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Protecting the Western Arctic

Application Date	5/31/2024		
Applying Organization	Alaska Wilderness League	Grant Type	Member Directed
Requested Amount	\$50,000.00	Project Name	Protecting the Western Arctic
Contact Name	Chris Konish	Project Location (State or Territory)	AK
Contact Title	Senior Director of Development	Project State/Province	AK
Contact Email Address	chris@alaskawild.org	Project Multiple Locations	
Notes		Status	Submitted
		Created By	Chris Konish, 5/23/2024, 12:31 PM

Organization Details

Organization Name	Alaska Wilderness League	Annual Operating Budget	\$3,240,000.00
Applying Contact	Chris Konish	Tax Status/Organization Type	501c3 Organization
Staff Size	15	Main Phone	2025445205
Total Membership	190,000	Website Address	https://alaskawild.org/
BIPOC-led	No	Address	122 C Street Northwest, Ste 650 Washington, District of Columbia 20001 United States
C-Suite Staff			

Proposal Questions

1. Purpose/History Of Organization	Alaska Wilderness League was founded 31 years ago, to make certain that Alaska's public lands receive the attention they deserve from federal decisionmakers. Going back to our first days as an organization, the foundation of our work has always been strengthening and maintaining partnerships. Key to this is standing with and elevating the voices of our Indigenous allies, while we build and support a network of networks – including outdoor brands, faith and	2. Final Success	The Secretary of the Interior expands protections for existing Special Areas in the Western Arctic and designates new Special Areas, adding at least two million acres of new protections for biodiversity, subsistence, recreation and other sustainable uses.
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climate groups, sportsmen, veteran organizations and other affinity groups – to ensure that all allies for Alaska’s public lands know how they can make a difference.

Our vision is that Alaska's wild landscapes endure to support vibrant communities and abundant wildlife, and we work to achieve that through our mission of protecting Alaska's wild lands and waters by inspiring broad support for federal policy action.

3. Location Details

The National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska (Western Arctic), is our nation’s largest single unit of public land, spanning nearly 23 million acres (roughly the size of Indiana) across Alaska’s North Slope. Originally established 100 years ago as a petroleum reserve for the US Navy, management was transferred to the Department of Interior in 1976, under a law that provides for some development but also “maximum protection” for areas of extraordinary ecological significance.

The Western Arctic has been recognized for globally significant habitat that sustains extraordinary biodiversity, including migratory birds, large caribou herds, the threatened polar bear, walrus, beluga whales and more. The Iñupiat have inhabited this region for thousands of years, and subsistence activities from the lands and waters of the Western Arctic support more than 40 communities today.

Fortunately, Congress charged the Department of Interior to provide “maximum protections” for areas that hold these unique values, through the administration designating “Special Areas.” Today, five unique landscapes - the Teshekpuk Lake, Colville River, Kasegaluk Lagoon, Utukok River Uplands and Peard Bay Special Areas – have some level of protections as designated Special Areas (an official term unique to this landscape). Additionally, a recent regulatory process strengthened how DOI manages these Special Areas for conservation purposes, including an outright prohibition of leasing on 10.8 million acres. Finally, this new regulation envisions Special Area review once every ten years, where additional geographically specific protections will be considered across the entire landscape.

In June, we expect the launch of this new Special Area process. It provides a durable mechanism to designate millions of acres of new protections, along with the first chance in over a decade to review whether specific protections in existing Special Areas are sufficient to

4. Strategy & Timeline For Final Success

In spring 2023, when President Biden approved the Willow project, the administration acknowledged the climate movement backlash and the importance of better protecting biodiversity in the region by launching a review of Special Area protections in the Western Arctic. This review resulted in the release of a strengthened draft rule in September 2023 and a final rule in April 2024 that better defines how Special Area protections should be administered. When these new regulations go into effect in June of this year, there will be an outright prohibition on new leasing on 10.8 million acres of the Western Arctic, and stronger requirements of agency action to mitigate or prevent any adverse effects from oil and gas activities. In addition, and perhaps of most importance to our goal of securing lasting, durable protections, this new rule includes a defined timeline for the agency to review and create new Special Areas in the decades to come.

