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Indigenous and Conservation Groups Applaud Suspension of Arctic Refuge Leases but Call for Further Action

Washington — Today the Biden administration announced the suspension of oil and gas leases for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge — President Biden had previously placed a temporary moratorium on oil and gas leasing activities on the Arctic Refuge coastal plain [via an executive order](#) issued on his first day in office. The leases suspended today were issued under the leasing mandate contained in the 2017 Tax Act. The first lease sale held under that mandate was an epic failure that yielded little more than \$12 million, less than 1% of the \$1.8 billion in revenue promised by drilling advocates in the lead-up to the Tax Act.

Multiple conservation and Indigenous organizations sued the Trump administration (separate suits [here](#) and [here](#)) in August 2020 for finalizing an illegal leasing program that violated bedrock laws put in place to protect our nation's public lands, waters, wildlife and people, including the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, the National Wildlife Refuge System Administration Act, the National Environmental Policy Act, the Wilderness Act, and the Endangered Species Act. These lawsuits asked the court to vacate the leasing program and cancel the leases issued under the Trump administration. This suspension means the leases would remain in place while the administration re-does the analysis for the program.

Joint statement from the Indigenous and conservation organizations listed above:

“Thank you, President Biden and Interior Secretary Haaland, for taking this step toward protecting the Arctic Refuge from oil activities. These lands are sacred to the Gwich'in and Iñupiat peoples and nursery to the Porcupine caribou, polar bears and millions of migratory birds. More work remains, however, and we look forward to working with the administration on stronger action to correct this unlawful leasing program and preserve one of our nation's most majestic public lands. We also look to the administration and Congress to now prioritize repealing the ongoing threat posed by the statutory oil leasing mandate and restoring protections to America's Serengeti.”

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