



The Fight Is Not Over: Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Gwich'in Tribal Council Respond to Reckless Lease Sale of Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit (The Sacred Place Where Life Begins)

**Sending Clear Warning to Companies Who May Be Interested in Leasing the Sacred Lands of the Gwich'in Nation
(Old Crow, Yukon/ Inuvik, Northwest Territories, Canada – December 7, 2020)**

A lease sale of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has been set for January 6, 2021.

Today the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) issued the [Notice of Sale](#) and released the [Detailed Statement of Sale](#) for the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program (Program) offering almost the entire Coastal Plain, critical calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou herd and sacred lands of the Gwich'in Nation, to the highest bidder.

This has come before the end of the ongoing [Call for Nominations](#) which asked for comments on specific tracts of land to be offered during a forthcoming lease sale. The Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Gwich'in Tribal Council intended to participate in the Call for Nominations process to voice our significant concerns about the Program and the process followed to date, as did a number of our allies and partners across the U.S. and Canada including the other Parties of the 1985 *Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement*.

The Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Gwich'in Tribal Council are sending a clear message to those interested in leasing the Coastal Plain:

Circumventing normal process, BLM's decision to rush ahead with a lease sale of the Coastal Plain is a continuation of this Administration's use of politically motivated and unlawful methods to open our sacred lands to destructive drilling activities. Par for the course, unfortunately the BLM had no intention of considering our concerns and is clearly trying to silence our voices through their actions.

Participating in leasing of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is not only reprehensible but also fraught with significant risk. At this time, there are four unresolved legal challenges against the environmental review of the Program and an ongoing investigation by the United Nations into the Program's human rights violations. The majority of Americans remain against drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and financial institutions and investors across the globe have placed self-imposed sanctions on financing it. U.S. President-elect Joe Biden has said he is totally opposed to drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and restoration of protections was included in the 2020 Democratic Party Platform.

The current U.S. Administration has ignored our rights and our concerns but our voices cannot be silenced. We will not stop until the critical nursery grounds of our relations the caribou (*Vadzaih*), the place we call *Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit*, is permanently protected. We will stand up to anyone who seeks to destroy these sacred lands and our culture.

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