The next year will be highly proactive for us, as we aim to increase the number of acres that are protected in the Western Arctic through Special Areas. The regulations that were finalized in April include the announcement of a new public process, which we expect to begin in the next few weeks to consider new areas for additional protections, along with expanded protections for existing Special Areas. New areas could be millions of acres in size, and focused on preserving biodiversity, recreational opportunities, clean air/lands/waters and subsistence access for nearby local communities. Our advocacy will help the administration gather necessary feedback and enthusiasm for Special Areas over the summer, for potential action late this year or early next by the Secretary.

While we will not know exactly the parameters of this public process until it begins, likely in June or July, we know that it will require activating our base and our partners to show support for expanded Special Areas by providing public comment. We will also need to demonstrate through science and

protect biodiversity and sustainable human uses, along with any needed changes. This process can result in meaningful limitations on expanded oil and gas industrialization, across the frontlines of where industry is eyeing new projects in Alaska. Our work in the next year will be to elevate biological hotspots and areas that are important for recreation and subsistence, so that proper limitations on future oil and gas development can then be applied through secretarial action as soon as late this year.

Indigenous knowledge why certain areas are worthy of stronger protection. With our partners who specialize in science and technical work, today we are helping to jumpstart the creation of a conservation proposal for the administration that will identify several million acres for additional protections; the exact number of acres can be provided to The Conservation Alliance when the technical report is complete during the summer of 2024. Over the past year, we have secured recent coalition meetings with the administration on this topic and we will continue to lead this effort, urging bold action by the start of 2025 through this process.

When a "Request for Information" is launched by the administration this summer, we will need to spearhead a large-scale public engagement push to make certain new protections make President Biden's list for priority action by the end of his first term. For months, our membership and congressional champs received regular updates highlighting the resources and values that existing Special Areas help to protect today, including when we celebrated the final rule announcement in April. In that way, the pumps are primed for our member and supporter base to engage in this process, and we are ready to empower congressional champions as well in the push for new and better protected Special Areas.

To ensure a holistic campaign with our closest partners, we are leading an Arctic Defense Campaign strategy meeting with a key set of decisionmakers from partner organizations – including The Wilderness Society, Earthjustice, Trustees for Alaska, Sierra Club and Environment America, among others – to outline how national elevation/partnerships, communications, federal advocacy, corporate, and in-Alaska subgroup activities can all be deployed during and after the Request for Information this summer. To ensure that the administration is poised to act on new area proposals late this fall or early next winter, we will remain focused on keeping advocacy strong through the late summer and fall.

While a lot may change in years to come depending on who controls the White House, this campaign has a route to success prior to the final day of President Biden's first term in office. If there is not a second term, the regulations provide an avenue for the Secretary to designate new Special Areas swiftly at the end of the year. Furthermore, given the specifics of how the recent Western Arctic regulations were crafted, any new Special Area

protections have some durability, even during a potential change in administration. If, on the other hand, we get a second term with President Biden in the White House, this initial Request for Information process could provide the foundation for more robust scientific review of the region, to set up even bolder and stronger protections that we can advocate for through 2025 for action later that year.

5. Key Decision Makers

Our main targets in this campaign include the current administration – namely President Biden and Secretary Haaland – along with high level BLM staff based in Washington, D.C. Thanks to the previous three and a half years of advocacy around Willow and restoring the 2013 Integrated Activities Plan, we have a solid handle on the correct channels and contacts to influence these decision makers. Our approach will continue to include a variety of paid and earned media tactics, lobbying and grassroots/membership engagement all designed to show public interest in expanded Arctic protections through early 2025.

