



Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Gwich'in Tribal Council Denounce Step Towards Lease Sale of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Call for Allies to Take Action

(Old Crow, Yukon/ Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada –Tuesday November 17, 2020)

After using undemocratic methods to slip a provision within the 2017 *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* and completing an unlawful Environmental Impact Statement process, the U.S. Administration has taken the next step towards opening up the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, critical habitat of the Porcupine Caribou herd and sacred lands to the Gwich'in Nation, to destructive drilling.

Today, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued the [Call for Nominations](#) for the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program. The Call for Nominations is the process to identify areas to be offered in the forthcoming lease sale and is typically used for industry to comment on what areas are of most interest for them. Submissions will be accepted by the BLM until December 17, 2020.

Following a Call for Nominations, we expect BLM to release a Notice of Lease Sale and Detailed Statement of Sale at least 30 days before holding a lease sale.

Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Gwich'in Tribal Council continue to carry forward the mandate of our Elders to protect the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou herd from industrial exploitation. Our governments and our communities have worked tirelessly to raise our concerns and bring forward our knowledge to the BLM to no prevail.

Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Gwich'in Tribal Council call upon our partners, allies, and friends to stand with us, the entire Gwich'in Nation and the Porcupine caribou herd to use the Call for Nominations as another opportunity to tell the BLM, and any company who might be willing to pursue leases, why drilling in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge cannot proceed and what will happen if it does.

You can submit comments to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management by mail to:

State Director, BLM-Alaska State Office
222 West 7th Ave., #13
Anchorage, AK, 99513
Attention: Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Lease Sale Call for Nominations

Quotes:

“The Trump Administration is barreling forward towards a lease sale in the sacred lands of our Nation while on its last legs. While no amount of money can ever justify what is taking place here it has been shown, time and time again, that drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has been driven by politics, not economics. Investors representing trillions of dollars in assets and dozens of global banks have recognized this and have made it clear that drilling these lands is bad business. Any company willing to participate in a lease sale of the Coastal Plain knows that their intentions to destroy these lands are against the rights of the Gwich’in Nation, the will of the American public, the recommendations of all levels of Canadian Governments and the views of the President- elect.” **Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation**

“The Gwich’in Tribal Council has continuously expressed that the environmental and social costs of any development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) significantly outweigh any potential economic benefit that may result. We view this lease sale as a desperate last-ditch attempt by the Trump Administration to threaten the Gwich’in way of life. The sacred grounds of the ANWR need to be protected for the sake of the caribou and our people. We are expecting new President-elect Biden to follow through on his election promise to protect this area and stand with the Gwich’in against this proposed violation of our Indigenous and human rights. The Gwich’in of the Northwest Territories stand with our allies to vehemently oppose any and all plans for development in the ANWR. In the interim, we will be working with our partners to pursue all regulatory and legal options to ensure that our voices are heard, and these lands are protected for future generations.” **Grand Chief Ken Smith, Gwich’in Tribal Council**

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Background

For decades Big Oil and certain members of U.S. Congress attempted to open the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development. For decades these attempts were met with fierce opposition, led by the Gwich’in Nation, and were unsuccessful.

In 2017, a lease sale of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas development become law through a provision slipped within the U.S. [Tax Cuts and Jobs Act](#). Specifically the provision mandates two lease sales, of at least 400,000 acres each, in the Refuge’s Coastal Plain for oil and gas development, production and transportation ‘by not later than 10 years after the date of enactment’.

In 2018, BLM officially started the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process for the [Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program](#). The BLM followed an aggressive timeline in order to complete the process and on August 17, 2020, the BLM released the [Record of Decision](#) (ROD) and adopted the most destructive leasing alternative, offering the opportunity to lease the entire Coastal Plain. Concerns raised by Vuntut Gwitchin Government and the Gwich'in Tribal Council were [disregarded](#) by the BLM throughout the process.

On August 24, 2020, the Gwich'in Steering Committee, representing the Gwich'in Nation of Alaska and Canada, sued the U.S. Administration for violating a number of laws and regulations in approving the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program. [This lawsuit](#), and three others, are currently ongoing.

Following the release of the Record of Decision, the Parties of the 1985 [Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement](#), which includes the five Indigenous governments representing Indigenous users of the herd in Canada, the federal government and territorial governments of Yukon and the Northwest Territories, [stated](#) that they do not feel the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program is sustainable for the Porcupine Caribou.

The United Nations has [called](#) for investigation into allegations that proposed oil and gas development in the Coastal Plain violates the human rights of the Gwich'in. [A Request for Early Warning Measures and Urgent Action Procedures](#) completed by the Gwich'in Steering Committee and supporting allies and submitted to the United Nations Committee of the Elimination of Racial Discrimination, brought attention to the numerous violations that pursuing oil and gas development in the Coastal Plain would have on the human rights of the Gwich'in including but not limited to rights to culture, education, employment, health, religion and security.

Investors representing more than \$2.5 trillion in assets have [openly](#) opposed “any efforts to develop oil and gas in the remote and pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge”. Dozens of global banks have updated their policies to prohibit financing drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, including three major Canadian banks; the [Bank of Montreal](#), [Royal Bank of Canada](#), and, most recently, [Toronto- Dominion Bank](#).

The provision authorizing drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was done so as a partial offset to the tax cuts made in the 2017 *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act*. In order to bring in the \$1 billion for the federal treasury projected by drilling Proponents, every acre of the Coastal Plain would need to be sold for more than \$1,000 per acre which is a significant departure from what has been [realized](#) in lease sales of the North Slope of Alaska to date.

[Polling](#) conducted in the U.S. in Spring 2020 shows that the majority of Americans remain against drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Champions for protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate have progressed various pieces of legislation in favour of its protection including but not limited to [H.R. 1146 Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act](#) (introduced to repeal the language in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act) and [S. 2461 Arctic Refuge Protection Act](#) (introduced to designate the Coastal Plain as wilderness). President- elect Joe Biden, to be inaugurated on January 20 2021, has [stated](#) that he “totally opposes” drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and restoring protections was included in the [2020 Democratic Platform](#).

Earlier this month the BLM completed a rushed public comment period on 3- dimensional seismic exploration of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge proposed for this winter. Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Gwich'in Tribal Council submitted comments during this period. Minister of Environment Climate Change Canada [stated](#) that it poses significant risk for the herd and for the Indigenous Peoples and northern that depend on it, and Yukon's Minister of Environment [stated](#) that the mitigations proposed, with respect to the Porcupine caribou, are inadequate.