

Urge Senators Coleman and Klobuchar to Protect the Arctic Refuge and the Polar Bear Seas!

Senator Coleman - 651-645-0323 and Senator Klobuchar – 612-727-5220

Folks, protecting the Arctic Refuge from oil drilling is a long-term war and you are the foot soldiers. The good thing is that you're not alone – we're in it together. As long as you continue to choose to be engaged, alert and active, we WILL see some kind of permanent protection for the refuge and other wild lands and waters in Alaska.

This time there are two pieces of federal legislation that need our attention.

An amendment to the Flood Insurance Bill has been introduced by Senator Mitch McConnell (R-Kentucky). The amendment is also known as the "American Energy Production Act" and it will:

- open the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil drilling
- open all of our nation's coastlines to oil and gas development
- encourage the use of high greenhouse gas intensive coal to liquid technology
- and promote environmentally destructive oil shale development

The other piece of legislation is Senate Bill 2568, authored by Senator John Kerry (D-Massachusetts). This bill will help protect the Beaufort and Chukchi Seas (known as the Polar Bear Seas) by prohibiting oil and gas exploration activities until potential impacts are better understood. This bill needs cosponsors.

Oil drilling in the Chukchi Sea would have at least a 35 percent chance of producing a major oil spill of more than 1,000 barrels of oil. In addition to admitting that there is no proven way to fully recover a spill in arctic waters, Bush administration officials have acknowledged that polar bears often die when they come into contact with oil.

Please call Senators Klobuchar and Coleman! Urge them to:

- oppose any attempt to pass the "American Energy Production Act"
- and to cosponsor Senate Bill 2568 to help protect the Polar Bear Seas

If twenty people make this call today – that's significant! E-mail (ssolterman@audubon.org) or call me (651-260-7040) and let me know if their staff says anything noteworthy to you!

"Minnetonka's Binocular Bunch" by Laurie Blake, Star Tribune (April 15, 2008)
Two Active Audubon Volunteers - Anne Hanley and George Skinner

Standing before a class of fledgling bird-watchers, George Skinner and Anne Hanley spell out rule No. 1: The birds come first. "You want to see birds, you want to learn about them, but we don't want to interfere with their breeding or nesting," Skinner instructs. So continues the tireless campaign by the Minnetonka husband-and-wife team to turn people on to birds.

On this day, they've donated their Sunday afternoon to give a free tutorial at the Minnesota Valley National Wildlife Refuge in Bloomington to a troop of Brownies and about 15 other drop-ins.

"We think birds are so cool, and we think it's a good way to get people interested in protecting the environment," Hanley said.

Minnesota's forests, prairies and rivers make it a top national destination for bird-watching, and across the state dedicated volunteers like Skinner and Hanley have built enthusiasm for birds by teaching classes, leading field trips and putting on bird-watching festivals -- so much so that the money spent on birding now tops the money spent on hunting in Minnesota, said Carrol Henderson, non-game wildlife supervisor for the Department of Natural Resources.

They may not be as visible -- bird-watchers "are not wearing blaze orange when they go out to do their thing," as Henderson noted -- "but there are more of them."

Spreading the word

Classes like Skinner and Hanley's build grass-roots political support for protecting the natural habit that will save the birds for future generations, said Mark Martell, director of bird conservation for Audubon Minnesota.

"You can't do conservation without people caring and being involved," Martell said. "People protect the things they love. If you like birds, you will work to protect them."

The state can boast of having the longest-running continuous wildlife survey in the country, Martell says. Every Christmas for more than 100 years, an avian army of volunteers has taken an annual bird count in Minnesota.

Skinner and Hanley first took interest in birds in the 1980s "because they were appealing to look at," Hanley said. They got more serious and began taking classes in the 1990s. Now they teach beginning bird classes in Minnetonka and Hopkins in addition to sessions at the wildlife refuge. They also lead field trips as members of the Minnesota River Valley Audubon Chapter (www.mrvac.org), one of 14 chapters across the state.

"When I meet people on the trail repeatedly who are coming to our walks and have been in the classes, and it's obvious that they have also fallen in love with the wildlife and birds, that's a big payoff," Skinner said.

Getting started

At the class at the wildlife refuge, Hanley runs a slide show of bird photos along with the sound of their calls and songs, while Skinner explains: "If you find a bird, point your nose at it, keep your head still, and reach down and pick up your binoculars."

After walking and gardening, bird-watching is one of the most popular and fastest-growing pastimes, Skinner says.

Information on birds is readily available at the library and on the Web, Skinner says. "You can go birding and not spend a fortune."

Skinner and Hanley recommend that people get a field guide and binoculars with a magnification power of seven -- for a big field of view.

Which bird is that?

A good place to start in identifying a bird is the beak shape, Hanley says. Birds can change the color of their feathers, their feet and even their eyes, but not their beak shape, she said. Start at the head and work down to figure out "who is out there."

Size is very hard to judge out in the field, especially with binoculars, Skinner says.

To identify a bird soaring overhead, he recommends looking at wing shape -- eagles hold their wings out straight; turkey vultures hold their wings in a V-shape; falcons have sharply pointed wings for quick maneuvering.

