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Contact: Siqiniq Maupin, Native Movement, sarah@nativemovement.org, 907-884-1859
Erica Watson, Northern Center: erica@northern.org, 907-452-5093

PRESS RELEASE: ALASKANS CONTINUE TO DEFEND COASTAL PLAIN AS BLM RELEASES FINAL LEASING EIS

Today, the Bureau of Land Management's release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement aimed at selling off the sacred coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas exploitation marks the latest move in the administration's rushed disregard for Indigenous rights, science, and public process. [The final EIS is flawed and inadequate; and unfortunately represents](#) the leadership of federal officials overseeing the process. The recent resignation of former assistant Secretary of Interior Joe Balash in order [to take a job with Oil Search, a company](#) with clear interest in the Arctic Refuge, is alarming and ethically questionable. The questionable conduct of federal officials should be cause enough to stop or slow this entire NEPA process.

Alaskans have been defending the coastal plain for generations, fighting to protect intact ecosystems and lifeways from the Brooks Range to the Beaufort Sea. Gwich'in and Iñupiat Peoples, who still rely on this sacred land, have been its caretakers for millennia before federal regulations. Yet since its designation in the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, the coastal plain has been left without similar protection given the rest of the Arctic Refuge. This FEIS minimizes and fails to adequately address the potential harm to the Porcupine Caribou Herd, which calves across the leasable acreage, polar bears which are increasingly forced to den there as sea ice diminishes, and myriad species of migratory birds. Notably, it doesn't address the very serious concerns around seismic testing that this lease program is propelling. Public comment at [past hearings throughout Alaska have been overwhelmingly opposed](#) to the reckless and fast-tracked attempt to sell off the coastal plain to oil and gas interests. Our organizations represent Alaskans throughout the state and we will continue 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.

"Caribou herds, polar bears, and land that has sustained the Indigenous Peoples since time immemorial have changed significantly since the incorporation of oil exploitation in the Arctic Slope," **says Siqiniq Maupin, organizer for Native Movement** "This year we have seen the Arctic sea ice melt completely for the first time ever, polar bears starving from lack of ice, and the largest earthquake recorded on the North Slope near Kaktovik in 2018. It is time for transition from an oil dependent economy to an equitable and just regenerative economy that will sustain the Inupiat peoples and all the lives that depend on the health of the Arctic ecosystem."

“This FEIS is clearly motivated by a political agenda to benefit oil and gas companies at the expense of Alaskans and all Americans. We will be trading the ineffable inheritance of future generations for a gamble on oil that we can’t afford to burn, and a financial return that was [overestimated by orders of magnitude](#) in the legislation that is allowing this rushed process to proceed,” says **Ryan Marsh, arctic program coordinator at the Northern Center**. “We stand with the Indigenous Peoples of Alaska who have depended on the health of these lands and the Porcupine Caribou Herd for millennia. The calving grounds on the coastal plain are sacred and irreplaceable, and should forever remain off limits to industrialization. Alaska can’t afford to continue to sell off our public lands.”

“The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was originally established as a place where nature would be allowed to continue, in its essentially undisturbed condition, as it has since the beginning of time. It is the most ecologically intact and vast wild land remaining in America,” says **Fran Mauer of the Alaska Chapter of Wilderness Watch**. “If the coastal plain is sold off to the highest bidder for oil exploration and development, the destructive consequences will impact many species and reverberate across the international range of the Porcupine caribou herd and beyond. Spawned by a rigged legislative maneuver (the 2017 tax cut), this impact statement has been fatally compromised by a rushed process, flawed analysis, and unethical manipulation of scientific findings by a corrupt administration. It would be a colossal tragedy if this ploy is allowed to proceed, resulting in more carbon in the atmosphere of our already overheated Planet, and the needless destruction of this last great wilderness.”

“This FEIS is an expected course of action from a federal administration that consistently fails to take into account Indigenous or western science. Decisions like these are made based on a political agenda and only serve to exploit people and land for the short-term benefit of extractive corporations,” says **Jessica Girard, director of the Fairbanks Climate Action Coalition**. “FCAC will continue to work with Indigenous leaders to protect sacred lands in a time of climate chaos.”

“Oil and gas infrastructure in the Arctic Refuge, when considered in conjunction with climate change, poses an existential risk to several Arctic bird species,” says **Natalie Dawson, executive director for Audubon Alaska**. “Yet, the FEIS glosses over this stark reality, blurring the connection between oil development, climate change, and impacts on birds. It is beyond irresponsible to proceed with auctioning off portions of the Coastal Plain without a thorough and complete dataset on wildlife population trends and their habitat use in the Refuge. This FEIS is full of glaring data gaps.”

“As Alaskans, we value democratic transparency and Alaskans' way of life. Alaskans deserve to have a seat at the table in the decisions made about our lands and home. The lack of broad based community engagement during this process has produced an inadequate final EIS. The Arctic Refuge is an imperative part of Indigenous cultures and the lack of engagement with our community is unacceptable. We deserve better, and it's time for our Congressional leaders and agencies to work with us toward a clean energy future, not send us backward,” says **Alyssa Quintyne, Interior community organizer with The Alaska Center**.

“Alaska is the last great American wilderness, the last place with intact ecosystems that support subsistence communities and Indigenous traditions,” says **Nicole Schmitt, director of the Alaska Wildlife Alliance**. “To disrupt and fragment the Arctic Refuge, especially in a time of dramatic climate change and surging local resistance, is both reckless and short-sighted. We cannot continue to manage our public lands in ignorance of climate change, and cannot in good conscious sell our public lands, traditions, wildlife, and ecosystems to 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.”

“The Bureau of Land Management’s release of the Final Environmental Impact Statement regarding the sale of the coastal plains of the Arctic Refuge is astonishingly unethical. The lands and waters proposed for exploitation are not the government’s to sell; they are the traditional lands of Alaska Native peoples,” says **Brenae Baker of the Hrrrl Scouts**. “It is incredibly disrespectful, betraying an unsurprisingly selfish view of anything beyond present profit, to disregard the direct wishes of Alaska Natives in how their land should be used. Furthermore, the entire process of manufacturing this EIS has been rushed and corrupted from its inception, betraying a lack of interest in democratic or ethical procedure. Drilling in Alaska has already caused irreversible damage to the land and the Alaska Native populations who have taken care of it for millennia, without generating the resources necessary to impact energy security. The continued extraction of fossil fuels from Alaskan land and sea is not a solution to our growing energy needs – it’s simple greed at the cost of Alaskan land and lives.”

“Denali Citizens Council supports a No Action alternative on leasing in the Arctic Refuge. Our descendents will thank us for preserving the Refuge as it is,” says **Nancy Bale of Denali Citizens Council**.

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