

## Selling Our Soul

*By Sterling Holbrook*

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I admit to a sense of despondency while writing this column. It appears that parts of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are going to be opened to drilling for oil and gas. How important is ANWR? To any hunter or outdoors enthusiast it should be very important, for it represents the last true wilderness in our country—19 million acres of the last pristine land in the United States.

Within the million acres of wilderness in the western part of the Lower-48, the greatest distance from a road is 28 miles. In the East, it's just 17 miles, in the Florida Everglades. Wilderness areas in the Lower-48 are best described as small islands of undeveloped land.

Alaska Biological Research found that the greatest distance in Alaska, including established winter trails over tundra, is 85 miles from a road or village. That spot, the most remote in America, lies in ANWR. It represents the wilderness that is gone in the Lower-48, the wilderness that I dreamed of as a young hunter. It was pristine then and still is now, thanks to protections put in place by President Eisenhower, a Republican, in 1960 and changed from Range to Refuge by Congress in 1980.

Bordered on the north by the Arctic Ocean, this area is the calving ground of the Porcupine caribou herd of 200,000 animals. The herd is dwarfed by the numbers of geese, ducks, songbirds, and raptors that return to ANWR from all over the world to nest. This area is home to polar bears and musk ox. I can quickly count 21 rivers flowing north

into the Arctic Ocean through ANWR.

To the east lies the Canadian border, to the south the Yukon Flats. In between the eastern Brooks Range rises, famous for Dall sheep and a refuge for caribou trying to escape the biting bugs that inhabit the coastal plain in summer.

From the snow fields and crags of the Brooks Range spring the southern flowing Coleen, Sheenjek, and Chandalar river systems with their numerous tributaries. This is winter range for the Porcupine herd along with the packs of wolves that follow them. Arctic grizzlies range over the entire Refuge.

The western border of ANWR follows closely the corridor of the Dalton Highway and the Alaska pipeline. This is the rough supply link to Prudhoe Bay and its massive oil infrastructure. Prudhoe produced one-fifth of U.S. oil consumption in the last 25 years, but fracking has changed the dynamics of oil extraction in the rest of the country and greatly increased domestic output elsewhere.

Sitting in Fairbanks, my GPS shows 317 miles as the raven flies to the remote spot described earlier, which I have visited several times. It's not easy to get to even with an airplane. I can assure you that it's a wild and beautiful place. Ask Don Thomas, Dick and Yote Robertson, or Doug Borland, who have packed numerous impressive rams out of there.

If it were only as simple as politicians and media pundits—who seem to have a knack for brainwashing intelligent citizens—make it out to be. After

all, the Refuge is 19 million acres and they only want 1.5 million for drilling, but they want their foot in the door as always. What you never hear is that they already have almost the entire Western Arctic Plain—over 23-million acres—in the Naval Petroleum Reserve, set aside for oil exploration. While the oil companies have politicians that will give to them, they want ANWR.

We need the oil, right? I hear that constantly from politicians. Alaska sure needs all the oil it can get to end the financial crisis here in a state whose budget is totally dependant on oil. So far, the state has lacked politicians with the courage to address this petroleum addiction even though Alaska sinks deeper into debt every year.

By Department of Energy estimates, there are 7.7 billion barrels of oil in the proposed drilling area in ANWR. American consumption for 2017 was 7.28 billion barrels. Do the math! Are we really going to industrialize—it's not just wells, but the whole gauntlet of roads, pads, and infrastructure—one of the last true wild and fragile places on the planet for one year's worth of oil? Unbelievable!

The old argument is that we need to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. That died when we became the world's largest oil exporter. The reason for the attack on ANWR is pure greed by people who don't care about wildness or caribou. Hunters should care even if they will never see ANWR. We used to be the conservationists who actually saved what meager wildness remains. You have that option. Study for yourself and think. Don't let politics or talking heads get in the way of reason.

I would like to leave my granddaughter at least part of the Earth still wild.