

Biden won't challenge NEPA redo of massive Alaska oil project

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The Biden administration has decided not to appeal a court ruling that axed approvals for ConocoPhillips' massive Willow project in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, prompting cheers from environmentalists.

Judge Sharon Gleason of the U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska ruled this summer that the federal government had failed to consider the climate, public health and wildlife impacts of significantly expanding oil and gas operations within the reserve ([Energywire](#), Aug. 19).

"The prior administration approved Willow while ignoring local communities and failing to address risks to people, land, water or wildlife," said Kristen Miller, acting executive director of Alaska Wilderness League, one of six groups to challenge the project in court.

"With Willow's approval now revoked, President Biden can chart a new course in America's Arctic," she added in a statement.

Gleason, an Obama appointee, said the agencies' "serious" errors had violated the National Environmental Policy Act. She tossed out federal approvals for the \$6 billion project that was expected to produce a peak of 100,000 barrels per day, and ordered the Bureau of Land Management and the Fish and Wildlife Service back to the drawing board.

Neither ConocoPhillips nor the administration brought the case to the 9th U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals by this week's filing deadline.

"The matter has now been remanded to the BLM," said Melissa Schwartz, communications director for the Interior Department.

"In light of the court's decision, we are reviewing to determine next steps," Schwartz said.

The Biden administration's decision not to challenge the court ruling comes as the federal government is undergoing a national review of the current oil and gas leasing program on federal lands and waters as part of the administration's efforts to address climate change.

"The Administration's move not to appeal the lower court's decision to stop Willow is a victory for protecting the Arctic and combating the climate crisis," said Hallie Templeton, legal director for Friends of the Earth, in a statement.