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Court waves through Trump's massive public land giveaway in Alaska

Decision partially dismisses lawsuit challenging public land handouts that benefit private mining projects and the proposed Ambler road

ANCHORAGE, ALASKA — A federal court dismissed portions of a [lawsuit](#) today that challenged the Interior Department's removal of longstanding protections for over two million acres of federal public land stretching from the Yukon River to the Brooks Range to make way for mining projects and the proposed Ambler road. These lands have been protected for over 50 years to ensure Arctic health and a stable corridor for the Dalton Highway and Trans-Alaska Pipeline.

"This decision does not erase the harm it poses to communities closest to these lands that will be forced to live with the consequences of a rushed federal action that prioritizes state takeover and extractive development over public process, Tribal sovereignty, and long-term stewardship," said **Krystal Lapp, interim executive director with the Northern Alaska Environmental Center**. "People from Wiseman to communities across the Brooks Range and Interior Alaska have been clear that opening these lands to mining claims, roadbuilding, and industrialization, including the proposed Ambler road, threatens clean water, wildlife habitat, subsistence resources, and the quiet, intact landscapes that sustain local ways of life. Northern will continue working with partners, Tribes, communities, and supporters to defend Alaska's public lands from short-sighted giveaways and ensure these places remain protected for future generations."

Transferring federal lands to the State of Alaska will remove important federal protections for subsistence and lower the bar for evaluating and mitigating impacts when permitting extractive projects. It will also remove much of the corridor encompassing the Trans-Alaska Pipeline from federal ownership. Interior gutted longtime protections for these lands in February without taking public comments or holding hearings in affected local communities, despite knowing the severe harm to the environment and subsistence use its decision would

cause. Trustees filed a [lawsuit](#) on behalf of ten groups in March, then filed a motion requesting a preliminary injunction in April.

After Trustees filed the lawsuit, Interior took the initial step to transfer over 1.38 million acres of those lands to the State by issuing “Tentative Approvals” for those lands. Today’s decision dismissed the legal challenge around that subset of lands on the ground that the State has sovereign immunity and an interest in those lands not subject to legal challenge. The court also denied a request to halt any further actions to transfer those lands out of federal ownership.

“This decision should shock anyone who cares about laws put in place to protect transparency, public participation, and the health of people, the places they live, and their livelihoods and ways of life,” **said Bridget Psarianos, senior staff attorney with Trustees for Alaska.** “The administration’s removal of protections for these public lands prioritizes and panders to the mining industry while ignoring community health and the public’s interest in sound decision-making. The court’s ruling brushes off substantial legal claims aimed at ensuring the administration follows mandates for public participation and prevents harms to land and subsistence. You can bet we will rigorously and doggedly defend the right of local people and the public to participate in decisions affecting them and fight this reckless belittling of public land for the benefit of billionaires.”

Nonprofit law firm Trustees for Alaska represents ten clients in the lawsuit: Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Alaska Community Action on Toxics, Alaska Wildlife Alliance, Alaska Wilderness League, Center for Biological Diversity, Earthworks, National Parks Conservation Association, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, and Winter Wildlands Alliance.

Client statements:

“We are disappointed in the court's ruling today,” **said Nicole Schmitt, executive director of Alaska Wildlife Alliance.** “The lands at risk in this litigation are vast, spanning boreal forest, Arctic mountains, and high Arctic tundra. These ecosystems support the migration of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, along with salmon-bearing rivers, Dall sheep lambing grounds, habitat for grizzly bears, wolves, and countless other species, as well as subsistence hunting grounds for Alaska Native communities. A land giveaway this important must be, at minimum, compliant with federal law.”

“Today's ruling is deeply disappointing, but it does not change what's at stake,” **said Andy Moderow, senior director of policy, Alaska Wilderness League.** “Removing longstanding protections from these public lands opens the door to industrial development in one of the world's most intact Arctic landscapes while sidelining the voices of the people most affected. Americans deserve a transparent process when decisions of this magnitude are made—not

backroom giveaways that put short-term industrial interests ahead of wildlife, Indigenous communities, and future generations. We will continue exploring every available path to defend these lands because once protections are lost, the consequences can last forever."

"Everyone who cares for America's public lands should be deeply concerned by this ruling, which allows for the disposal of 1.3 million acres in Alaska and threatens everlasting harm to the Brooks Range," **said Naawéiyaa Tagaban, the Arctic and Interior Alaska campaign director for the National Parks Conservation Association.** "This land transfer is a blatant attempt to override American public's overwhelming rejection of the Ambler mining road and instead allow it to bulldoze through our Gates of the Arctic National Preserve and America's largest park landscape. NPCA will continue to fight the Ambler mining road at every level, alongside Alaska Native communities and allies across the country."

"This is a deeply disappointing ruling," **said Anneka Williams, policy director at Winter Wildlands Alliance.** "Alaska's Brooks Range is one of the last truly wild landscapes in North America. Dismissing the case leaves more than two million acres of Arctic ecosystem vulnerable to development. This ecosystem is home to the migration routes of three caribou herds, vast swatches of intact ecosystem, and one-of-a-kind backcountry recreation experiences. The stakes are simply too high for us to give up. When agencies sidestep the legal safeguards that protect our public lands, we have a responsibility to challenge that, and we will continue to fight this."

"Today's ruling is deeply disappointing, but it does not change the stakes for Alaska's public lands or the communities that depend on them," **said Dan Ritzman, the Lands, Water and Wildlife director for the Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign.** "The Interior Department's decision to strip away these protections opens the door to industrial development in some of the most ecologically and culturally significant landscapes in the country. Projects like the Ambler road would fragment wildlife habitat, threaten clean water, and undermine the subsistence traditions that have sustained Alaska Native communities for generations. We are evaluating our next legal options and remain committed to fighting alongside Tribes, local communities, and our partners to defend Alaska's wild places from reckless development. This fight is far from over."

"I'm really disappointed that the District Court is minimizing our opportunity to defend the vital Dalton Corridor in court against this blatant violation," **said Rebecca Noblin, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity.** "This area is far too important to Alaska's communities and wildlife to let it be treated like a pawn in Trump's reckless public land exploitation fantasies. If this incredible habitat for fish, birds and caribou is bulldozed for unnecessary extraction projects, the damage would be incalculable. We'll keep working hard to make sure that doesn't happen."

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