The best way to start bird-watching is to go out with other birders, Skinner says. And simply enjoy looking.

Audubon Minnesota's Mark Peterson to Speak in River Falls: Silent Spring? The Next Generation

7 pm, Thursday, May 16, River Falls Public Library

Mark Peterson will present Silent Spring, the Next Generation at the River Falls Public Library. This talk will be about the very real danger to some of our most familiar birds and how we can protect them. This event is sponsored by the St. Croix Valley Inter-state Sierra Club and the River Falls Public Library.

Minnesota Environmental Partnership Hosts Post-Legislative Session Constituent Meetings with Legislators

MEP is setting up constituent meetings with legislators to continue our conversations with lawmakers. Issues discussed will be protecting our lakes, rivers, streams, forests, and prairies – everything that makes Minnesota such a great place to live. This is an excellent forum for finding out what happened during the state legislative session and what’s likely to be on next year’s agenda.

Bemidji Monday, May 19 RSVP to Sue Trnka or 218-784-2877	St. Peter Tuesday, May 20 MEP Field Office 201 West Park Row, Suite D (basement level) St. Peter, MN RSVP to John Knisley or 507-934- 4821	Winona Wednesday, May 21, RSVP Charisa Templeton or 507- 864-4273	Austin Thursday, May 22 RSVP to Merlene Stiles or 507-552- 1399	Duluth Thursday, May 22 RSVP to Julie O’Leary or 218- 727-0800
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C’Mon, Everybody! Audubon Minnesota Summer Outings, Member Appreciation Events! Sign-Up Now!

Birdwatching and Bagels, 8 am, Monday, June 30th, Belwin

Birdwatch with us at one of the largest remaining undeveloped tracts of land near the Metro-area. Belwin is located on 1,300 acres near Afton and is used by St. Paul school kids for outdoor instruction. The land, not open to the public without special permission, contains woods, wetlands, tallgrass prairies, goat prairies, oak savannas, spring-fed cold water streams, marshes, floating bogs, potholes, oak and maple/basswood forests and farmland being restored to prairie. We’ll birdwatch and top-off the morning with bagels, juice and coffee. Free. RSVP by June 25th.

Birds, Beer and Baseball, 7 pm, Monday, July 28th, Twins vs. White Sox

Audubon Twins fans, bring your family and friends to this evening’s Twins game at the Metrodome. We’re working on getting a section of a sky box donated (no guarantees yet!). At the very least, we’ll all sit together, drink beer, eat peanuts and talk about birds and of course, baseball! \$20/person. RSVP by July 9th.

RSVP for both events to Susan Solterman at 651-260-7040 or email me at ssolterman@audubon.org. Carpooling arrangements will be made.

**Tell Your Friends and Family – Don’t Forget to Vote on November 4th
The Clean Water, Land and Legacy Amendment**

Minnesota's natural and cultural resources are critical to maintaining our state's high quality of life. Unfortunately, they are among the first areas to be cut in times of budget crisis.

During the 2008 state legislative session, Audubon Minnesota worked hard lobbying legislators to support a constitutional amendment that will dedicate revenue from a small increase in our sales tax to our under-funded natural resource programs.

We need clean water for drinking, fishing, and swimming, for future generations and for wildlife. The funding provided by this amendment will protect our drinking water and clean-up rivers, lakes and streams in Minnesota. \$300 million a year for 25 years will be generated and this money will enhance and restore our wetlands, prairies, forests. More than 80 percent of the funding will be directed toward clean water, wildlife habitat and natural areas. Just under 20 percent will be directed to the arts and cultural resources. The language in the constitution specifically allocates funding among four purposes: 33 percent for water quality, 33 percent for wildlife habitat, 19.75 percent for arts and cultural resources and 14.25 percent for parks and trails. The proposal sunsets in 25 years.

Minnesota's sales tax is actually the 2nd most progressive of our four modes of taxation.

Moreover, the sales tax is more stable and predictable than other revenue sources, allowing for more accurate long-term planning. When compared to other metropolitan areas of comparable size and affluence, the Twin Cities currently has one of the lowest sales tax rates in the country.

By reducing competition for limited general funds, the amendment gives legislature more flexibility during appropriation discussions. The revenue proposal is entirely funded with new money so strain on the state's budget will be alleviated, and at the same time will ensure that our state's long-term natural resource priorities aren't short-changed. In Minnesota, amending the constitution is the only mechanism for creating a truly dedicated funding source. Contrary to popular belief, it's not unusual to amend the state constitution – in fact, Minnesota's constitution has been amended numerous times.

The ballot question reads:

Shall the Minnesota Constitution be amended to dedicate funding to protect our drinking water sources; to protect, enhance and restore our wetlands, prairies, forests, and fish, game and wildlife habitat; to preserve our arts and cultural heritage; to support our parks and trails; and to protect, enhance, and restore our lakes, rivers, streams and groundwater; by increasing the sales and use tax rate beginning July 1, 2009, by three-eighths of one percent on taxable sales until the year 2034?

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