

A REPRINT FROM *SIERRA MAGAZINE* ▶ Read this article adapted from “American Idylls” in the September/October 2005 issue. Then click on the link at the end and send an instant fax to your representatives in Congress before they cast a crucial vote on the refuge this fall.

where the fox & the caribou play

THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

ONE OF THE PLANET’S GRANDEST WILDLIFE SPECTACLES unfolds in the brief Arctic summer at the top of the North American continent, as hundreds of thousands of caribou spill over the Brooks Range and onto their calving ground on the broad plain leading up to the Beaufort Sea. And one of the most cynical political games is the effort by the Republican leadership in Congress to turn that cradle of life into an industrial oilfield. Cynical because those pushing the destruction of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge know that—contrary to their own public pronouncements—whatever oil may be found there won’t make the United States self-sufficient in energy, won’t lower gas prices, and won’t even start to flow for at least ten years.

They’re also well aware that the summertime beauty and awesome vitality of the refuge are its saving grace. (That’s why they conduct their “fact-finding tours” during the inhospitable winter.) Grizzlies, wolves, and foxes follow the caribou herds through vast fields that also nurture birds that disperse in the fall to the ends of



Arctic foxes MICHIO HOSHINO/MINDEN PICTURES



Caribou GARY BRAASCH

the earth: snow geese, tundra swans, wheatears, phalaropes, eiders, and loons. All the original relationships of predator and prey, migrant and nester are preserved here intact.

If the refuge is Eden, House Majority Leader Tom DeLay (R-Texas) is the serpent. In a speech to a closed meeting of the Republican

leadership in September 2003, he revealed that the real reason for opening the Arctic Refuge to oil exploration was to crush resistance to drilling other sensitive areas in the future. If environmentalists can’t stop drilling here, DeLay reasoned, they can’t stop it anywhere: “It’s about precedent.”



Kongakut River CARR CLIFTON

save it!

In April, narrow majorities in the House and Senate passed a budget bill that included revenues from oil drilling in the Arctic Refuge. In late September, however, both houses are scheduled to cast a final vote on whether to approve a budget that actually authorizes the drilling. Call, write, or visit your representatives (or send a fax at sierraclub.org/sierra/idylls) and ask them to save this priceless wilderness.



Pacific loon ART WOLFE



Snowy owls ART WOLFE



The Sierra Club is the largest and oldest grassroots environmental organization in the world, with more than 750,000 members, 65 chapters, and 400 groups. The Club promotes conservation by influencing public policy through grassroots activism, public education, lobbying, and litigation. The organization also leads outings that enable members to explore and enjoy the natural world. Contact us at 85 Second St, San Francisco, CA 94105; (415) 977-5500; or www.sierraclub.org.