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District Court ruling allows ConocoPhillips to blast forward with Willow project, despite harm to local communities and climate

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — A U.S. District Court ruling today allows ConocoPhillips to plow ahead with a massive oil and gas project that would do significant harm to local communities and the planet. The decision concerns our [lawsuit](#) filed in March 2023, just days after the Biden administration approved the controversial Willow project, 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 continued rapid industrialization that would lead to significant physical and mental health harms and would convert important hunting and fishing grounds into an oil field.

“This is really hard news, and it again shows that the oil and gas industry exerts incredible power over those whose health and food are most impacted and who will most experience the climate harm and disaster this project will flame,” **said Sigiñiq Maupin, executive director of Sovereign Inupiat for a Living Arctic.** “Companies and politicians continue to sacrifice places like Teshekpuk Lake and communities like Nuiqsut for their benefit. We will continue to fight this project and protect Teshekpuk Lake.”

Trustees for Alaska filed the lawsuit on behalf of six clients, charging the Interior Department, multiple agencies, and agency officials with violating an array of laws. The Biden administration’s approval of Willow broke many of the same laws that the 2020 Trump approval did. The U.S. District Court [voided the Trump era permits](#) in 2021.

If built, Willow would be the largest new oil and gas project on federal lands and would significantly expand ConocoPhillips’ extensive oil and gas extraction operation in the Arctic. ConocoPhillips executives have touted Willow as a hub for future industrialization that would push fossil fuel extraction for decades.

“This decision is bad news not just for our clients, but for anyone who cares about the climate and future generations,” **said Bridget Psarianos, senior staff attorney with Trustees for Alaska.** “The Biden administration added a little more window dressing when it rubber-stamped the previous Trump approvals, but Interior handed out permits without looking at options that would reduce the impact on local people or preclude drilling in sensitive ecosystems. It again did not consider the accumulation of impacts of greenhouse gas emissions and climate change, nor the way those accumulations harm people, animals, habitat, and the planet in deep and tangible ways. There is too much at stake to gloss over the harm this project will do. We will remain steadfast in working with our clients to protect the Arctic from this devastating project today and in the weeks, months, and years ahead.”

The public interest non-profit law firm Trustees for Alaska represents six clients in this litigation: Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic, Alaska Wilderness League, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Environment America, Sierra Club and The Wilderness Society.

Group statements:

“This is a profoundly disappointing decision,” said **Karlin Itchoak, Alaska regional director for The Wilderness Society**. “Despite Willow posing a serious threat to air quality and subsistence resources for Indigenous communities in the region—as well as the world’s climate—ConocoPhillips will be allowed to begin work on a destructive project that was poorly evaluated by the Bureau of Land Management. We will continue to fight with all means at our disposal.”

“We are incredibly disappointed that ConocoPhillips will be allowed to move forward with construction for the Willow project,” said **Emily Sullivan, communications director for the Northern Alaska Environmental Center**. “This decision was handed down despite proven impacts to climate, the health and safety of communities, and food security on the North Slope. We remain committed to halting progress on this disastrous project.”

“Today’s ruling is disappointing, but we will keep fighting this project in the days, months, and years to come,” said **Kristen Miller, executive director at Alaska Wilderness League**. “The project poses unacceptable impacts to our climate and the environmental review ignored impacts to the community of Nuiqsut, among other major flaws. Our nation’s public lands and climate future deserve better, and we won’t back down until a new direction is fully realized for America’s Arctic.”

“We’re disappointed in the decision, but we will continue to work to ensure that the Willow project does not move forward,” said **Ellen Montgomery, public lands campaign director with Environment America**. “In 30 years, we should be done with oil entirely and instead relying on clean energy for our buildings and transportation. We don’t want to look back and realize that this damaging project was completely unnecessary.”

“The facts of the matter have not changed,” said **Dan Ritzman, Director of Conservation at Sierra Club**. “The Willow project is a climate disaster waiting to happen. The lands, wildlife, and communities of the Arctic, and our global climate, will face serious consequences if ConocoPhillips is allowed to complete Willow. This ruling is only one step in the process of stopping the Willow project. We will continue to support the Alaskan communities directly in harm’s way and keep working to defuse this carbon bomb.”

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