’S NORTH SLOPE BETWEEN 1996 AND 2008, THERE WERE MORE THAN 5,890 SPILLS TOTALING MORE THAN 2.7 MILLION GALLONS OF TOXIC SUBSTANCES, 369,000 GALLONS OF CRUDE OIL, 122,000 GALLONS OF DRILLING MUDS, AND 1 MILLION GALLONS OF PROCESS WATER. —BROKEN PROMISES: THE REALITY OF OIL DEVELOPMENT IN AMERICA’S ARCTIC

THE WILD SIDE OF THE RESERVE

The Reserve encompasses an extraordinary diversity of large-scale, healthy ecosystems. Decades ago, Congress first recognized the importance of protecting exceptional places, such as the fish and wildlife habitats that support subsistence harvest, in addition to managing the Reserve to help meet the nation's energy needs. In 1976, Congress identified Teshekpuk Lake and the Utukok Uplands as areas with wildlife and habitat resources deserving protection. As of 2011, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) has designated four Special Areas: Teshekpuk Lake, Utukok Uplands, Colville River, and Kasegaluk Lagoon.

In 2010, the BLM initiated the first-ever comprehensive management plan for the entire Reserve to identify the proper balance between the conservation of wildlife habitat and development of oil and gas resources.



TED SWEM

KASEGALUK LAGOON SPECIAL AREA

The sheltered, shallow waters of the lagoon draw spotted and ringed seals as well as calving beluga whales. It holds critical habitat for endangered polar bears. As sea ice shrinks due to climate change, the lagoon is an increasingly important haulout for walrus. Kasegaluk Lagoon is a globally significant Important Bird Area.

COLVILLE RIVER SPECIAL AREA

The cliffs and bluffs along the Colville River and its tributaries support extraordinarily high concentrations of nesting raptors, including Peregrine Falcons, Gyrfalcons, and Rough-legged Hawks. The river supports more than 20 species of fish.



TED SWEM



GARY BRAASCH

TESHEKPUK LAKE SPECIAL AREA

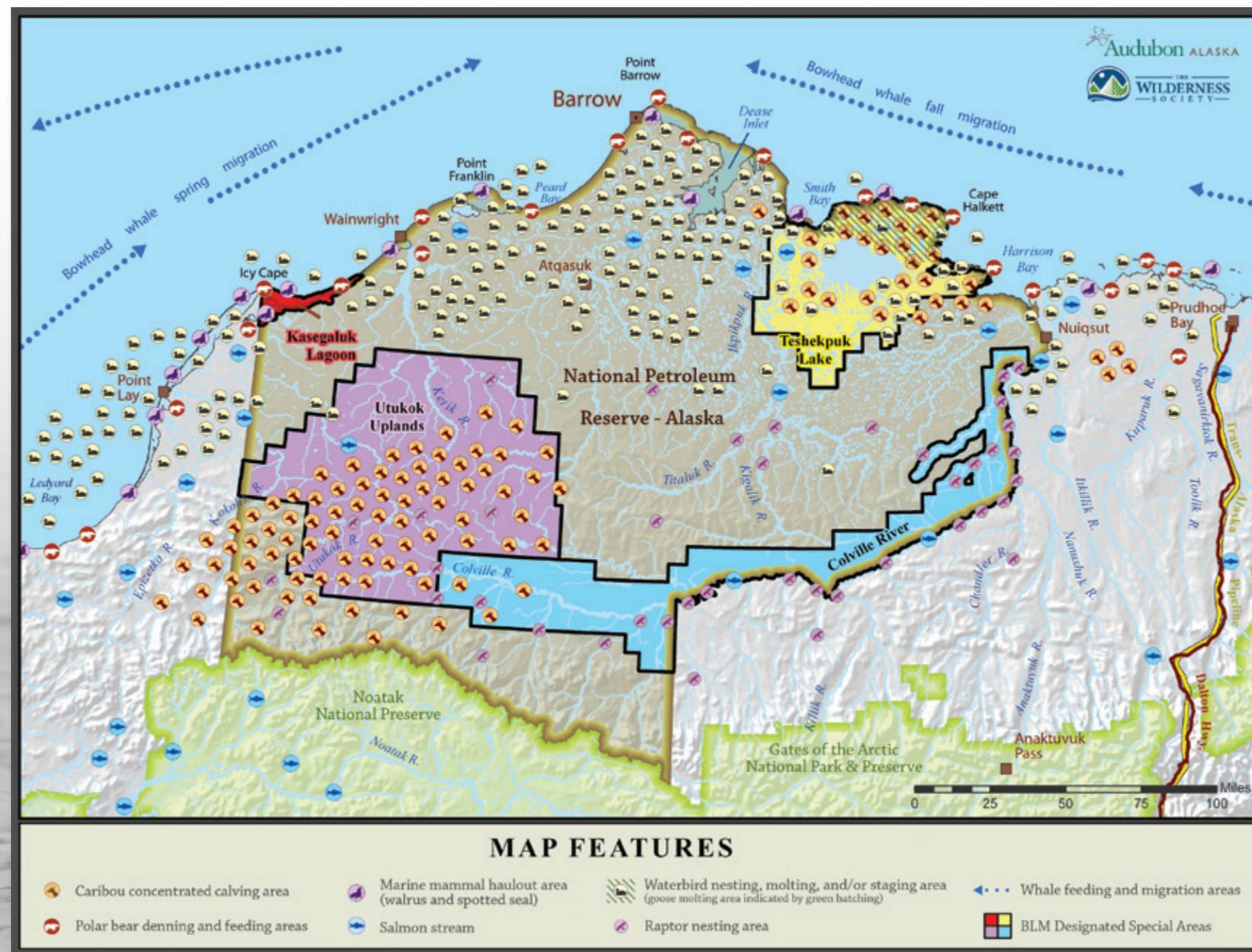
The largest freshwater lake on the North Slope, Teshekpuk Lake and the surrounding wetlands support hundreds of thousands of nesting and migrating waterfowl and shorebirds. It is an essential haven for up to 30 percent of all Pacific Black Brant when they are flightless during molting. Teshekpuk Lake is a globally significant Important Bird Area. It is also the calving ground for the 67,000-animal Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd.

UTUKOK UPLANDS SPECIAL AREA

This is the core calving area for the 348,000-animal Western Arctic Caribou Herd, one of the largest herds in the world. The Utukok Uplands provide vital habitat for predators such as grizzly bears, wolves, and an exceptionally high density of wolverines.



GERRIT VYN, THE MACAULAY LIBRARY AT THE CORNELL LABORATORY OF ORNITHOLOGY



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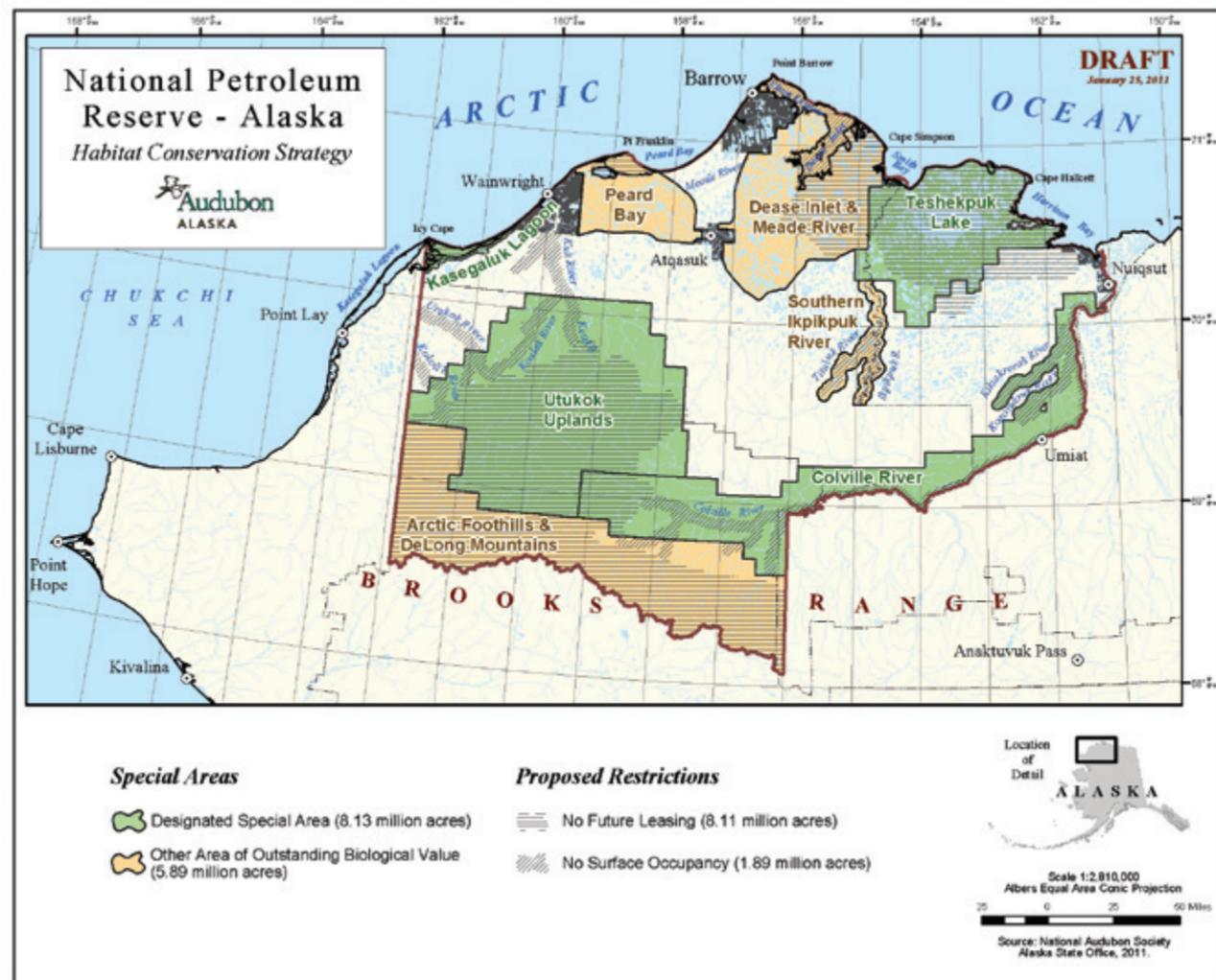
BALANCE IN THE WESTERN ARCTIC: AUDUBON'S HABITAT CONSERVATION STRATEGY

Based on a scientific analysis of wildlife habitats in the Reserve, Audubon has developed a habitat conservation strategy for protecting important wildlife values while also allowing for responsible oil and gas development. You can read the full *Habitat Conservation Strategy for the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska* (2011) on our website www.AudubonAlaska.org. Below is a summary of the main findings.

❖ Conservation of the key habitats identified in the Reserve is necessary to support healthy wildlife populations that, in turn, sustain subsistence harvest opportunities for communities in the region.

❖ Audubon has identified crucial areas that warrant protection through a variety of management designations, including no lease areas, no surface occupancy areas, and special lease stipulations (for example, seasonal activity restrictions or buffer zones surrounding key wildlife habitat).

❖ In addition to existing BLM-designated Special Areas, Audubon has identified four areas of outstanding biological value that warrant designation as new Special Areas: Peard Bay, Dease Inlet/Meade River, Southern Ikpikpuk River, and Arctic Foothills/DeLong Mountains.



AUDUBON'S MANAGEMENT RECOMMENDATIONS FOR CURRENT BLM-DESIGNATED SPECIAL AREAS AND SUGGESTED NEW SPECIAL AREAS IN THE RESERVE.

Implementing the conservation strategy will benefit a broad range of wildlife and protect subsistence opportunities for communities throughout the region, as highlighted below. Audubon's recommendations are in italics.

Caribou, Grizzly Bears, Wolves, and Wolverines

Protecting concentrated caribou calving and insect relief areas is essential to ensure the continued health of the 348,000-animal Western Arctic and the 67,000-animal Teshekpuk Lake caribou herds.

⇒ The caribou is a keystone species within the Reserve ecosystem. In addition to sustaining grizzly bears, wolves, and wolverines, more than 40 communities in northwestern Alaska depend upon the Western Arctic herd. The Teshekpuk Lake herd, which remains predominantly on the North Slope year-round, is a critically important food resource for several North Slope communities.

