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**Trump Administration Prepares for Lease Sale in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge**  
*Organizations respond with commitment to stand with Gwich'in to defend irreplaceable wildlands, wildlife, human rights and to protect our climate*

WASHINGTON, D.C. – The Trump administration has announced the beginning of a planning process to allow for exploration and leasing in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, barreling forward with plans for destructive oil and gas drilling and disregarding the serious biological, cultural and climate impacts fossil fuel extraction will have in the rapidly-warming Arctic. Tomorrow's scheduled notice in the Federal Register will begin a 60-day public comment period.

The Department of the Interior has [announced a Notice of Intent](#) to initiate scoping for an Environmental Impact Statement on the proposed lease sale that would target the biologically rich coastal plain, an area of the Refuge the Indigenous Gwich'in people, who have subsisted off the land for millennia, consider sacred. Drilling would also imperil wildlife and harm our climate. Scientists have warned that to avoid the worst impacts of climate change, we must keep Arctic fossil fuel reserves in the ground.

The Trump administration's first action to advance drilling in the Arctic Refuge comes only months after oil industry allies in Congress snuck a drilling provision into the unrelated federal tax bill in December. Drilling proponents circumvented normal legislative channels because winning legislative or public support for such a controversial measure in an above-board process would have been otherwise impossible.

A broad coalition of environmental organizations reaffirmed its commitment to stand with the Gwich'in to defend the Arctic Refuge and the wildlife, wilderness, recreational and cultural values it was established to protect.

**Statements**

"We will continue to stand against any development in the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd. My people have had a cultural and spiritual connection the herd for thousands of years. With climate change hitting Alaska harder than any other place in the world, this is the last thing we need. An Attack on the Arctic Refuge is an attack on the Gwich'in and we will stand strong in unity for our future generations. This is an uphill battle that we are willing to take on because it is tied to the identity of the Gwich'in people," said **Bernadette Demientieff, Gwich'in Steering Committee Executive Director.**

"Just because those lease sales are opened up doesn't mean they have to be invested in. We must continue to divest from fossil fuels. As stewards of the land since time immemorial, Indigenous people across the Arctic stand in solidarity in opposition to any further development in our ancestral places. We support our Gwich'in brothers and sisters in the fight to the continue the protection of Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit, The Sacred Place Where Life Begins, for the best interest of everyone in the world, not just ourselves. We know we are all dependent on the land. It provides not only food security, but also has a direct correlation with our cultural identity, our spirituality, and our place in the universe. We're seeing a large misrepresentation of our people through corporate endeavors and would like to remind policy makers and the general public, that what these corporations are saying is from the for-profit, western lifestyle that we have been forced into. This is reality for us. This threatens who we are. This isn't putting up a

new store, or investing in the stock market. This is our life. We all have to be good ancestors to our future generations. The land remembers. Our people remember.” **Native Movement - Alaska Board Members, Arlo Nasruk Davis (Selawik) and Adrienne Aakaluk Titus (Unalakleet)**

“When we have an administration using Twitter to fire cabinet secretaries and rewrite plans for the entirety of America’s coastline, maybe we shouldn’t be surprised at the reckless, warp speed approach it is taking to put oil rigs in one of the most iconic and wildest places left in America,” said **Adam Kolton, Executive Director at Alaska Wilderness League**. “But the Trump administration’s secretive work with Senator Murkowski and others to ‘aggressively’ push for Arctic drilling is a disgrace. Forget minimal effort; they can’t even be bothered to fake the effort needed to assess the impacts of leasing on wildlife and the environment or meaningfully consult with the Gwich’in people whose culture is at stake.”

"Over the last 14 months we have seen this administration try to cut corners, revoke existing environmental protections, rescind conservation priorities, and overall threaten our public lands. Now, after an already scheming process to get the Arctic Refuge opened in the tax bill, they want to expedite a lease sale in the coastal plain. This is unacceptable. This is the 'sacred place where life begins.' We stand firmly with the Gwich'in Nation to protect the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and preserve a traditional way of life practiced for millennia," said **Lisa Baraff, Program Director, Northern Alaska Environmental Center**.

"This is about the Gwich'in people and one of our last, great wild places. But it's also about what our country wants for our future-- a race to the bottom dominated by drilling and greed, or the preservation of life, climate justice and our wild places for future generations. We stand with the Gwich'in Nation as we fight for a better world, starting with safeguarding the Arctic Refuge," said **Alli Harvey, Alaska representative for Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign**.

“This Administration is barreling ahead with a fossil fuel extraction plan in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, despite the environmental and human rights implications of industrializing the wild birthing grounds of caribou upon which indigenous Gwich’in have relied for millennia, and the fact that investing in oil development in the Arctic takes us in exactly the wrong direction on combating climate change. Earthjustice stands prepared to uphold bedrock environmental laws that protect the Refuge’s values and mount a strong defense of the Arctic Refuge and our climate,” said **Earthjustice attorney Erik Grafe**.

