



Vuntut Gwitchin delegates rally for legislative protection of lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit under Biden

FOR RELEASE

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Gwich'in leaders were in Washington D.C. last month advocating for the protection of lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit (the Sacred Place Where Life Begins) – the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the critical calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation representatives included Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, Elder Lorraine Netro, and Caribou Coordinator Liz Staples. The Gwich'in delegation also included leaders from Alaska and Northwest Territories, including Gwich'in Tribal Council's Bobbie Jo Greenland-Morgan, designee for Grand Chief Ken Kyikavichik, as well as Teetl'it Band Council Chief Wanda Pascal and youth representative Shenise Vittrekwa.

They met with the offices of key members of Congress, who will need to restore protections to the Refuge legislatively, and key advisors to the White House, including the Chair of the White House Council on Environmental Quality, the Secretary of the Department of Interior, the White House National Climate Advisor, and officials within the U.S. Department of State, whose support is critical to ensuring protections are restored.

The delegation delivered the unified message that Congress must restore protections to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge this year, urging the use of 'budget reconciliation' to repeal Trump's Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Program which enables oil exploration in the Refuge.

Following the 2020 election of President Joe Biden, a budget reconciliation bill was identified as the best opportunity to restore protections to the Refuge. However, Democratic Senator Joe Manchin refused to support Biden's bill, known then as the Build Back Better Act, over concerns about costs.

Passing a budget reconciliation bill that restores protections to the Refuge may be possible before November's midterm elections, which could change the balance of power between Republicans and Democrats in the House and Senate.

Quotes

As I travel back to our community of Old Crow, I acknowledge all the work of those who came before us; our ancestors, our partners, and all those who have never given up. To those I travelled alongside with, I say Haii'. Your support and ongoing commitment to the work of protecting the ancient Porcupine caribou is so very important at this critical time. Now it is up to Congress to do the right thing so that the caribou will be protected for future generations of our Gwich'in Nation.

— **Elder Lorraine Netro**



Vuntut Gwitchin Government

MEDIA RELEASE

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the beating heart of an ancient ecosystem that supports one of the last great land mammal migrations on earth. We, Gwich'in, call it lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit – the Sacred Place Where Life Begins. This powerful and beautiful name is a reminder to us that we must always work to protect this sacred, life-giving place.

— **Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm**

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Quick Facts

- 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.
- Budget reconciliation is a legislative process that allows the majority party in Congress to pass legislation that addresses budget items with a simple majority vote in the Senate.
- A second lease sale of the Coastal Plain by 2024 is still mandated by the Act. That's why Congress must work with President Biden to act and restore protections for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.
- When Democrats took control of Senate following the 2020 election (50 Democratic Senators plus Vice President Kamala Harris with the tie-breaking vote), budget reconciliation was identified as the best opportunity to restore protections to the Coastal Plain.
- In the Fall of 2021, the House of Representatives passed a budget reconciliation bill, then called the Build Back Better Act, which included language to restore protections to the Coastal Plain by repealing the Trump Administration's mandate for oil and gas development in the Coastal Plain and cancelling all leases sold by the Trump Administration in 2020.
- Before the Build Back Better Act could be signed by President Biden, who "totally opposes" drilling in the Coastal Plain, into law, it required a majority vote in the Senate.
- Late last year Democratic Senator Joe Manchin announced that he could not support the Build Back Better Act over concern about the scope and cost of the bill despite months of negotiations that largely centered around him.
- Senator Manchin has recently indicated willingness to come back to the table on budget reconciliation and it is believed that Democrats have a limited amount of time to get legislation done, particularly with midterm elections upcoming this fall.
- The oil and gas program mandated through the 2017 budget reconciliation process was originally projected to yield \$1.1 billion for the U.S. Treasury in order to help pay for tax cuts made through the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act.
- That estimate has now been tested in the real world: the first lease sale in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge generated a mere \$12 million — one per cent of the revenue that was projected.
- No major oil companies showed up to bid, and only nine tracts were sold out of 22 offered.
- Drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is recognized to be financially risky. The remote nature of the Refuge, combined with global appetite to limit climate pollution, make drilling in the Coastal Plain an expensive risk.
- The financial risks are so clear that 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.