

Views needed on ANWR

The U.S. Congress will be making a critical decision this year on whether to open the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas exploration and development.

The Coastal Plain of the refuge — known as ANWR — has been described by many industry and business interests as having the best potential of any frontier region in the United State for major new oil discoveries. Some of them say the potential may even have the magnitude of Prudhoe Bay.

When Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act in 1980, it designated nearly half of the 18-million-acre ANWR as "wilderness," the most restrictive of federal land classifications.

The key issue today is whether the 1.5-million-acre Coastal Plain should be designated as wilderness.

Among those who have come out against a wilderness designation for the Coastal Plain are industry officials, as well as the Arctic Slope Regional Corp., which represents 3,700 Eskimo shareholders.

Environmentalists, not surprisingly, are arguing that the refuge must be preserved as an inviolate wilderness.

The resulting polarization of each side makes it difficult to assess this issue, and we fear that members of Congress will have a hard time finding a middle ground. We must remember that most of our national senators and representatives have no real concept of Alaska.

We feel strongly that the most important thing to keep in mind in this debate is the people of the North Slope region and other areas of the Arctic. Many of these people depend on the wildlife of the area for subsistence, and these resources must be protected.

The people should be given adequate consideration in any decision.

We hope that in the next several months our readers will take the time to write us letters on this important subject and express their views on the issue.

There are many voices that are not now being heard. Those who do write to us — and whose comments are published as letters to the editor, guest editorials and columns — will not be among them.

A NOTE TO OUR SUBSCRIBERS

We are mailing out the second notice to all subscribers whose subscriptions expired on or before Dec. 31, 1986. We are allowing a period of time for those subscribers to remit payment in order to avoid having their names and addresses deleted from the subscription masterfile on Jan. 30.

Those who note an inaccurate expiration date on their mailing labels should feel free to contact us and let us know so we can adjust our records accordingly.

Thank you for your assistance and continued support.