

**Congress of the United States**  
**Washington, DC 20515**

September 16, 2024

The Honorable Deb Haaland  
Secretary  
Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

The Honorable Tracy Stone-Manning  
Director  
Bureau of Land Management  
1849 C Street, NW  
Washington, DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland and Director Stone-Manning,

In response to the Bureau of Land Management’s July 12, 2024 request for feedback on its management of protected areas in the Western Arctic, we ask you to look at expanding and providing new protections to additional areas of the 23.4 million-acre reserve. Additionally, it is important to ensure that significant surface values within these areas are maximally safeguarded from disruption and use a science- and traditional knowledge-based approach that includes Tribal co-stewardship. The myriad of unique ecosystems, sensitive habitats, and iconic species within the Western Arctic must be prioritized and protected from the impacts of oil and gas development. As the largest unit of public land in the country, management decisions for the Western Arctic play an incredibly important role in supporting conservation, climate, and Alaska Native culture.

The Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act (NPRPA) requires that the Department of Interior provide maximum protection for areas with important fish and wildlife, cultural, conservation, biodiversity, subsistence, and other values, known as Special Areas.<sup>1</sup> The Department designated the first Special Areas—recognizing the importance of the Utukok River Uplands, Teshekpuk Lake, and the Colville River—in the 1970s and has added more areas and protections since then, including for Peard Bay and Kasegaluk Lagoon.

In April 2024, the Biden-Harris administration expanded protections for and supported subsistence uses for Alaska Native communities on 13 million acres of iconic landscapes in five Special Areas within the Western Arctic (National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska). The July 12, 2024 request for information provides a new opportunity to consult with Indigenous leaders, scientists, and the public to review whether additional areas of the Western Arctic deserve new or expanded protections. The April 2024 rule recognized the Department’s authority to engage in co-stewardship with Tribes; we strongly encourage you to seek opportunities for meaningful partnerships and engagement with Tribes for any new or expanded protected areas.

Congress long ago recognized that management decisions for the Western Arctic deeply affect the people and species who call this place home, and, accordingly, provided the Department with the ability to designate Special Areas in the region. These protections ensure that the species that rely on the Western Arctic can continue to thrive in a changing climate and

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<sup>1</sup> 42 U.S.C. § 6501 et seq.

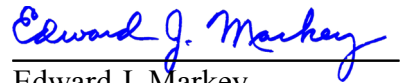
sustain the communities that rely on them for survival. This opportunity to take a renewed look at needed protections is especially timely, as the effects of climate change in the Arctic—from declining sea ice, permafrost thaw, and record temperatures—are felt more acutely than ever before and new extractive development encroaches more and more into important habitat and subsistence areas. Caribou herds, migratory birds, polar bears, brown bears, walruses, and beluga whales all depend upon the ecosystem of the Western Arctic, and all deserve the highest level of protection to limit the impacts of development.

Thank you, and we appreciate your ongoing work to ensure America’s Arctic is protected both now and for the future.

Sincerely,



Jared Huffman  
Member of Congress



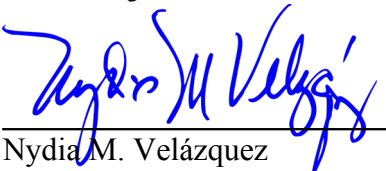
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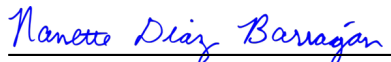
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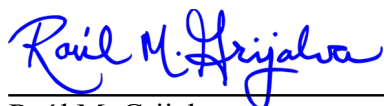
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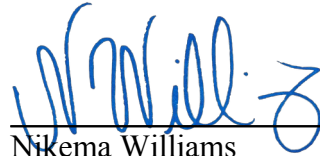
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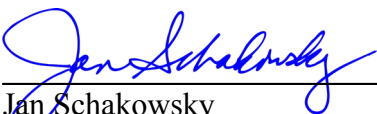
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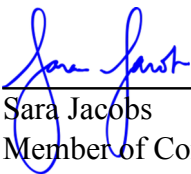
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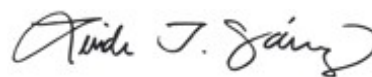
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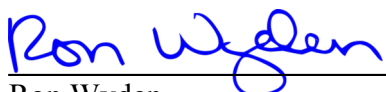
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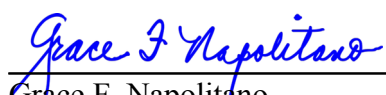
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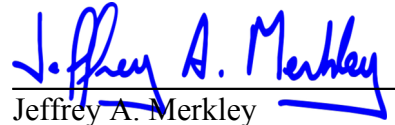
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