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## Groups ask Ninth Circuit Court to pause construction of the ConocoPhillips' Willow oil and gas project pending appeal

ANCHORAGE, Alaska — Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic and five allied groups filed an emergency motion in the U.S. Ninth Circuit Court of Appeals today requesting an injunction to pause construction of ConocoPhillips' Willow oil and gas project pending their appeal of a District Court decision in November. Trustees for Alaska filed the motion as part of a [lawsuit](#) charging the Biden administration with illegally approving the project.

“We find ourselves in court again to stop a destructive project from sacrificing our lives, communities, and futures for oil industry profits,” **said Sigiñiq Maupin, executive director of Sovereign Inupiat for a Living Arctic.** “Willow will extract life and wellbeing from communities through ongoing respiratory illnesses and rare cancer clusters caused by industrial pollutants and toxins. It will extract health and life around the world through a climate crisis that displaces people, erases animals, reduces access to food, and makes communities unlivable due to wildfires, erosion, flooding, and volatile storms. We will continue to fight this project and work to protect Teshekpuk Lake, our cultures, and our communities.”

Stopping construction while litigation continues will prevent further on-the-ground destruction while the court hears the appeal. ConocoPhillips plans an aggressive construction schedule starting on Dec. 21 that includes blasting gravel mines, building roads, erecting miles of pipelines, and constructing other significant and permanent industrial infrastructure, such as a bridge over a subsistence waterway and gravel pads for its operations facilities.

“ConocoPhillips intends to do as much building as possible to expand and entrench its project in a region that’s already enduring existential climate impacts like the collapse of fish populations and community infrastructure,” **said Bridget Psarianos, lead staff attorney with Trustees for Alaska.** “This project was approved despite known harm to the community of Nuiqsut and despite not addressing the real and cumulative effects of climate change. This motion asks for a pause on industrialization while the Ninth Circuit Court rules on our strong claims. Willow is not a done deal.”

The Biden administration approved Willow in March 2023 despite a massive outpouring of public comments against it. Trustees filed a lawsuit in District Court charging the administration with breaking multiple laws when approving the project. That court issued a ruling on Nov. 9

allowing Willow to plow ahead. Trustees appealed that ruling on Nov. 14, followed by a request for an injunction pausing construction pending appeal in District Court. The lower court rejected that request on Dec. 1, and our filing today takes that motion to the Ninth Circuit Court.

Willow would be the largest new oil and gas project proposed on federal lands in the U.S. 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.

It would also 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.

The March approval of the Willow project violates many of the same laws that the 2020 Trump-era approval did. The U.S. District Court [voided those permits](#) in 2021. The current 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.

Today's motion charges the Bureau with violating multiple laws by failing to consider alternatives that would further reduce impacts to subsistence users, preclude drilling in sensitive ecosystems, or otherwise minimize Willow's impacts to the western Arctic.

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.

Client quotes:

“Willow poses a decades-long threat to local communities and the global climate but, in the near term, ConocoPhillips represents an immediate danger because it is poised to begin blasting and building roads and pipelines for a massive project,” said **Karlin Itchoak, Alaska senior regional director for The Wilderness Society**. “It is essential to stop this destructive work pending a ruling from the Ninth Circuit.”

“While we await review from a higher court, ConocoPhillips must pause activities to prevent irreparable damage to the region,” said **Elisabeth Balster Dabney, Executive Director of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center**. “It would not only undermine the appeals process to allow construction to continue, but also present immediate threats to the health, safety, and food security of communities on the North Slope. We remain firmly committed to halting construction on this short-sighted plan.”

“ConocoPhillips plans to start construction this month,” said **Ellen Montgomery, public lands campaign director with Environment America**. “Gravel blasting and other building activity will do immediate harm to animals like caribou, polar bears, and millions of migratory birds. It's

not worth causing this damage to get the oil out of the ground when we should be moving toward a future powered by clean energy. We're asking the court to press pause on the construction while the merits of our case are heard in the Ninth Circuit Court."

"We've said it before, and we'll say it again – the Willow project is an environmental disaster waiting to happen," **said Mike Scoot, Sierra Club Oil and Gas Campaign Manager.**

"Construction on Willow must stop until all litigation is resolved. Without this injunction, the Willow project could still destroy vast amounts of Arctic landscapes before producing a single barrel of oil. We will continue to stand with our Indigenous allies in their efforts to block Willow and preserve their way of life."

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