

Obama recommends extended wilderness zone in Alaska

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A general view of landscape near Anchorage, Alaska, on July 13, 2014

US President Barack Obama said Sunday he would recommend a large swath of Alaska be designated as wilderness, the highest level of federal protection, in a move likely to anger oil proponents.

By setting aside 12.28 million acres (five million hectares) of public land in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as [wilderness](#), the oil-rich area would be sealed off from roads and development, including drilling.

"I'm going to be calling on Congress to make sure they take it one step forward, designating it as a wilderness so we can make sure that this amazing wonder is preserved for [future generations](#)," Obama said in a video posted online.

According to the US Department of the Interior, if Congress approves the measure, it would mark the largest wilderness designation since the classification was created more than 50 years ago.

The 19.8-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is home to countless species including polar bears, gray wolves, caribou, muskoxen, more than 200 species of birds and 42 species of fish, it said.

"It's very fragile and that's why I'm proud my Department of Interior has put forward a comprehensive plan to make sure we're protecting the refuge, and that were designating new areas including costal planes for preservation," Obama said.

More than seven million acres of the refuge are already designated as wilderness, but don't include the Alaska's Coastal Plain, which is home to numerous species.

"Just like Yosemite or the Grand Canyon, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of our nation's crown jewels and we have an obligation to preserve this spectacular place for generations to come," said Secretary of the Interior Sally Jewell.

But Alaska Republican Lisa Murkowski, chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, has already expressed anger over the move, according to The Washington Post.

"What's coming is a stunning attack on our sovereignty and our ability to develop a strong economy that allows us, our children and our

grandchildren to thrive" Murkowski told Jewell on Friday.

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