



# VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

## Protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge a priority for Prime Minister Trudeau and President Biden

### Protection of the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd identified as part of the “Roadmap for a Renewed U.S.-Canada Partnership

**(Old Crow, Yukon, Canada –February 24, 2021)**

Vuntut Gwitchin Government is commending yesterday’s acknowledgment by Prime Minister Trudeau and President Biden of the importance of cross border cooperation in protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

In a [Joint Statement](#) released yesterday following the first bilateral meeting between Prime Minister Trudeau and President Biden, the leaders recognized the importance of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and “agreed to work together to help safeguard the Porcupine caribou herd calving grounds that are invaluable to the Gwich’in and Inuvialuit people’s culture and subsistence.”

Today’s acknowledgement recognizes the importance of protecting the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to Canada and supports the intent of the 1987 international agreement between Canada and the U.S. on the conservation of the Porcupine caribou herd.

Vuntut Gwitchin Government would like to acknowledge the hard work of the countless Gwich’in voices, our allies and the elders of the 1988 Gwich’in Gathering who have dedicated their lives and work to ensure the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is permanently protected.

We would like to also acknowledge the work that the Government of Canada has done to voice concerns on the effects that development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would have on the Porcupine caribou herd and the impacts that it would have on our communities.

For millennia, the Gwich’in Nation have been stewards of these lands and for effective stewardship to continue the voices of the Gwich’in Nation need to be recognized. We look forward to working with the Canadian and U.S. governments to ensure the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is permanently protected.

#### **Quotes:**

“Since 1988, upon our elders’ direction, the Gwich’in Nation have worked tirelessly to protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; the beating heart of an ancient ecosystem. The caribou do not recognize the border between Alaska and Canada and today’s acknowledgment of the need for cross border cooperation in protecting the herds critical calving grounds recognizes this. Our elders have always taught us that as we make a shift as a species to honour the survival of others and the future generations that are depending on us, that we can only be successful in this together. Hai choo’ to Prime Minister Trudeau and President Biden for making protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge part of a renewed U.S. – Canada Partnership. “ **Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation**

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**Background:**

In 2017, a lease sale of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas development became law through a provision slipped within the U.S. [Tax Cuts and Jobs Act](#).

Despite being on the other side of the border, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is of great importance to Canada. The Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the critical calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd and sacred lands to the Gwich'in Nation of Alaska and Canada. The herd, which spends much of its migration in Canada, is central to the culture and food security to the Gwich'in Nation and other Indigenous communities in Canada.

Recognizing the Porcupine caribou herd as an "irreplaceable natural resource of great value which each generation should maintain and make use of so as to conserve them for future generations" the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States signed an agreement to conserve the herd. The objectives of the 1987 [Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on the Conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd](#) include conserving the herd and its habitat through international cooperation and coordination and enabling users of the Porcupine caribou herd to participate in this.

Despite the Agreement, the Government of Canada, and territorial and Indigenous governments who represent users of the herd in Canada, were treated merely as members of the public when it came to review of the proposed Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program (the Program). Even though significant concerns about the effects that development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge would have on the herd, the impacts on Indigenous communities, and on the lack of consultation that has occurred Indigenous governments in Canada, remained [unaddressed](#), the Trump Administration barrelled forward with a lease sale of the Coastal Plain on January 6, 2021.

The Government of Canada has domestic and international obligations with respect to the rights of the Gwich'in and other Indigenous users of the Porcupine Caribou herd and development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge places these rights in jeopardy. For decades, all levels of Canadian governments have supported protections of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Canada's Minister of Environment and Climate Change, Minister Wilkinson, has released several statements expressing concerns regarding the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Program, the most [recent](#) of which he stated "Porcupine caribou and their calving grounds are invaluable to the culture and subsistence of the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit and are integral to biodiversity in the north."

In addition to the ongoing support provided by the Government of Canada, the Vuntut Gwitchin Government, Gwich'in Tribal Council, First Nation of Na'Cho Nyäk Dün and the Tr'ondëk Hwëch'in have been seeking a public statement from Prime Minister Trudeau against development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. When the first lease sale of the Coastal Plain was announced, Vuntut Gwitchin led the public in calling on Prime Minister Trudeau for his immediate action to support protection of the sacred lands of the Gwich'in Nation and the Porcupine caribou herd.

On January 20, 2021, President Biden signed an [Executive Order](#) which placed a temporary moratorium on all oil and natural gas leasing activities in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.