



The Vuntut Gwitchin Government commends the Biden Administration for cancelling all remaining oil and gas leases in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

FOR RELEASE - September 7, 2023 - Old Crow, Yukon

Today, the U.S. Department of Interior [announced](#) its decision to cancel the last remaining oil and gas leases in *lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit*, the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Coastal Plain is a critical habitat of the Porcupine Caribou herd and sacred lands to the Gwich'in Nation.

Seven leases held by the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), covering more than 350,000 acres of the Coastal Plain, were cancelled by Secretary of Interior Deb Haaland.

Secretary Haaland determined that the 2021 lease sale was seriously flawed, citing "insufficient analysis under the National Environmental Policy Act, including failure to adequately analyze a reasonable range of alternatives and properly quantify downstream greenhouse gas emissions; and failure to properly interpret the Tax Act."

The Vuntut Gwitchin Government acknowledges and commends President Biden and Secretary Haaland for their support for the protection of *lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit* since the Biden Administration took office in 2021.

Today's decision is another important step towards protecting these sacred and globally important lands in the short term. In the longer term, the Vuntut Gwitchin Government and our partners, allies and friends will not rest until we see legislative action to protect the Coastal Plain for the benefit of all future generations.

With today's announcement, the Biden Administration also released a Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for public review, the next step in the process for analyzing the environmental impacts of a Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

The Vuntut Gwitchin Government will be reviewing the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement over the coming weeks. Our government, the entire Gwich'in Nation, and our partners, allies and friends, will continue to stand together and use this as another opportunity to send a clear message to the Biden Administration, and the world, that drilling in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge cannot proceed, and that these lands must be permanently protected.

Quotes:

"The Biden Administration's decision to cancel the remaining oil and gas leases in *lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit* is another significant step towards reversing the unlawful actions taken by the previous Administration as they rushed ahead in a process that ignored our rights and attempted to silence our voices.



For decades the Gwich'in have warned what will happen if drilling is allowed to proceed in the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This message has clearly resonated with people across the United States, Canada and around the world.

On behalf of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation, I would like to say Hai' choo to President Biden and Secretary Halland for hearing us. You have shown through action that the voices of our Gwich'in Elders, and the future of our children and grandchildren matter. We look forward to your continued support as we seek permanent protections for these sacred lands.”

—Chief Pauline Frost, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

Contact:

Gyde Shepherd
Communications Manager
Vuntut Gwitchin Government
gyde.shepherd@vgfn.net
(613) 804-4273

Background:

- In 2017, Republicans under the Trump Administration used budget reconciliation to enact the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act which mandated an oil and gas program on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
- The oil and gas program was originally projected to yield \$1.8 billion by drilling proponents in order to help pay for tax cuts made through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.
- The first lease sale in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge held on January 6, 2021, generated \$14.4 million in initial bids— with actual revenue now standing at \$9.7 million or a mere 0.54% of the projections made in 2017.
- No major oil companies showed up to bid and only nine tracts were sold out of 22 offered to three entities:
 - Regenerate Alaska Inc., a subsidiary of Australia's 88 Energy and the only oil and gas company to bid in Trump's 2021 lease sale, cancelled their lease of approximately 23,000 acres of the Coastal Plain which they secured with a bid of almost \$800,000.
 - Knik Arm Services, a small real estate company, cancelled their leaves of nearly 50,000 acres of the Coastal Plain which they secured with a bid of more than \$1.6 million.
 - The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority remained the only lease holder who remains having leased nearly 370,000 acres of the Coastal Plain for \$9.7 million.



- In 2022, Chevron and Hillcorp abandoned their interests in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge paying Arctic Slope Regional Corporation to exit their legacy leases on a small tract of land owned by the Alaska Native corporation. These leases were originally held by BP and Chevron since the 80s when the oil companies drilled the only test well in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the results of which were never released.
- All major banks in the U.S. and Canada are among the more than two dozen banks around the world that have announced they will not fund any new oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and 20 international insurers have said they would not insure any drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
- On January 20, 2021, the day he took office, President Biden signed an executive order placing a temporary moratorium on oil and gas activity in the Refuge; on June 1, the US Department of Interior suspended oil and gas leases in the Refuge pending a comprehensive analysis of environmental impacts.
- The Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) process is ongoing with a Draft (SEIS) released for public comment on September 6, 2023 with confirmation that there will be a 45-day public review and comment period on the Draft SEIS.
- A second lease sale of the Coastal Plain by 2024 is still mandated by the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.
- On the first full day of the 2022 Gwich'in Gathering, the Gwich'in Nation unanimously reaffirmed the 1988 resolution calling for the U.S. President and Congress to "recognize the rights of the Gwich'in to continue to live our way of life by prohibiting development in the calving and post-calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd."