



REGIONAL REPORT  
**ALASKA**

**A**laska is warming faster than the rest of the planet. The state now contends with record-high temperatures, thawing permafrost, and other consequences of a rapidly warming climate. Rather than face these problems, the federal government seems set on dragging Alaska backward by propping up the same destructive industries that have long threatened Alaska's environment. Earthjustice works to defend Alaska's ecosystems from these threats in partnership with local communities. This day-in, day-out work is made possible by supporters like you. Thank you for joining us in the fight to protect the only Arctic region in our country and the communities and species that will always call Alaska home.

### Ending Reliance on Last Century's Fuel

Today, modern renewable energy sources are some of the cheapest, cleanest ways to generate power. They're also essential if we are to slow climate change. Yet federal leaders are doubling down on obsolete fossil fuels. To extract and produce more oil and gas, they have set their sights on the north.

Above: Two polar bears on Barter Island in the Beaufort Sea. Reimar Gaertner / Getty Images

### In This Report



**PAGE 2**

Taking on the Trump administration



**PAGE 3**

Spotlight: national wildlife refuges



**PAGE 4**

Mining at the border of Canada and the U.S.



**PAGE 5**

The dangers of massive trawl nets



**PAGE 5**

The ongoing fight to protect the Tongass

On his first day back in office last year, President Trump issued an Alaska-focused executive order aimed at maximizing industrial development and increasing production of oil and gas in the Arctic. In support of this agenda, the Republican-led Congress passed the so-called One Big Beautiful Bill Act, the budget bill for the administration's priorities. This big ugly law includes requirements for the U.S. government to hold lease sales for large tracts of Alaska's Western Arctic and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — areas that Earthjustice has defended for decades. Private companies that secure a lease will extract fossil fuels from these public lands. But we cannot afford more oil extraction: The U.S. is already producing more crude oil than any country in history, and it's taking us backward in the fight against climate change. For as long as profit-driven interests try to keep Alaska's energy sector stuck in the past, we, our clients, and partners will fight back.

**Western Arctic.** In February 2026, we sued to challenge the Trump administration's decision to open over 80% of the Western Arctic to oil leasing and to schedule a lease sale in one of the most important and sensitive areas in the Arctic, Teshekpuk Lake. The region is a globally important area for birds that migrate there every summer from around the planet to feed, nest, and raise their young. It's also home to a caribou herd irreplaceable in its own right and vital to the subsistence culture of Alaska Natives who have lived in the Arctic for millennia.

#### EARTHJUSTICE CLIENTS

*Center for Biological Diversity and Friends of the Earth*

**Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.** In addition to the threats to the Western Arctic, the Trump administration also adopted a maximum-oil drilling program for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in October 2025. This is the largest wildlife refuge in the nation and one of our country's most ecologically important places. It's home to the Porcupine Caribou Herd, denning



*Peter Hoey for Earthjustice*

polar bears, musk oxen, wolves, and more than 200 species of migratory birds. Residents of Alaska Native villages who are part of the Gwich'in Nation are also spiritually and culturally tied to the health of the caribou and the land.

The Trump administration is now offering all 1.56 million acres of the refuge's Coastal Plain for oil and gas leasing. In response, we and our clients have sued to challenge the program, arguing it violates the National Environmental Policy Act, Endangered Species Act, and the Refuge Act, among others. The project's approval provides a faulty analysis that dismisses harms that increased drilling would have on federally protected Southern Beaufort Sea polar bears.

#### EARTHJUSTICE CLIENTS

*Center for Biological Diversity, Friends of the Earth, and Natural Resources Defense Council, which is both our co-counsel and a client for this matter.*



## UNCOMMON GROUND: THE NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE SYSTEM

Stretching across 850 million acres, the U.S. National Wildlife Refuge System is the largest network of conservation lands and waters in the world. Its vast footprint is about 10 times the size of the U.S. National Park System. And like the park system, the National Wildlife Refuge System also consists of public lands managed by the federal government. But the refuge system's primary purpose is special among U.S. public lands: The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service states that "[w]ildlife conservation drives everything on national wildlife refuges, from the purposes for which each refuge was established, to the recreational activities offered, to the resource management tools used." The National Wildlife

Refuge System represents an enduring national commitment to protecting America's wildlife, fish, and plant species. Since 1903, presidential administrations and members of Congress have worked with environmental advocates to designate more than 570 units in the refuge system — at least one in every state and territory. Americans across generations, income levels, and political parties have cared, and continue to care, about our nation's public lands. In an era of extreme polarization, the refuge system is a testament to our shared values and to the kind of world that we continue to strive toward.

**Above: The Porcupine Caribou herd on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.** Florian Schulz / [protecttheartctic.org](http://protecttheartctic.org)

## Slowing a Reckless Gold Rush

After the discovery of gold in Alaska in the late 1800s, tens of thousands of prospectors flocked to the state. Today, mining companies continue to seek out gold while putting Alaska at risk of devastating harm. While Alaskans must live with the threat of mining waste that can poison nearby water sources, most wealth generated by gold mining will flow into the pockets of a small group of investors and distant urban communities.

