

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Alaskans condemn today's disgraceful sale of sacred lands

The Bureau of Land Management today announced the outcome of the sale of leases in the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The lease sale generated less than 1 percent of the Tax Act's projected \$1.8 billion in revenues, with the average price per acre at \$26 and the total bids at just over \$14 million. This disgraceful commodification of sacred and public lands furthers an exploitive agenda that trades Indigenous cultural values and future generations' health and wellbeing into pieces of real estate sold in a political yard sale.

As expected, the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) placed the most bids, with only two other bidders who made only one bid each. This follows a secretive AIDEA meeting over the holidays, where the state entity gave itself approval to spend state funds on leases despite near-unanimous opposition and a need for financial support to small businesses in Alaska during the pandemic.

The administration continued its last-minute attack on Arctic Alaska despite several ongoing lawsuits, commitments from all US and Canadian major banks that they will not fund Arctic drilling, international concern about human rights violations, widespread public support for protecting the Arctic Refuge, and scientific consensus that in order to prevent the worst impacts of the climate crisis, remaining fossil fuels must be left in the ground.

"This administration's insistence on holding this lease sale in the final weeks of its term is a desperate act of violence toward Indigenous ways of life," **said Bernadette Demientieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee.** "The Gwich'in Nation has fought this process every step of the way. No amount of money is worth more than our way of life, and we will continue to stand up against anyone who attempts to harm the calving grounds, as our ancestors did for generations before us. We have the strength of generations of love and prayer supporting us, and that is far stronger than this administration's greed. We will not back down."

"The oil and gas lease sales on the Arctic Refuge demonstrate the Trump Administration's complete disregard for the human rights of the Gwich'in & Iñupiat people, and our ways of life that depend on the health of the Refuge's coastal plain," **said Jody Potts, Han Gwich'in community organizer.** "The adverse impacts of oil development in these sacred and critical caribou calving grounds will be heavily felt by Gwich'in and Iñupiat villages. As a Gwich'in person, I know my family's food security, culture, spirituality and ways of life are at stake."

Gwich'in people will not compromise and we will defend our way of life for future generations until this sacred land is permanently protected.”

"Iñupiat People value all life, and this lease sale and the extraction it aims to enable goes against all our principles, ways of life, and who we are," **said Sigiñiq Maupin, executive director of Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic (SILA)**. "We've seen again and again the true cost of oil extraction through its impacts to our health, traditional practices, food sovereignty, and more. There is no safe way to drill for oil. SILA stands in solidarity with the Gwich'in for protection of the Porcupine Caribou birthing grounds."

“Alaskans have shown up and spoken out at every public meeting, submitted comments, written letters, and called their representatives in favor of continued protection of the Arctic Refuge,” **said Emily Sullivan, Arctic program coordinator at the Northern Alaska Environmental Center**. “We are appalled to see the federal government push this rushed leasing process forward, even as the financial industry and many fossil fuel companies have chosen not to exploit the coastal plain. We will continue to work for permanent protections for these sacred lands, and for a future where millennia of stewardship is not sacrificed for a political agenda.”

“This lease sale represents a stale worldview that perpetuates injustice and inequity by giving public lands to private corporations to industrialize instead of prioritizing the health of all human beings and living things, and protecting sacred places,” **said Brook Brisson, senior staff attorney for Trustees for Alaska**. “The process and approval of this disastrous leasing plan broke the law and public trust, and we proudly join our clients and partners in protecting the sacred and public lands of the Arctic Refuge in court, in Congress, and wherever the path to permanent protections takes us.”

“The capacity to plan for and avert climate devastation is wholly reliant on meaningful public engagement regarding oil and gas development, but the Arctic Refuge blitz leasing process has made this impossible,” **said Alyssa Sappenfield, Energy Analyst with Alaska Public Interest Research Group (AKPIRG) and Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition (FCAC)**. “The State of Alaska is actively shrinking public oversight and establishing dangerous precedents to exclude the public’s interest in favor of small, secretive corporations as evidenced by the recent RCA approval of Hilcorp’s takeover of BP’s Alaska assets and the midnight secrecy of AIDEA’s plan to bid on Arctic Refuge leases.”

“Alaskans are on the frontlines of the climate crisis, which is driven by the unchecked burning of fossil fuels,” said **Sarah Furman, Keep It In The Ground Organizer for FCAC**. “Rather than auctioning off sacred land for further extraction Alaska needs to transition away from fossil fuels as a main income revenue and focus on developing a diversified and regenerative economy. The Arctic Refuge lease sale is a monumental step in the wrong direction.”

“Indigenous knowledge systems should be a guide for the incoming federal administration in how to create a more sustainable future for Arctic communities,” **said Nauri Toler, Iñupiaq community organizer with Native Movement.** “Current Indigenous land stewardship accounts for 80 percent of our planet’s remaining biodiversity. We hope the incoming administration and the American people will stand with us in ensuring lasting protection.”

"Today’s Arctic Refuge lease sale is an attack on our climate and on the human rights of the Gwich'in and Iñupiat, who have relied on and protected the Arctic Refuge for millennia,” **said Karlin Itchoak, Alaska state director for The Wilderness Society.** “Drilling in the refuge is a financial and reputational risk and goes against the will of the people. We will hold accountable every company that purchased a lease and every politician who helped open the refuge to oil and gas development. We won’t stop until the Arctic Refuge is protected for generations to come.”

“Together, the Alaska Just Transition Collective stands in solidarity with the Gwich'in and Iñupiat nations. With the uncertainty of a worsening global pandemic, health and language crises, along with climate chaos in the Arctic, now is not the time to repeat past mistakes by investing in this extractive economy,” **said Alex Rexford, the Alaska Just Transition Collective Coordinating Fellow.** “Now more than ever, we need to uplift the voices of frontline communities and ground ourselves in Kotrh’elneyh, Remembering Forward, by returning to Indigenous knowledge systems and stewardship of the land. We will stand with these communities and their continued protection of the Arctic Refuge to ensure the health and wellbeing of future generations.

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