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Lawsuit charges Biden administration with violating multiple laws when approving ConocoPhillips' Willow oil & gas project in Alaska

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Six groups filed a [lawsuit](#) today in U.S. District Court charging the Interior Department, multiple agencies, and agency officials with violating an array of laws when authorizing ConocoPhillips' Willow oil and gas project in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. No single oil and gas project has more potential to set back the Biden administration's climate and public lands protection goals than Willow — the largest new oil and gas project proposed on federal lands.

Earthjustice will be filing an additional lawsuit shortly.

The Biden administration approved Willow on March 10, despite acknowledging and failing to mitigate known harms to Arctic communities, public health, wildlife, and climate. The people of Nuiqsut, the community located just a few miles away, would endure increased air pollution, repeated blasting for gravel mining, and continued rapid industrialization that would lead to significant physical and mental health harms.

The Willow project would significantly expand ConocoPhillips' extensive oil and gas extraction operation in the Arctic and become a hub for future industrialization for decades, spewing out toxic emissions and greenhouse gas pollution that undermines the President's climate promises.

“Once again, we find ourselves going to court to protect our lives, our communities, and our future,” said **Siqñiq Maupin, executive director of Sovereign Inupiat for a Living Arctic**. “The Biden administration's approval of the ConocoPhillips Willow project makes no sense for the health of the Arctic or the planet and comes after numerous calls by local communities for tribal consultation and real recognition of the impacts to land, water, animals, and people. ConocoPhillips has made record profits year after year and hopes to continue to do so at the cost of our communities and future generations. The true cost of Willow is rising health issues like respiratory illnesses and rare cancer clusters all over the Arctic. The true cost of Willow is a climate crisis that displaces Arctic people and reduces access to foods like caribou and fish. The true cost of Willow is a future where we lose our traditional practices and diet because of the pollution and destruction to land, water, and climate caused by the fossil fuel industry's unending greed. We will continue to fight this project and protect Teshekpuk Lake, and do so every step of the way.”

This month's authorization of the Willow project still violates many of the same laws that the 2020 Trump-era approval did. The U.S. District Court [voided those permits](#) in 2021. Today's lawsuit charges the U.S. Bureau of Land Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, U.S.

Department of Interior with violating their respective duties under the National Environmental Policy Act, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, the Naval Petroleum Reserves Production Act, and the Endangered Species Act.

“Interior attempted to put a shiny gloss over a structurally unsound decision that will, without question, result in a massive fossil fuel project that will reduce access to food and cultural practices for local communities. This new decision allows ConocoPhillips to pump out massive amounts of greenhouse gases that drive continued climate devastation in the Arctic and world,” **said Bridget Psarianos, staff attorney for Trustees for Alaska.** “The laws broken on the way to these permits demonstrate the government’s disregard for those who would be most directly harmed by industrial pollution and ignores Alaska’s and the world’s climate reality.”

Among the lawsuit’s counts includes one that charges agencies with violating NEPA by failing to consider alternatives that would further reduce impacts to subsistence users, preclude drilling in sensitive ecosystems, or reduce greenhouse gas emissions or climate impacts. It further charges agencies for not taking a hard look at direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts, as required by NEPA, including impacts on greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, air quality, polar bears, caribou, wetlands, and subsistence uses and resources.

The public interest non-profit law firm Trustees for Alaska filed the suit in Anchorage, Alaska, on behalf of Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic, Alaska Wilderness League, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Environment America, Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society.

Group statements:

“Despite widespread concerns about extreme climate impacts, health and safety of surrounding communities, and access to food, the Biden administration has approved the Willow project. This is a dangerous and disappointing announcement,” **said Emily Sullivan, communications director at the Northern Alaska Environmental Center.** “We will continue to support those calling to stop Willow altogether as we challenge this decision in court.”

“The Biden administration has failed to listen to the science, the voices of Native leaders in the region and millions of people across America who have pleaded for the protection of air quality, subsistence resources and the global climate by rejecting Willow,” **said Karlin Itchoak, Alaska regional director for The Wilderness Society.** “We had hoped the administration would do the right thing but it put the interests of ConocoPhillips’ first, so now we must turn to the courts. This bad decision is more proof we need aggressive change in the way we manage our public lands for climate and that has to start in America’s Arctic.”

“We are deeply disappointed in the Biden administration’s approval of the Willow oil and gas extraction project in Alaska’s Arctic,” **said Kristen Miller, executive director of Alaska Wilderness League.** “Let’s be clear: rampant oil and gas development on our nation’s public lands must stop now. We will keep fighting the Willow project. And we must change the way we manage all our nation’s public lands for climate, starting with no more oil from America’s Arctic.”

“ConocoPhillips’ massive oil and gas project presents a real threat to the wildlife, ecosystems, and communities of Arctic Alaska,” **said Mike Scott, senior campaign representative for Sierra Club's Our Wild Alaska campaign.** “If they’re allowed to break ground, the Willow project would be a disaster for the climate, the effects of which would be felt for decades. We continue to support the Alaskan communities most directly in harm’s way, and our work to stop Willow will go on.”

“The Willow Project will disrupt and degrade the habitat of caribou, polar bears and millions of migratory birds,” **said Ellen Montgomery, public lands campaign director with Environment America.** “And for what? So we can extract more oil, burn it and add another 240 million tons of carbon dioxide to the atmosphere? In a rapidly warming world, that makes no sense.”

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