While gold is just one of the minerals targeted by industry in Alaska, it's emblematic of the immense danger posed by mining.

**Donlin gold mine.** If built, the Donlin mine would be one of the world's largest gold mines. It would also produce at least 568 million tons of toxic mining waste that must be held by a dam 40 stories tall. A dam failure could be catastrophic. It could poison the Kuskokwim River, a vital waterway that is central to the livelihoods and traditional ways of



An open-pit copper and gold mine in British Columbia, Canada. Garth Lenz / The Narwhal / CC BY-NC-SA 2.0

the provincial government of British Columbia is authorizing upriver gold mines without consulting with these Tribes or seeking their consent.

We are representing a consortium of Tribes in an international case to uphold the rights of Indigenous peoples to protect their traditional territory from toxic mining pollution. Most recently, Earthjustice helped support our client in collecting nearly 30,000 messages urging British Columbia lawmakers to pause the permitting of massive mining developments. We will continue to fight alongside them for as long as it takes.

life for Alaska Natives in the region. Last year, a court ordered the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and the Bureau of Land Management to redo analyses that grossly underestimated the risk of potential dam failure.

In January 2026, the Army Corps announced that it will complete this environmental review to consider a larger dam spill, as ordered by the court. But the Army Corps also decided to only offer a short initial window for public comment. It may also finish its new review before project developers share updated plans — which may include building an even larger mine. Alongside our clients, we continue to oppose this shortsighted project.

#### EARTHJUSTICE CLIENTS

*Orutsararmit Native Council, Native Village of Eek, Native Village of Kwigillingok, Organized Village of Kwethluk, Chevak Native Village, and Tuluksak Native Community*

**Mining at the British Columbia-Alaska border.** In Canada, where gold mining is recklessly under-regulated, there are at least eight proposed or operating mines along rivers that flow into Alaska. These rivers are part of watersheds that have sustained Southeast Alaska Native communities' fisheries and cultural practices for millennia. Yet

#### EARTHJUSTICE CLIENTS

*Southeast Alaska Indigenous Transboundary Commission*

#### Fighting for the Future of Salmon

**Trawl fishing.** In the Bering Sea and waters off the Aleutian Islands, enormous trawl fishing boats drag nets as large as a football field underwater. While targeting pollock, they also inadvertently catch thousands of Chinook salmon and hundreds of thousands of chum salmon each year. Meanwhile, Alaska's salmon populations are collapsing and Tribes in western Alaska face severe and sustained restrictions on subsistence salmon fishing. This includes a moratorium through 2030 on fishing for Chinook in the Yukon River.

**Our people are suffering without salmon as the agencies responsible for protecting our natural resources have stood back and watched the devastation unfold.**

- Vivian Korthuis, Association of Village Council Presidents CEO

Despite the severe impacts on Alaska Native communities, the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS) continues to prioritize maximizing

the catch of pollock and other groundfish. On behalf of our clients, we challenged NMFS' use of nearly 20-year-old environmental studies to set groundfish catch limits.

In March 2025, a judge ruled that NMFS can continue to rely on the outdated studies. We have appealed this decision, and the fight to help our clients defend their way of life is far from done.

### EARTHJUSTICE CLIENTS

*Association of Village Council Presidents and Tanana Chiefs Conference.*

*Collectively, they work on behalf of nearly 100 Tribes and communities in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and interior Alaska.*

**Seafloor habitats.** When a trawl net scrapes the seafloor, it damages and dramatically changes ocean habitats. Deep-sea coral and sponge ecosystems, some of which are hundreds of years old, can be destroyed by just one pass of a weighted trawl net. And the consequences of this damage ripple outward: Fish, including salmon, and other marine life lose habitats needed to spawn, feed, and take shelter from predators.

Our client Oceana submitted proposals in 2023 and 2025 that would protect 90% of the Gulf of Alaska from bottom trawl impacts while displacing a minimal amount of trawl activity. But the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and NMFS elected to take no conservation actions. In 2024, we filed a lawsuit arguing that NMFS failed to meet its legal obligations to protect corals, sponges, and seafloor habitats from bottom trawling. A federal court dismissed our lawsuit, but in December 2025, we filed notice that we will appeal that decision.

