

Alaska Conservation Foundation
25th Anniversary of the Alaska Lands Act
Keynote Address
By Tom Evans

“Thank you, Bill Meadows, for your introduction and, most importantly, for what you and Becky Rohm and others are doing at the Wilderness Society on behalf of our planet. Thank you, Deborah Williams! Thanks to Congressman Souder for being with us and especially for your work in our national parks. Thanks everyone for being here and for the inspiration you provide. A special thank you to Cindy Shogan, who does such a fine job as Executive Director of the Alaska Wilderness League.

How long will it be before this administration gets it? How long will it take them to understand that conserving and preserving is a conservative thing to do?

And how long will it take for the Bush Administration and the Republican leadership in Congress to remember that the Republican party has a great heritage in preserving the natural resources we have been so generously given. They should remember that great conservationist and Republican president Teddy Roosevelt and another Republican president, Dwight Eisenhower, set aside the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's original acreage. And don't forget Richard M Nixon. He did a great deal for Native Alaskans and also established the Environmental Protection Agency. Preserving natural resources caring about the environment is not and should not be a partisan issue. It belongs to all of us Democrats, Republicans and independence alike!

Perhaps if George W Bush and Tom DeLay we're able to better understand the value of preserving a great treasure like the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for future generations, they might have second thoughts about drilling for oil there. Perhaps if they were influenced less by large amounts of dollars received from major oil companies like Exxon. Perhaps if they listened less to Dick Cheney, my former colleague and friend who, as head of the energy task force, told us that conservation is only a personal virtue. It does nothing to reduce our dependence on foreign oil. I know where that type of thinking belongs. Maybe Pluto! Perhaps if they read some of Debbie Miller's marvelous children's books, they might change their minds.

Perhaps if we could dispel some myths that the administration and the leadership in Congress seemed to be buying, we might change our minds.

Let's look at those myths.

Myth #1

There's a substantial amount of oil in the coastal plain of ANWR, and if only we could drill there, we would solve our energy problems. Remember the California energy crisis several years ago? We were told that if only we could drill in the Arctic, we could resolve that energy crisis.

I might also add that there was certainly an implication that one of the benefits from invading Iraq would be lower gasoline prices. That turned out to be false as well, and in the process, we've made this a much more dangerous world.

We already have a glut of oil in the world today. The problem is not supply but the ability to refine it. And there is just not a substantial amount of oil in ANWR. At best, it will only supply 3 to 4% of our energy needs, and it won't come on stream for eight to 10 years. Conoco and British Petroleum, to their credit, are not even going to bid on the leaseholds. Why in the world would we even think about destroying something so very special unnecessarily? For misguided greed?

Why in the world don't we raise fuel economy standards a couple of miles per gallon? Why don't we add just a little more air to our tires? These types of things would be worth more in developing energy independence than all the oil we would ever find in the Arctic.

And, if we have a major push in developing alternative sources of energy, we will create thousands of jobs in science and engineering. I might add that many of those jobs could be right here in this magnificent state of Alaska!

The moguls in the Middle East certainly don't want us to wean ourselves away from our oil consumption. Incredibly, we consume 25% of all the energy produced in the world, and we have only 5% of the world's population. Think about it. That should tell us something. We must, and we can do better! America should lead the way, and President Bush should reconsider his position on Kyoto.

Myth #2

Drilling in the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge will not be harmful to this beautiful, fragile plain.

If you believe that, I'll sell you the Brooklyn Bridge or, better yet, one of those bridges from nowhere to nowhere that some politicians would like to build here in Alaska! That's fiscal insanity.

Oil companies can drill on a 2-acre footprint, so one thousand wells would mean only two thousand acres. That doesn't sound like very much. But that's exactly what they want you to think. Don't you believe it because it's only the very tip of the iceberg!

The irreparable damage occurs primarily from the logistical support for the drilling. The interconnected pipelines. The roads. The trucks. The helicopters. The planes. The noise they all make. And the airfields. That's what causes the damage. And, in the Arctic, it is irreversible. And this list of dangers doesn't include a major oil spill. We had an anniversary of the Exxon Valdez spill not long ago. That was catastrophic! Why add additional risks?

And by the way, we have not treated our Native Americans very well in this country. The Gwich'in tribe, who live in the Refuge, will have their culture and their livelihoods destroyed. And for what? More profit for Exxon.

Well, ladies and gentlemen, should we give up? Should we roll over? Should we accept what some call an inevitable result?

I say we must never, never give up! I know all of you who have done so much to preserve this great American treasure feel the same way!

We must speak for those who have no voice! The mother polar bear with her newborn cub has no voice. The caribou with her newborn calf, the grizzlies, so magnificently described by your wonderful Alaskan poet, Richard Nelson, and 180 species of birds who spend part of their summers on the coastal plain before heading back to places as far away as South America have no voice. We must prevail for them. And most importantly, we must prevail for future generations of Americans. They have no voice either yet.

We have two opportunities to prevent this insanity coming up soon. The Budget Reconciliation bill will be coming up again in the House and the Senate. That vote taking place calls for drilling in ANWR.

Between now and then, we must act individually and collectively to tell the real truth about the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The American people need to send an unmistakable message to Congress and the Bush Administration. It must begin with all of you here who care so much. Come to Washington for a rally on Tuesday, September 20th.

We have two and a half months to organize. And in the meantime, call and write members of Congress. It does make a difference. Let them know that you really care. Call radio talk shows. Write letters to the editors of your newspapers. Share your thoughts with your friends and neighbors. Ask them to do the same. And give what you can afford. And, because of the urgency, I hope you will stretch that a little.

Let me leave you with a thought. Our destiny as a nation does not lie in plundering the natural resources that we have been so graciously bequeathed, but rather by doing everything possible to protect and preserve these natural treasures for all God's creatures. With your help, I know we can win! I wish you all Godspeed”!