

U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

February 19, 2026

Andrew Bowman
President and CEO
Defenders of Wildlife
1130 17th Street NW
Washington, DC 20036

Dear Mr. Bowman:

The House Committee on Natural Resources (Committee) is conducting oversight related to Defenders of Wildlife's (Defenders) efforts to derail the widely supported bipartisan Willow Project (Willow).¹ The Committee is particularly concerned with Defenders' coordination with other activist environmental groups, many of which employ lawfare strategies, including ethically dubious sue and settle tactics,² to not only champion a disdain for established essential multiple use principles, but also drown out the voices of native Alaskans while simultaneously undermining American energy independence.³

Willow has long received overwhelming bipartisan support to bring Alaska's vast North Slope oil resources to market, not only in the state of Alaska, but also across the United States.⁴ Willow, with a gravel footprint of approximately 385 acres in the northeast of the 23 million-acre

¹ See *Willow*, CONOCOPHILLIPS ALASKA, <https://alaska.conocophillips.com/what-we-do/projects/willow/>; *Willow Project*, CONOCOPHILLIPS, <https://www.conocophillips.com/operations/alaska/willow-project/>.

² See generally Letter from Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, H. Comm. on Natural Resources, et al. to Deb Haaland, Secretary, U.S. Dept. of the Interior, and Tracy Stone-Manning, Director, Bureau of Land Management (Nov. 20, 2023), https://naturalresources.house.gov/uploadedfiles/hnr_letter_to_doi_blm_on_twin_metals_cancellation_tws_meetings.pdf (seeking documents and information from Biden administration officials to further the Committee's investigation into the Superior Withdrawal and cancellation of the Twin Metals leases); Letter from Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, H. Comm. on Natural Resources, et al. to Kieran Suckling, Executive Director, Center for Biological Diversity (Apr. 10, 2025) (seeking documents and information from environmental activist groups related to the legal settlement regarding Point Reyes National Seashore ranching); Letter from Rep. Bruce Westerman, Chairman, H. Comm. on Natural Resources, et al. to Kieran Suckling, Executive Director, Center for Biological Diversity (December 1, 2025) (seeking documents and information from environmental activist groups related to the cancellation of the Twin Metals leases and Superior Withdrawal).

³ See *Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential: Oversight Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Natural Resources*, 119th Cong. (Sept. 16, 2024), <https://naturalresources.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=418363>.

⁴ See, e.g., Alex Bengel, *Alaska legislature signals unanimous support for Willow Project*, KTVF (Mar. 1, 2023), <https://www.webcenterfairbanks.com/2023/03/01/alaska-legislature-signals-unanimous-support-willow-project/>; *ICYMI: Widespread Support for the Willow Project from North Slope Mayors, Education Leaders, and Laborers*, U.S. SENATOR FOR ALASKA LISA MURKOWSKI (Mar. 9, 2023), <https://www.murkowski.senate.gov/press/release/icymi-widespread-support-for-the-willow-project-from-north-slope-mayors-education-leaders-and-laborers->; Linley Sanders, *Majorities of Americans support the Willow oil project and want energy independence for the U.S.*, YOUGov (Apr. 12, 2023), <https://today.yougov.com/politics/articles/45552-majorities-americans-support-willow-oil-project-an/>; *Willow Project*, CONOCOPHILLIPS, <https://www.conocophillips.com/operations/alaska/willow-project/>.

National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska (NPR-A), is estimated to be able to produce up to 180,000 barrels of oil daily at its peak, totaling about 600 million barrels of recoverable oil.⁵

Alaska's natural oil resources are critical to establishing and maintaining American energy independence. According to the Bureau of Land Management (BLM), without Willow, the U.S. will need to import more than half of the lost oil resources from foreign sources. Relying on foreign sources for our energy needs weakens America's global energy standing, and funds energy operations abroad that employ weaker environmental standards when compared to U.S. domestic producers.⁶

The economic benefits of these North Slope oil resources are invaluable. Willow is estimated to generate up to \$17.1 billion in federal, state, and local royalties and tax revenues.⁷ Because the project will require approximately nine million work hours, Willow is estimated to create about 2,500 construction jobs and 300 long-term, stable, high-paying jobs that will directly benefit native Alaskan communities in and around the NPR-A.⁸

Unsurprisingly, the strategic and economic benefits of the project elicit overwhelming support from native Alaskans for Willow, especially from those who live in and around the North Slope.⁹ Yet, Defenders appears determined to ignore Willow's indispensability, undermine American energy security, and obstruct native Alaskan prosperity through its unscrupulous coordinated litigation tactics.

In 2018, Willow began its formal development permitting process.¹⁰ In 2020, BLM published its final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and Willow Master Development Plan Record of Decision (ROD).¹¹ That same year, several other activist organizations conjured up bogus environmental and procedural claims to sue the federal government to derail Willow.¹² In 2023, the Biden Administration's BLM and the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) published a final supplemental EIS and an updated ROD allowing Willow to progress.¹³

⁵ See *The Willow Project*, CONOCOPHILLIPS (Jan. 2024), https://static.conocophillips.com/files/resources/willow_fact_sheet-jan-2024.pdf.

⁶ See *Willow Project*, CONOCOPHILLIPS, <https://www.conocophillips.com/operations/alaska/willow-project/>.

⁷ See *The Willow Project*, CONOCOPHILLIPS (Jan. 2024), https://static.conocophillips.com/files/resources/willow_fact_sheet-jan-2024.pdf.