### EARTHJUSTICE CLIENT

*Oceana*



**Massive industrial trawl boats tow nets as large as a football field behind them.**

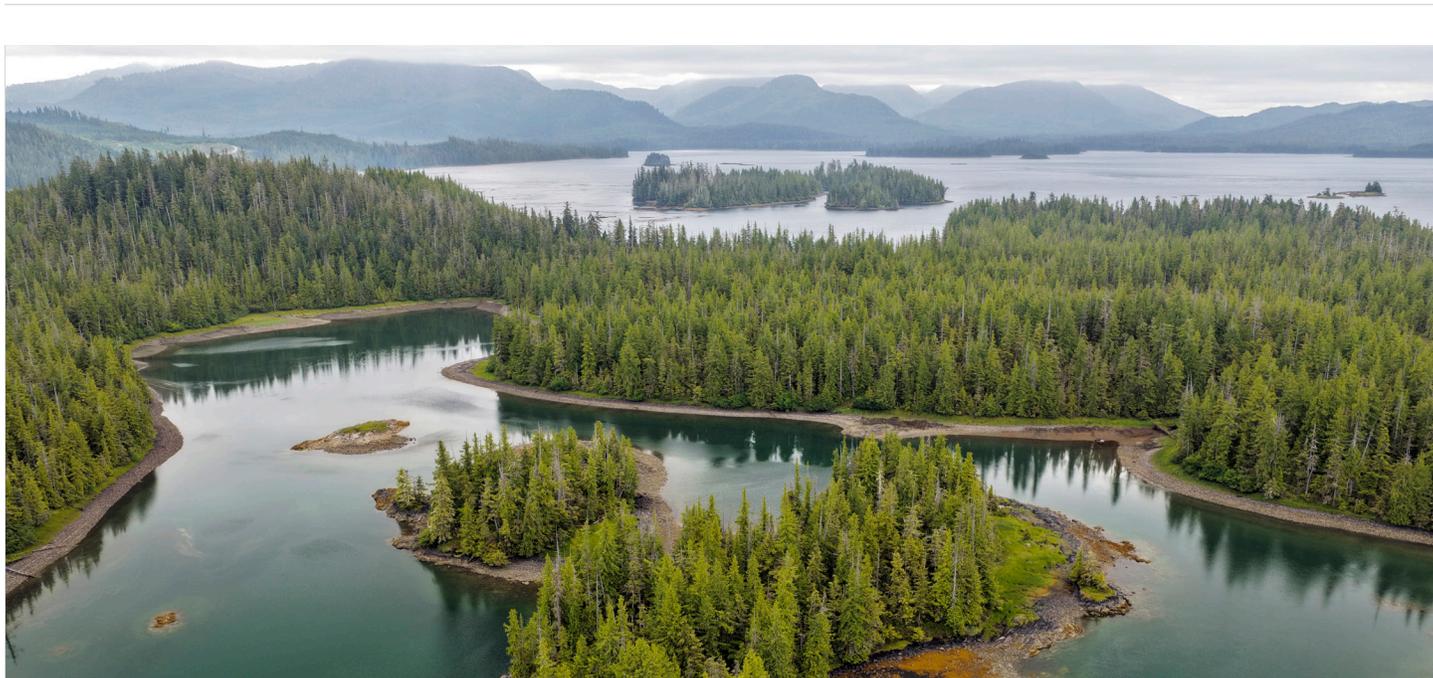
*Pierre Gleizes / Greenpeace*

## Protecting Old-Growth Forests

Under a federal regulation known as the Roadless Rule, Alaska's Tongass National Forest is healing from decades of logging. The Roadless Rule protects 45 million acres of pristine national forests across the country from clearcutting and damaging new roads. In the Tongass, it has created space for local sustainable economies, namely tourism and fishing, to flourish. The logging industry of the past has now been almost entirely replaced here.

The Tongass is the ancestral homeland of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples. It provides critical habitat for wildlife, including salmon, brown and black bears, bald eagles, flying squirrels, and Sitka black-tailed deer. This remarkable forest also plays a globally important role in buffering the climate because of the ability of older trees to absorb and store large amounts of carbon dioxide. The Tongass is estimated to store 20% of all the carbon stored by the other U.S. national forests combined.

Despite all this, the Trump administration has announced an official rulemaking process to rescind the Roadless Rule — laying the



The Tongass is the world's largest intact temperate rainforest. It has been protected for decades by the Roadless Rule, the most important land and forest protection measure of our lifetime. *David Herasimtschuk for Earthjustice*

groundwork for a major increase in industrial logging across the nation. This is not the first time we've been here: Earthjustice has filed and won more than 10 lawsuits to preserve the Roadless Rule, and we are prepared to file more.

At the same time, the administration has plans to ramp up the clearcutting of old-growth outside of roadless areas. We continue to fight an industry lawsuit seeking to force the U.S. Forest Service to offer more old-growth trees for timber sales. We are also closely monitoring a massive old-growth logging project, known as the South Revilla project, planned for Revillagiedo Island, near Ketchikan in the Tongass. This logging project would allow cutting 60 million board feet (one board foot is equal to a 12" x 12" x 1" board) of old-growth trees.

#### EARTHJUSTICE CLIENTS

*Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association, Alaska Wilderness League, The Boat Company, Center for Biological Diversity, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of*

*the Earth, Hoonah Indian Association, Ketchikan Indian Community, Organized Village of Kake, Organized Village of Kasaan, Sierra Club, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council, Uncruise Adventures, The Wilderness Society, and Women's Earth and Climate Action Network. Natural Resources Defense Council is also a client and our co-counsel in this matter.*

## Holding the Line Against Federal Threats

The Trump administration and its allies in Congress are trying to prop up extractive industries' overwhelming power in Alaska. But we, our clients, our partners, and supporters like you are holding the line against these regressive efforts. Communities are also rejecting approaches that prioritize short-term private profits over the long-term health of Alaska's environment. We are deeply grateful for your support as we work together to move forward.