

# Commentary

## The case against opening ANWR

by Frank Keim

Soon the Porcupine caribou herd will begin moving north to its calving grounds on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. They will cross high mountain passes and swiftly moving rivers filled with thick chunks of floating ice. Some of the caribou will drown while swimming these rivers; many more will fall to the hunters who depend on them for their subsistence food. But most of the 80,000 females who started the migration will reach their goal and give birth to their calves. And the majority of these will survive, thanks to the unique characteristics of this marvelous wilderness region.

It saddens me to think that some day the Porcupine caribou and myriad other species who inhabit the coastal plain may no longer have this crucial area to call their home. For if the Arctic Power Company and global oil corporations they represent have their way, the coastal plain will be converted into a Prudhoe Bay-style industrial complex that will benefit only the bottom line of the oil giants. And caribou, especially females, don't like to be around these places to bear their offspring because they're so terribly noisy and polluted.

Is this what we Alaskans really want for what amounts to be one of the world's last great wildernesses? I don't think so. In spite of detractors such as Don Young and his friends at Arctic Power who speak of the coastal plain as a "wasteland" and favor its immediate massive development, I am convinced that if the majority of Alaskans were presented with a truthful account of the issue by the mainstream media, they would decide, as I have, that we should leave this national treasure untouched so that future generations of our children may visit what by then may be the only true wilderness left in the United States.

I think it's unfortunate that so much of the discussion surrounding development of the Arctic Refuge coastal plain revolves around money. We are constantly reminded by the oil giants and their politician apologists that oil greases 85% of our state's budget and that our Permanent Fund Dividends depend upon this imputed largesse of the oil companies. It somehow escapes the majority of the public that the oil does not even belong to these global corporations. It belongs to us, the public. Through our elected representatives, we simply allow the companies the privilege of extracting the oil and selling it on

the market at an immense profit. What we, the people, get from this crude stuff is only a small tax and a 12.5% royalty share.

The corporations threaten us by saying they'll withdraw from the state if they aren't given more favorable terms or are not allowed to develop areas such as the Arctic Refuge coastal plain. They tell us in somber tones that if we don't develop this area, the flow of oil through the pipeline will trickle to a halt. They fail to mention recent estimates from industry consultants that predict oil flow, even without Refuge inputs, will be higher in the year 2005 than it is now (and this without government incentives to the industry).

To the claim that we need the oil as a national security hedge because of our low oil reserves, there have been valid counter claims recently reported in the Anchorage Daily News that American reserves are in fact twice what we had been told they were.

On another tack, for those of us who are concerned about putting the squeeze on our prodigal ways, then look at it this way. We cannot afford to develop the coastal plain because it would simply allow us to continue along the same old road of our profligate

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gate waste, irresponsibility and corruption. Jay Hammond correctly pointed out the irony of it all last year when he stated that if our politicians hadn't abused our oil revenues from the start, we would today have ample savings in the Permanent Fund alone to provide for our state's needs in perpetuity. Non-development of

this area might therefore nudge us closer to wiser use of the taxes on the oil we have left in Alaska.

Further, if we have even an inkling of regard for the availability to future generations of oil as both an efficient energy source and a raw material for the manufacture of valuable consumer items, this may be another good reason not to develop the coastal plain. In effect, preservation of this area could contribute to both curtailment of our use of fossil fuels and the promotion of development of alternative energy sources. Which would, as a consequence, just happen to make this black goo available for Alaskans later on when the rest of the world is bankrupt of the precious stuff and most certainly there will be superior technology to develop it.

In a recent and very poignant editorial, Jan Konigsberg told us that Alaska's love affair with oil has not resulted in a better society but in one of civic and politi-

cal cynicism, increased crime and a "dumbing down" of our population. As a 34 year Alaskan, I've been here long enough to know he is absolutely correct. Perhaps by not developing the Arctic Refuge coastal plain, we could begin to reverse this trend.

I just returned from a trip to California where I was reminded of the development mistakes I believe most Alaskans would like not to repeat up here in God's country. It is a reality, however, that there are rich and powerful corporations and their jaded political servants who would happily see us repeat these mistakes. After all, it would make their shareholders and CEO's an increment richer. And once again, Alaska would be raped and pillaged of its treasures and part of its unsurpassable beauty. We cannot allow this to happen. We must draw our line in the tundra, and let it be at the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.