A key element of our approach includes working in partnership with others to achieve our collective aims. As the sponsor and a cochair of the recently revitalized Arctic Defense Campaign, we help design and lead strategy that engages a network of national, in-Alaska and constituency led groups that share a vision for stronger Arctic Refuge and Western Arctic land and water protections. This Special Area process will be one of the key priorities for this collaborative effort, and funding from The Conservation Alliance will ensure we've got the necessary resources to lead and participate in tactics during the year ahead.

7. Measurable On-Ground Outcomes

1. By 2025, millions of acres of new protections are added to Special Areas in the Western Arctic. The exact acreage will be available upon the scientific report's conclusion in summer 2024.
2. The new Special Area process includes stronger protections within the 13 million acres of existing Special Areas, including more restrictions on existing oil and gas activities and leases.
3. The Biden administration's return to the 2013 Integrated Activities Plan for the Western Arctic and the Special Area regulation, as finalized in June 2024, is protected.
4. Congressional attacks on recent administrative actions – like the "Alaska's Right to Produce Act" (H.R. 6385) – are defeated. (We understand that no TCA funds can be used on lobbying, and provide this for background only.)

6. Elevate Voices

As a co-chair of the Arctic Defense Campaign, we continue to make space and elevate projects like the Imago Initiative, spearheaded by The Wilderness Society, in Arctic coalition activities. This effort, which aims to strengthen Indigenous leadership in shaping and achieving conservation outcomes, is helping to inform the proposed conservation proposal for new Special Area protections in the upcoming administrative process. Furthermore, we plan to lend our support for and to elevate any in-region led proposals for stronger Special Area protections, drafted by partner organizations like Sovereign Inupiat for a Living Arctic and other Indigenous leaders from communities like Nuiqsut, during the year ahead.

Historically, we have supported fly-ins and administrative meetings for leaders like Rosemary Ahtuanguaruak, former mayor of Nuiqsut and the founder of a new organization Grandmothers Growing Goodness, on Arctic issues. We will continue to assist with federal advocacy tactics, as requested by our Indigenous partners throughout this Special Area process.

8. Evaluate Your Progress

Outcomes 1 and 2 can be achieved with the lay of the land we have now, even if President Biden doesn't return for a second term next year. In that scenario, we will evaluate our progress by whether we succeed in securing additional Special Areas by the end of his time in the White House. If President Biden has a second term in office, his administration may opt to pursue a longer process to create new Special areas. If that is the case, we will judge our progress in the next year by whether new protections are on track for action later in 2025.

We also expect new and expanded Special Area protections to address the pressing threat of development on existing leases in the eastern part of the National Petroleum Reserve - Alaska. Our advocacy will push for protections

across the Western Arctic, and a full success requires the administration to protect lands under imminent threat, along to areas that could be subject to future oil and gas leasing.

9. TCA Funding Plan We will utilize funds from The Conservation Alliance to cover a portion of staffing costs associated with this campaign. No lobbying will be supported with funds from The Conservation Alliance.

10. JEDI Efforts and Impact

The League recognizes that threats to the environment have greater effects on marginalized communities, and until the conservation movement is more just, equitable and inclusive of all people, we cannot truly secure a safer, healthier and sustainable environment for future generations. We also recognize that Alaska’s federally protected public lands originated as Indigenous lands and today still experience the impacts of colonialism. We are committed to deepening our understanding of this history to create a brighter and more inclusive future for the conservation movement.

Over the past year, we have held all staff discussions on justice, equity, diversity and inclusion (JEDI) topics at least once per month. We have completed the Green 2.0 report for several years now, and we have continued to update our hiring processes and internal policies. Our Board created a JEDI working group and retained a consultant for training and to develop a plan for meeting long term JEDI goals.

11. Confidential Items While this proposal is not written for general public distribution, it is fine to share with member company employees as a part of the ballot process.

Other Relevant Application Details