⁸ *Id.*

⁹ See, e.g., *ICYMI: Widespread Support for the Willow Project from North Slope Mayors, Education Leaders, and Laborers*, U.S. SENATOR FOR ALASKA LISA MURKOWSKI (Mar. 9, 2023), <https://www.murkowski.senate.gov/press/release/icymi-widespread-support-for-the-willow-project-from-north-slope-mayors-education-leaders-and-laborers->; *Willow Project*, CONOCOPHILLIPS, <https://www.conocophillips.com/operations/alaska/willow-project/>; *Unleashing Alaska's Extraordinary Resource Potential: Oversight Hearing Before the H. Comm. on Natural Resources*, 119th Cong. (Sept. 16, 2025), <https://naturalresources.house.gov/calendar/eventsingle.aspx?EventID=418363>.

¹⁰ *The Willow Project*, CONOCOPHILLIPS (Jan. 2024), https://static.conocophillips.com/files/resources/willow_fact_sheet-jan-2024.pdf.

¹¹ *Id.*

¹² See *Lawsuit Challenges Large Fossil Fuel Project Proposed in Alaska's Arctic*, CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (Dec. 21, 2020), https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/lawsuit-challenges-large-fossil-fuel-project-proposed-in-alaskas-arctic-2020-12-21/?_gl=1*1f6jeir*_gcl_au*Nj15Njg4ODIwLjE3NTc5NDQwMjM.

¹³ See *The Willow Project*, CONOCOPHILLIPS (Jan. 2024), https://static.conocophillips.com/files/resources/willow_fact_sheet-jan-2024.pdf.

Unhappy with the project's reapproval despite crushing bipartisan support, Defenders joined other preservationist groups in suing to stop Willow.¹⁴ Boldly, though unsurprisingly, Defenders and its partners expected the same taxpayers harmed by this vexatious litigation to pay for it through exploitation of the Equal Access to Justice Act (EAJA).¹⁵ In November 2023, Defenders' effort was quashed by the U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska upholding the updated Willow ROD.¹⁶ Unfortunately cursed with an unquenchable thirst to subvert American energy independence, Defenders and other activist groups continued to wage lawfare against Willow until June 2025, when the U.S. Court of Appeals for the Ninth Circuit largely upheld Willow's approval but required that BLM address a lone minor procedural "error."¹⁷

Given Defenders' questionable litigation strategies and the importance of Willow to Alaskan economic prosperity and American energy security, the Committee is keen to uncover the details of Defenders' opposition to the project. Accordingly, the Committee hereby requests that Defenders provide the following documents and information in your possession, custody, or control, in complete, unredacted, and electronic format, as soon as possible but no later than March 5, 2026:

1. All documents and communications among or between Defenders, Center for Biological Diversity (CBD), Friends of the Earth (Friends), Greenpeace USA (Greenpeace), Natural Resources Defense Council (NRDC), Earthjustice, DOI, BLM, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS), U.S. National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA), or U.S. Department of Commerce (DOC) related to Willow from January 2020 to present.
2. All communications among or between Defenders, CBD, Friends, Greenpeace, NRDC, Earthjustice, and any Russian, Chinese, Iranian, or North Korean nationals, or any representatives or affiliates thereof, related to Willow from January 202 to present.
3. Documents and communications sufficient to show dates, attendees, agendas, and minutes of any meetings among or between Defenders, CBD, Friends, Greenpeace, NRDC, Earthjustice, DOI, BLM, FWS, NMFS, NOAA, or DOC related to Willow from January 2020 to present.
4. Documents and communications sufficient to show all litigation costs—including but not limited to attorney's fees, hours, salaries, bonuses, filing fees, and other expenses—incurred by Defenders, CBD, Friends, Greenpeace, NRDC, or Earthjustice for which Defenders, CBD, Friends, Greenpeace, NRDC, or Earthjustice sought reimbursement under EAJA from January 2020 to present.

¹⁴ See *Biden Administration Sued Over Willow Oil Project in Alaska's Western Arctic*, CENTER FOR BIOLOGICAL DIVERSITY (Mar. 15, 2023), <https://biologicaldiversity.org/w/news/press-releases/conservation-groups-sue-biden-administration-to-stop-willow-oil-project-in-alaskas-western-arctic-2023-03-15/>.

¹⁵ See, e.g., Complaint, *Center for Biological Diversity v. Bureau of Land Management*, No. 3:23-cv-00061, (D. Alaska Mar. 15, 2023).

¹⁶ See, e.g., *The Willow Project*, CONOCOPHILLIPS (Jan. 2024), https://static.conocophillips.com/files/resources/willow_fact_sheet-jan-2024.pdf.

¹⁷ See e.g., Niina H. Farah, *9th Circuit allows Willow project to proceed but gives the agency homework*, E&E NEWS (June 13, 2025), <https://www.eenews.net/articles/9th-circuit-allows-willow-project-to-proceed-but-gives-the-agency-homework/>; Yereth Rosen, *Appeals court upholds approval of Willow project on Alaska's North Slope*, ALASKA BEACON (June 13, 2025), <https://alaskabeacon.com/2025/06/13/appeals-court-upholds-approval-of-willow-project-on-alaskas-north-slope/>.

5. All documents and communications among or between Defenders, CBD, Friends, Greenpeace, NRDC, or Earthjustice related to EAJA from January 2020 to present.

An attachment to this letter provides additional instructions for responding to the requests from the Committee on Natural Resources. Please contact the Majority staff for the Oversight and Investigations Subcommittee at (202) 225-2761 or HNRR.Oversight@mail.house.gov with any questions. Under House Rule X, the Committee on Natural Resources has “general oversight” of any matter relating to its jurisdiction, including the management of federal lands and the development of oil resources. Thank you for your cooperation.

Sincerely,



Bruce Westerman
Chairman
Committee on Natural Resources



Paul A. Gosar, D.D.S.
Chairman
Subcommittee on Oversight and Investigations



Nicholas J. Begich, III
Congressman for All Alaska