

ALASKA CENTER FOR THE ENVIRONMENT

ALASKA CONSERVATION ALLIANCE

ALASKA WILDERNESS LEAGUE * EYAK PRESERVATION
COUNCIL [AK]

FRIENDS OF THE EARTH * MOVEON.ORG * MINERAL POLICY
CENTER

NATIONAL WILDLIFE FEDERATION * NORTHERN ALASKA
ENVIRONMENTAL CENTER * PUBLIC EMPLOYEES FOR
ENVIRONMENTAL RESPONSIBILITY

SIERRA CLUB * US PIRG

Senator Joseph Lieberman

United States Senate

Washington, DC 20510

October 25, 2001

Dear Chairman Lieberman:

It appears that Interior Secretary Gale Norton has substantially altered the biological findings of the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (FWS) in an official letter to a Congressional committee, and did so to manipulate the Senate's debate on oil development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. If true, this distortion of facts provided by agency staff constitutes a serious breach of ethics for a cabinet-level appointee that raises issues of concern within the jurisdiction of the Governmental Affairs Committee.

Last May, Senator Frank Murkowski, then Chair of the Energy & Natural Resources Committee, wrote Secretary Norton to ask for her Department's official assessment of the impacts of oil drilling on the Porcupine caribou herd in the Arctic Refuge. Secretary Norton tasked FWS, the agency responsible for the Refuge, with developing answers to those questions. The resulting FWS findings were transmitted to the Secretary's office. However, Norton's official reply to Senator Murkowski on July 11 was markedly different from the scientific input she had received from FWS. (See both letters and summary attached). The Secretary ignored crucial pieces of FWS data that argue against drilling within the refuge and even inserted new numbers favoring drilling.

In response to inquiries from the *Washington Post*, Interior spokesperson Mark Pfeifle stated that Norton took the new numbers from a peer reviewed caribou study in the *Wildlife Society Bulletin* concluding that oil development has little impact on

caribou. In fact the study was not formally peer reviewed but did acknowledge the oil company BP Exploration for its "encouragement, funding, and useful comments..."

During her confirmation hearings last year, Secretary Norton pledged to "provide [Congress] the best scientific evaluation of the environmental consequences...[of] any exploration and production" in the Refuge. The contradictions between the scientific findings of the FWS and the dramatically different information presented to Congress in Secretary Norton's July 11 letter seem to conflict with this oath.

The undersigned groups respectfully request an investigation by your Governmental Affairs Committee into the possible ethical and legal implications of the discrepancies between these letters with regard to the porcupine caribou herd's use of the Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain.

Sincerely,

Alaska Center for the Environment

Randy Virgin, Executive Director

Alaska Conservation Alliance

Kevin Harun, Executive Director

Alaska Wilderness League

Cindy Shogun, Executive Director

Eyak Preservation Council [AK]

Carol Hoover

Friends of the Earth

Erich Pica, Economic Policy Analyst

MoveOn.org

Peter Schurman, Executive Director

Mineral Policy Center

Lexi Shultz, Legislative Director

National Wildlife Federation

Pamela E. Goddard, Senior Grassroots Outreach Manager

Northern Alaska Environmental Center

Arthur Hussey, Executive Director

Public Employees for Environmental Responsibility

Eric Wingerter, National Field Director

Sierra Club

Melanie Griffin, Director of Public Lands

US PIRG

Athan Manuel, Arctic Wilderness Campaign Director