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CANADA URGES THE UNITED STATES TO PROTECT
NORTHEAST ARCTIC COASTAL PLAIN

The Right Honourable Joe Clark, Secretary of State for External Affairs, the Honourable Tom McMillan, Minister of the Environment and the Honourable William McKnight, Minister of Indian Affairs and Northern Development, announced that bilateral consultations took place today with officials of the United States Government on a potential development in the Northeast Arctic coastal plain in Alaska.

During the consultations Canada urged that oil and gas development in the area not be permitted, that the wilderness status of these lands be enhanced, and that protected areas on both sides of the border be twinned in recognition of the regional and international significance of the wildlife they sustain.

The consultations centered on a draft U.S. environmental impact statement which proposes oil and gas development in the northeast Arctic coastal plain in Alaska. The U.S. delegation was headed by William Horn, Assistant Secretary, Fish and Wildlife and Parks, U.S. Department of the Interior. The Canadian delegation was headed by Lorette Goulet, Assistant Deputy Minister, Environment Canada, and representatives of the Departments of External Affairs, Environment, Indian Affairs and Northern Development, Energy, Mines and Resources and the Canada Oil and Gas Lands Administration, together with officials of the Governments of the Yukon and the Northwest Territories, and representatives of the Council of Yukon Indians, D ne-Metis and the Inuvialuit, and the Canadian Porcupine Caribou Management Board.

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Background:

The Alaskan lands in question, 1.5 million acres, are located within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge which is contiguous with the Yukon. Oil and gas development in the area would affect transboundary shared wildlife resources, which provide the major source of protein for the native communities of Dawson City, Mayo, and Old Crow in the Yukon, Fort McPherson, Arctic Red River, Aklavik, Inuvik and Tuktoyatuk in the Northwest Territories.

The Canadian position is based primarily upon the importance of shared migratory animals, principally caribou, polar bears, and snow geese, to the subsistence life-style of native Canadians. Canada also expressed its concern that the draft U.S. study does not provide an assessment of the cumulative effects of the proposed development with other regional developments. Furthermore, the assumptions used in the U.S. study to estimate the oil and gas potential of the area are optimistic, thereby influencing the resulting analysis and recommendations.

Canada also questioned comparisons made between the experience acquired in the Prudhoe Bay area and that which could be expected farther east. The size, densities and habits of the animal populations in question are dissimilar.

After a careful analysis of the wildlife resources, and their importance for Canadians, together with the hydrocarbon potential and the identifiable risks, the Government of Canada has concluded that the risks of development in the area far outweigh any advantages. Canada urged the United States Government to recognize the serious implications for Canada of development in the area and to protect the lands by giving them "Wilderness Designation".

For its part, Canada has already protected the shared wildlife resources on its side of the border by, among other things, establishing the Northern Yukon National Park.

In Canada's view, given the transboundary nature of the wildlife, their importance to the residents of the Canadian North and Alaska, and the wildlife values these lands sustain, it would be a fitting and appropriate step to twin protected areas on both sides of the border.

Copies of the Canadian position paper may be obtained by contacting the United States Transboundary Division, Department of External Affairs, (613) 990-6914.