⇒ The National Research Council (NRC) expressed particular concern about development activities interfering with caribou migratory movements and reduced calving success due to oil field development.

⇒ Consistent with the position of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group—a wildlife management advisory group that includes subsistence users, biologists, conservation groups, and wildlife managers—Audubon recommends no further oil and gas leasing within the concentrated calving grounds and insect relief areas of the Western Arctic or Teshekpuk Lake herds.

Ice Seals, Beluga Whales, Polar Bears, and Walrus

Kasegaluk Lagoon and Peard Bay are especially important areas for marine mammals.

⇒ Kasegaluk Lagoon is a unique ecosystem that supports spotted seals, beluga whales, and walrus. Peard Bay is a concentration area for ringed, spotted, and bearded seals. Both areas include critical “no disturbance area” polar bear habitat identified by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

⇒ Both Kasegaluk Lagoon and Peard Bay are important for subsistence uses. Audubon recommends designation as no lease areas.

Waterfowl, Shorebirds, and Raptors

The wetlands across the coastal plain of the Reserve provide vital habitat for millions of waterfowl, seabirds, and shorebirds. The bluffs and cliffs along the Ikpikpuk River and the Colville River and its tributaries host an extraordinary concentration of nesting raptors.

⇒ Wetlands along the Reserve's coastal plain support important nesting of threatened Steller's and Spectacled Eiders.

⇒ The Teshekpuk Lake area is a globally significant Important Bird Area for Yellow-billed Loons, Pacific Brant, Long-billed Dowitchers, Semipalmated Sandpipers, Pectoral Sandpipers, Dunlins, Stilt Sandpipers, Red Phalaropes, American Golden-Plovers, and Black-bellied Plovers. It includes the largest goose molting area in the Arctic, which supports up to 30 percent of the Pacific Brant population.

⇒ Audubon recommends no leasing around Teshekpuk Lake. Future activities in the Dease Inlet/Meade River and Peard Bay areas should be subject to special stipulations to prevent impacts to their outstanding waterbird values.

⇒ Consistent with a raptor specialist panel convened by the BLM, the Audubon strategy recommends no surface development along rivers with concentrations of Peregrine Falcons, Gyrfalcons, Rough-legged Hawks, and Golden Eagles.

Continued Subsistence Harvest

Implementation of Audubon's recommendations would protect healthy wildlife populations essential to continued subsistence harvest opportunities in the Reserve.

⇒ Audubon recommends no surface development of oil and gas facilities along historic subsistence routes in the western Reserve to maintain connectivity between the Utukok Uplands caribou grounds and coastal communities.



THE FUTURE OF AMERICA'S WESTERN ARCTIC

Decades of sprawling oil and gas development on Alaska's North Slope have permanently transformed significant portions of America's Arctic. Impacts include displacement of wildlife, air pollution, land and water pollution from oil spills, the loss of significant subsistence hunting opportunities, and elimination of wilderness values across a substantial part of the coastal plain.

Industrialization on the North Slope is now spreading west, encroaching on some of the most valuable wildlife habits in North America within the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (Reserve). The Reserve is the largest public land management unit in the United States and an area with extraordinary biological resources deserving protection. This includes two large caribou herds; healthy predator populations; abundant marine mammals; and millions of migratory birds, including exceptionally high densities of nesting raptors.

For decades, Congress has recognized the importance of protecting special areas and wildlife habitat values within the Reserve. Audubon is working to ensure balanced management of the Reserve. This should include maximum protection of the area's exceptional biological values while also allowing for responsible oil and gas development.

Based on the best available science, Audubon recommends a combination of large tracts of no lease, no surface occupancy, and specialized restrictions in specific areas to ensure the Reserve's internationally important habitats and significant populations of migratory birds, caribou, and marine mammals continue to thrive.

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For more information or copies of this special report, please contact:

Audubon Alaska
441 West Fifth Avenue – Suite 300
Anchorage, Alaska 99501
www.AudubonAlaska.org

FRONT COVER PHOTO CREDITS:
TED SWEM (SPECTACLED EIDER)
LIZ LABUNSKI, USFWS (BEARDED SEAL)
DAVE SHREFFLER (GRIZZLY)
STEVE ZACK (CARIBOU)