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COMMITTEE ON INTERIOR AND INSULAR AFFAIRS

U.S. HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES

WASHINGTON, D.C. 20515

December 10, 1979

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FOR LEGISLATIONGARY G. ELLSWORTH
MINORITY COUNSEL

The President
 The White House
 Washington, D.C. 20500

Dear Mr. President:

Over the past three years we have worked together on what may be the most enlightened and far-sighted legislative initiative of our lifetime, the Alaska lands bill. This past May, when the House approved the Udall-Anderson bill, a critical ingredient in our success was our ability to work closely together. I deeply appreciate the fact that you have made achievement of sound Alaska lands legislation a high personal priority and that your administration has not only been effective in gathering congressional support for the Alaska lands bill, but also has been willing to put aside minor differences in policy in an effort to achieve a common goal.

Recently I have learned that Under Secretary of the Interior James A. Joseph, acting on behalf of Secretary Andrus, has transmitted to you the Interior Department's recommendations for future management of the 22 million acre National Petroleum Reserve (NPR-A) on the North Slope of Alaska. I am troubled that the recommendations, which include draft legislation, contain proposals contrary to positions already taken by the House in its consideration of the Alaska lands bill.

The House has voted to mandate an expedited oil and gas leasing program in the NPR-A -- a program that I believe would result in leasing at least as quickly as the program recommended by Interior. Further, this year, as in 1978, the House has approved designation of NPR-A as a unit of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Because the chief

value of NPR-A, aside from its petroleum potential, is its wildlife, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service appears to be the most appropriate managing agency.

Furthermore, in rejecting the Breaux-Dingell version of the Alaska lands bill, the House rejected the concept of establishing BLM "national conservation areas" in this legislation. I do not think the Committee or the House will look favorably upon the Interior Department's proposed Western Arctic National Conservation Area, particularly in view of recent action in the Senate Committee cutting Alaskan wildlife refuges proposed by your administration and placing some of the deleted lands in BLM national conservation areas.

I am troubled to learn that the Interior Department apparently will recommend that the Federal Land Policy and Management Act apply in the proposed Western Arctic National Conservation Area only at the discretion of the Interior Secretary. FLPMA is a good, strong law which I view as one of the great public land laws written during my tenure on the Interior Committee. It prescribes the balanced, conscientious management which was lacking on our public lands prior to FLPMA's passage in 1976, and is of particular importance for the management of a fragile, pristine corner of Alaska.

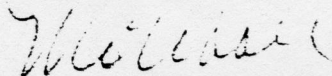
Finally, the Department recommends no designation of Wilderness System units and no further wilderness study in spite of the directive in the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act providing specifically for consideration of "wilderness values." In H.R. 39, the House has recommended wilderness studies of all parts of conservation system units, including the Teshekpuk-Utukok National Wildlife Refuge, not immediately classified as wilderness.

Mr. President, I doubt that my Committee will be inclined to take up legislation in this Congress which contradicts a plan already passed by the House on two successive sessions and which is no more responsive to our nation's immediate need for production of more domestic oil and gas.

The President
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I recognize that the Secretary must respond to the Congressional mandate of the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act. But I believe that the recommendations contemplated would serve to complicate our mutual desire to resolve the Alaska lands issue and enhance our national energy situation.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Morris K. Udall", written in a cursive style.

MORRIS K. UDALL
Chairman