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Groups appeal to 9th Circuit Court to prevent Interior from transferring more federal public lands to the State of Alaska during litigation

Ten Alaska and national groups appealed to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals today to prevent more federal public land transfers to the State of Alaska while their [March lawsuit](#) makes its way through court. The lawsuit challenges the Interior Department with unlawfully removing long-held federal protections of public lands stretching from the Yukon River to the Brooks Range. Shortly after the lawsuit was filed, Interior issued “tentative approvals” to transfer over 1.38 million acres of public lands to the State, prompting plaintiffs to file a motion requesting a preliminary injunction to stop further land transfers during litigation.

The court [denied](#) the request for an injunction in June and further concluded that any lands already “tentatively approved” were no longer under the jurisdiction of the court and could not be challenged in the lawsuit.

“The harm caused by Interior’s revocation of protections for these lands is already real, and then we got a ruling that says once these lands leave federal ownership, there may be no meaningful way to undo the damage, even if the government’s actions are ultimately found unlawful,” **said Krystal Lapp, interim executive director of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center.** “We are appealing because these lands should not be transferred away while the fundamental legality of stripping their protections remains unresolved. What is at stake is two million acres of lands and waters, wildlife habitat, subsistence resources, and the communities whose lives are tied to these places.”

Interior issued public land orders in February that removed federal protections that had been put in place in the early 1970s to protect Arctic health and the Trans-Alaska Pipeline corridor. The gutting of long-held protections opened the door to land transfers to the State, which has a lower bar for protecting subsistence and mitigating impacts from extractive projects like corporate mines and the proposed Ambler road.

“We appealed because the District Court’s decision essentially allows Interior to transfer public lands before our case gets heard and then gives our clients no remedy for the harms caused if we win in court,” **said Bridget Psarianos, senior staff attorney with Trustees for Alaska.** “Our government should not be allowed to break the law, give away millions of acres of public lands, and get away with it without any review by the courts.”

Nonprofit law firm Trustees for Alaska represents ten clients in the case: 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.

Contacts

Dawnell Smith, communications director, Trustees for Alaska, dsmith@trustees.org, 907-433-2013

Krystal Lapp, interim executive director, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, klapp@northern.org, 907-452-5091