

Alaska and Canadian Native Leaders: Protect the Arctic

WASHINGTON, DC – This week a delegation of Natives from Alaska and Canada, joined by people from across our nation, have come to DC to ask for protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and its sensitive Coastal Plain.

Last night, Gwich'in and Inupiaq leaders met with Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) to share their united stand against any oil and gas development in the Refuge. They also shared letters from Gwich'in children to Sen. Murkowski asking her to protect the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the fact that the herd is in decline. These Native leaders call on Congress, their representatives and the American public to stand with them in protecting the Refuge's Coastal Plain from any attempts to harm the sensitive Coastal Plain for the short-sighted use of oil and gas development.

Statements from Native Leaders:

“For decades, the Gwich'in Nation has protected the “Izhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit” – the sacred place where life begins. The threat of oil and gas activity there, combined with the impact of climate change in the Arctic, risks our food security and our culture. For us, protecting this place is a matter of physical, spiritual and cultural survival. It is our basic human right to continue to feed our families and practice our traditional way of life. Today, we call on the American public to stand with the Gwich'in and ask this Congress to take action to pass legislation that would designate the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge as Wilderness, said **Lorraine Netro, Vuntut Gwich'in First Nation**.

“The Gwich'in Nation has been working tirelessly to protect ‘The Sacred Place Where Life Begins’ – the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, for more than 25 years now,” said **Bernadette Demientieff, Executive Director, Gwich'in Steering Committee**. “We are concerned that the caribou herd populations in Alaska are declining. We must protect the Coastal Plain of the Refuge to ensure that the Porcupine Caribou Herd is strong. This will ensure our right to continue our Native ways of life. I do this work for my children and my grandchildren so that they can live the Gwich'in way and to learn about the amazing ancestors that walked the planet before them. We are asking for the American people and for Congress to take action to protect the Arctic Refuge and coastal plain as Wilderness.”

“Met with Senator Murkowski. Finally coming together as one. Showing our concerns with development with the loss of EPA. Speaking and lobbying to protecting our environment, arctic animals, future generations and our culture, said **Gabe Tegoseak, Inupiaq leader from Utqiagvik, Alaska**. “With the support of my elders, we as people are all survivors. Uniting as leaders to protect the Arctic.”

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[Download photo from the meeting here.](#)

Photo: Bernadette Demientieff, Executive Director, Gwich'in Steering Committee; Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Gabe Tegoseak, Inupiaq leader from Utqiagvik, Alaska hold artwork from children asking to protect the Porcupine Caribou Herd.