

Gwich'in Steering Committee

122 First Avenue ♦ Fairbanks, AK 99701 ♦ 907.458.8264 ♦ fax 907.457.8265



*“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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CONTACT Bernadette Dementieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee,
(907) 371-8028, gwichinsteering@gmail.com.
Dawnell Smith, Trustees for Alaska: 907-433-2013; dsmith@trustees.org

Interior disregards human rights of Gwich'in people

Anchorage, AK—Today the Interior Department disregarded the human rights of the Gwich'in people of Alaska and Canada by announcing that it will move forward on an aggressive timeline to allow oil and gas leasing in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Interior officials said they were pursuing an accelerated schedule during a presentation in Anchorage this morning.

“The Gwich'in people are opposed to all oil and gas activities in the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge and our position is not negotiable,” said Bernadette Dementieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee. “For the Gwich'in, protecting the coastal plain is protecting our identity, our human rights, and our culture. The announcement that the Trump administration is moving forward to allow oil and gas on the coastal plain ignores the Gwich'in human rights in favor of the oil and gas industry. They plan to rush headlong into drilling in the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge, the sacred lands that support the Porcupine Caribou Herd and my people. This betrayal of our human rights only strengthens our resolve. We will fight to protect the coastal plain and all that it has provided us for centuries.”

The Gwich'in, who rely heavily on the Porcupine Caribou Herd to support their way of life, call the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge “Izhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit” or “the place where life begins” because of its importance to the herd.

Recent polls show that the majority of Americans oppose oil and gas development in the Arctic Refuge and want it protected. Nevertheless, the GOP used a fast-track process to bury the drill bill in a budget that Congress passed last December.

At the time, Sen. Lisa Murkowski made promises to uphold environmental protections and tribal input when pushing for the bill's inclusion in the budget.

“Today, those promises have been broken,” said Dementieff. “Alaska's delegation and the Interior Department have made it clear yet again that they will disrespect indigenous people and ignore us. But we will continue to fight to protect the coastal plain. We will fight for our way of life every step of way.”

The Gwich'in Steering Committee was founded in 1988 by our elders to protect the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge from oil and gas activities.

Arctic Village -Fort Yukon -Venetie - Yukon Flats
– Old Crow– Tsiigehtchic – Fort McPherson

www.ourarcticrefuge.org