“The coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a place of stunning beauty and tremendous biological value, providing vital habitat for caribou, polar bears and hundreds of migratory bird species. Most Americans oppose the Trump administration’s headlong rush to drill and desecrate this sacred place, which will inevitably end up in court,” said **Jenny Keatinge, Senior Federal Lands Policy Analyst at Defenders of Wildlife**.

“This administration is recklessly moving to lease the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge, a land sacred to the Gwich’in people and one of the wildest places in our nation. The coastal plain is no place for oil and gas. We’ll continue to stand with the Gwich’in and our partners and to use the law to protect this invaluable land,” said **Brook Brisson, Senior Staff Attorney at Trustees for Alaska**.

“This administration is about to sell the Arctic Refuge to the highest bidder and turn one of America’s premier bird nurseries into an oilfield. We cannot and will not allow drilling in the Arctic Refuge. Such a disastrous approach to managing our protected public lands threatens

birds and robs our kids and grandkids of their natural legacy,” said [David Yarnold](#), **president and CEO of the National Audubon Society**.

“In its rush to drill America’s Last Frontier, the Trump Administration is trying to sell leases in the iconic coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge as fast as they can, with no regard for why the refuge was created in the first place,” said **Geoffrey Haskett, President of the National Wildlife Refuge Association**. “This race to drill flies in the face of the Arctic Refuge’s true purposes such as conserving natural diversity and shows the disdain this administration has for the natural world.”

“The Trump Administration’s frantic scramble to sell oil leases in the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a direct threat to the traditional lifestyle of the Gwich’in people and an assault on the wildlife and habitat of America’s greatest intact natural heritage,” said **Dr. David Raskin, President of the Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges**. “It is a violation of the laws and requirements for management of this iconic refuge that belongs to every American, not just the oil industry and their political supporters.”

“Interior’s timeline is rash and unrealistic, given the laws and safeguards protecting sensitive public lands and wildlife. NRDC will ensure those protections are not violated with impunity,” said **Niel Lawrence, Alaska Director and Senior Attorney for the Nature Program at the Natural Resources Defense Council**.

“By pushing for a lease sale next year, the administration is admitting that they have no intention of seriously evaluating the negative impacts of oil development on wildlife and these wild lands, which science tells us are significant,” said **Jamie Williams, president of The Wilderness Society**. “The Wilderness Society remains opposed to opening the Arctic Refuge coastal plain to drilling. Local communities and the public’s concerns should be fairly considered and addressed. Americans should be outraged at what is being done to the crown jewel of their National Wildlife Refuge System.”

“First Republican leaders in Congress snuck a provision to destroy the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge into their disastrous tax bill – which Trump himself admitted they tried to keep secret because selling out one of our most majestic landscapes to the oil industry is deeply unpopular,” said **Alex Taurel, League of Conservation Voters Deputy Legislative Director**. “Now Secretary Zinke is racing to transform this pristine wildlife refuge into an industrial oil field, apparently by waiving environmental review, planning, and local consultation that drilling supporters like Senator Murkowski assured would take place at each step in the process. We will continue to stand with the native Gwich’in people and work to block drilling every step of the way.”

“Sinking drills into the refuge will drain the wild Arctic of its lifeblood. The habitat of polar bears, wolves, and caribou can’t be trusted to the hands of oil companies,” said **Miyoko Sakashita, senior counsel at the Center for Biological Diversity**.

“Take note of the phrase ‘publicly owned.’ Because the Arctic Refuge is *your* Arctic Refuge. This place, called the ‘Crown Jewel of the Circumpolar North’ is the home and birthing ground for an abundance of wildlife, from polar bears to the massive Porcupine Caribou herd, to the millions of birds that migrate to the Refuge. From six continents their migration connects these ancestral breeding grounds to every person on the planet. To the Gwich’in nation it’s a human rights issue. The Gwich’in depend on the caribou for a subsistence way of life. A culture, passed down since time immemorial. They call the Refuge ‘The Sacred Place Where Life Begins.’ This is *your*

land the oil companies want. It is a land sale. Call / contact your Congress people and tell them NO! NO drilling in *our* Arctic National Wildlife Refuge," said Carol Hoover, **Executive Director of the Eyak Preservation Council**.

"Each year, the Porcupine caribou migrate between Alaska and Canada's north. They are one of the last, healthy barren-ground caribou herds left on earth. Disturbing their calving grounds could have a disastrous effect on the health of the herd. This is not just an American issue. It's a deeply Canadian issue. We stand firmly with the Gwich'in as they fight to keep oil and gas development off the land that has sustained them for millennia." said Chris Rider, **Executive Director of the Canadian Parks and Wilderness Society (CPAWS), Yukon Chapter**

### **Reporter Resources**

[Memo: Trump administration pursuing overly aggressive timeline for Arctic Refuge drilling](#)

[Explainer: The Arctic Refuge](#)

[Gwich'in Statement on the release of the Notice of Intent](#)

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