

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

August 17, 2020

Alaskans Stand Up to Protect Arctic Refuge from Exploitation

A coalition of Alaskans denounced today's Bureau of Land Management decision to give sacred lands in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to private interests for oil and gas exploitation. This [Record of Decision](#) is the final step in an agency environmental review process that puts politics before science and the law, and that threatens the land, water, wildlife, and people of America's Arctic. As Alaskans and people around the world face ongoing health and financial challenges due to the global pandemic, the administration's continued efforts to exploit sacred lands on behalf of the fossil fuel industry is particularly egregious.

"This decision, and the Final Environmental Impact Statement that informed it, is sloppy and unacceptable," **said Bernadette Demientieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee.** "The federal government did not meaningfully engage with us, and they left out Gwich'in communities in Alaska and Canada. As a result, people that will be negatively affected were never given a voice."

"The attack on Alaska as a whole has been overwhelming. Our food, water, and air has been contaminated to the point of serious health impacts to humans and our relatives on the land and in the sea," said **Siqiñiq Maupin, Community Organizer for Native Movement.** "We are seeing warming of the land that sustains all life at two times the rate of the rest of the world, endangering basic needs as the climate crisis worsens. In the midst of a pandemic that disproportionately affects BIPOC communities, we must take a stance against any further fossil fuel extraction and continued harm against our People. We are experiencing a shift in global consciousness from a system rooted in white supremacy into systems rooted in Indigenous ways and values. We must transition into an equitable and sustainable future for all beings."

This decision follows the release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) on September 12, 2019, and illustrates the corruption, haste, and disregard for human rights and science that have defined this push for exploitation since day one.

The FEIS went so far as to [deny that there is a climate crisis](#) impacting our entire planet, especially Arctic communities. Traditional and Western science overwhelmingly agree that human-caused climate change is occurring, and that transitioning off fossil fuels is needed. Officials have selected the most exploitative of the alternatives (none of which were sufficiently protective), allowing leasing across the entirety of the considered area, with minimal and waivable restrictions on construction only during a single month, a blatant dismissal of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the Gwich'in and Inupiat people who depend on it. This is the deceitful foundation on which the administration has built their policy. Protection of the

coastal plain is an Indigenous issue, an environmental issue, and a global issue, and voices from around the world have spoken up against this rush towards exploitation.

In response to the FEIS, [a broad coalition of Alaska organizations](#) issued a statement committing to “stand in solidarity for the protection of the coastal plain which provides spiritual, cultural, recreational, and economic sustenance for Alaskans and many others around the world.” This commitment remains strong, and we will not allow the violation of the coastal plain.

Additional Quotes:

“An environmental impact statement is meant to determine whether a project on public lands is in the best public interest, but this EIS process markedly failed to do that,” said **Lisa Baraff, Program Director for the Northern Alaska Environmental Center**. “The administration suppressed science and traditional knowledge about the coastal plain. They unabashedly deny the realities of climate change, and have ignored over a million Americans who have spoken out in overwhelming opposition to this project. They have minimized the concerns of Gwich'in and Iñupiaq peoples who rely on the Porcupine Caribou Herd and have been stewards of this land for millennia. We will not sit back and watch the wealth of our land extracted for the benefit of Outside interests. Fortunately, Alaskans and our allies around the world are watching, and will not allow this exploitation to happen.”

“To disrupt and fragment the Coastal Plain, especially in a time of climate change and surging local and national resistance, is both reckless and short-sighted,” said **Nicole Schmitt, director of the Alaska Wildlife Alliance**. “We cannot continue to manage our public lands in ignorance of climate change, and cannot in good conscience sell our public lands, traditions, wildlife, and ecosystems for short-term exploitation. We stand with the Indigenous Peoples of Alaska who depend on these lands, and with the polar bears, caribou, birds, and other Arctic species who cannot speak against the irrevocable destruction of their habitat.”

“Three major fossil fuel projects - the Atlantic Coast Pipeline, KeystoneXL, and Dakota Access Pipeline - have succumbed to community resistance and legal intervention based on the lack of meaningful engagement in the NEPA process. The ROD on Arctic Refuge leasing repeats the same errors, and will divert limited legal and community resources away from addressing climate change in the Arctic,” said **Jessica Girard, director of the Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition**. “We're witnessing the end of the fossil fuel economy. And yet the Alaska congressional delegation and the Trump Administration push to lease for oil and gas drilling in the Arctic Refuge, in its feeble attempt to feed a dying economy. Alaskans will continue to defend the lands and waters, and to work together to create a future beyond exploitative extraction in the face of climate change.”

“This record of decision, concocted under a rushed time frame, improper manipulation of scientific data, and preordained conclusions, validates the fallacy of ‘responsible oil

development' in the Arctic Refuge," said **Fran Mauer, Alaska Chapter Representative of Wilderness Watch**. "If left unchallenged, it will bring irreversible damage to the ecological integrity of America's Last Great Wilderness, including a vast area of northwest Canada and beyond. It would also leave an indelible scar on our nation's character."

"Alaskans know the Arctic Refuge as the wild intersection of cultural and environmental preservation in one of the world's last remaining, intact, Arctic coastlines," said **Natalie Dawson, V.P. and executive director for Audubon Alaska**. "The BLM has ignored the voices of people across Alaska, and the United States, and the result is a hasty plan to drill in this wild, sacred landscape. Alaskans have played a key role in protecting the refuge for decades, and we are determined to fight for our future as many times as it is needed to permanently protect the coastal plain for people, birds, and other wildlife in the face of our climate changed future."

"The relationship between industrial exploitation of land and exploitation of peoples' bodies, especially Native women and girls, is well established. This makes protecting the Arctic Refuge a feminist issue," said **Brenae Baker of the Hrrrl Scouts**. "Selling off stolen sacred lands to be exploited for the enrichment of a few at the cost of Alaska Native lives and lands is white supremacist exploitation, pure and simple. We stand in solidarity with our Alaska Native neighbors and demand protection of the Arctic Refuge."

Media Contacts:

Bernadette Demientieff, Gwich'in Steering Committee, bernademientieff76@gmail.com, 907-458-8264

Siqiñiq Maupin, Native Movement, siqiniq@nativemovement.org, 907-884-1859

Jessica Girard, Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition, jessica@fbxclimateaction.org, 907-251-5293

Erica Watson, Northern Center, erica@northern.org, 907-452-5093

Rebecca Sentner, Audubon Alaska, rebecca.sentner@audubon.org, 907-276-7034

Nicole Schmitt, Alaska Wildlife Alliance, nicole@akwildlife.org, 907-917-9453

###