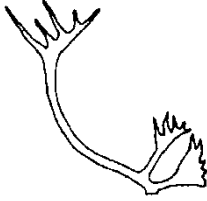


Gwich'in Steering Committee

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*"In no case may a people be deprived
of their own means of subsistence."*

International Covenants on Human Rights

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Gwich'in Nation resolves to fight Trump's rush to drill in the Arctic Refuge

Interior starts process for leasing sacred lands, threatening coastal plain and Porcupine Caribou Herd

The Gwich'in Nation stands united in denouncing today's advance publication of the Department of the Interior Notice of Intent to initiate the process for an oil and gas lease sale on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

"The Interior Department has chosen to rush oil and gas leasing at the expense of human rights," said Bernadette Dementieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee. "The administration has made my people a target. We in turn give notice to those in power that the Gwich'in people will not be silent. We will not stand down. We will fight to protect the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge every step of the way."

Today's action by Interior to advance drilling in the Arctic Refuge comes just months after oil industry allies snuck a drilling provision into a federal tax bill passed by Congress in December. Sen. Lisa Murkowski, chair of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, told reporters this month that she had worked quietly with Republicans to push the drill bill in the budget process to avoid opposition.

The move allowed drilling advocates to fast track this controversial provision with limited debate and transparency, despite the majority of Americans saying they want the Arctic Refuge protected.

Today's notice states that the scoping process for an Environmental Impact Statement for the lease sale will start tomorrow. The Interior has undertaken this move at an accelerated pace, putting politics before human rights.

The traditional lands of the Gwich'in people extend across Northeastern and Interior Alaska and Western Canada. Their culture and communities have relied on the Porcupine Caribou Herd and coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge for millennia. The Gwich'in call the coastal plain "Izhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit" or "the place where life begins" because of its importance to the caribou herd's survival and health.

“Protecting the coastal plain is protecting our identity, our human rights, and our culture,” said Dementieff. “We need to protect the coastal plain because it gives us life. It makes us who we are. Those who attempt to exploit this sacred place have taken aim at our communities and human rights.”