

Groups call on administration to shut down destructive ConocoPhillips' Willow oil and gas proposal, not duct tape it together and call it good

Alaska and national groups submitted a comment letter today urging the Biden administration to engage the public in a transparent process, conduct a thorough analysis, and work toward meeting climate goals when conducting its supplemental environmental review of the proposed Willow oil and gas project in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska. The letter makes clear that the only BLM permitting action that fulfills the administration's commitments to science-based decision making, the protection of biodiversity, and addressing the climate crisis is to reject ConocoPhillips' request for permits for its destructive fossil fuel project proposal.

Groups sent the letter today because the administration has skipped a scoping period and the critical public process that goes with it.

Key points

- **Biden administration skips key process for public engagement and understanding impacts**
- **Willow project would undermine Biden's climate goals and promises**
- **Willow project endangers Arctic communities, wildlife and the planet**

Biden administration skips scoping process

After the courts concluded in August 2021 that Trump-era authorizations for the ConocoPhillips' Willow proposal broke the law, the Biden administration immediately began working to supplement its previous flawed analysis with the goal of complying with the National Environmental Policy Act this time around. Yet in beginning a supplemental environmental review, they are skipping an important process for gathering public input at the outset and are instead working behind closed doors rather than making any public announcements about this process or its timelines. Scoping — NEPA's first step — is meant to determine the scale and impacts of a proposed project and identify significant issues that require in-depth analysis. It also allows the public to offer the agency valuable input.

The scoping process should not be skipped to fulfill ConocoPhillips' desires to have permits in hand by next winter. BLM should not prioritize ConocoPhillips' profits at the expense of the people, land, and animals who will be harmed.

(Details on public input, p. 19-22 of the comment letter.)

Willow oil & gas industrialization would undermine Biden's climate goals and promises

Willow would spew out massive amounts of carbon pollution in the Arctic and around the world with harmful consequences to people and animals. The effects of climate change are already dire in Arctic communities experiencing fish, bird and marine animal die-offs, the loss of food access and food sources, the need to move entire villages due to coastal erosion, sea level rise and extreme storms, infrastructure damage and loss due to erosion and permafrost thaw, and much more.

Reporter memo

Based on ConocoPhillips' estimates, the project would produce 260 million metric tons of greenhouse gases over its lifetime – more carbon than 56 million cars emit in a year. This would cause devastating and potentially catastrophic consequences to Arctic animal behavior, hydrology, permafrost, and subsistence hunting. BLM is obligated by law to look not only at the effects of Willow on climate change, but also at the implications of climate change on the environment and, indeed, the future.

A recent District of Columbia District Court ruling that voided oil and gas leases in the Gulf of Mexico reiterated the Alaska District Court and other court decisions rejecting the Interior Department's bogus climate model used with Willow. As numerous courts have now found, BLM has an obligation to thoroughly and accurately analyze climate effects, not attempt to paper over Willow's real climate impacts by ignoring science.

(Climate impacts, p. 26-37 of the comment letter)

The Willow oil and gas project endangers Arctic communities and the planet

The community of Nuiqsut already suffers the health consequences of nearby oil and gas exploitation, and Arctic communities already endure the escalating impacts of climate change. The Willow proposal would dramatically escalate a feedback loop that increases these impacts.

The project would further endanger the health and survival of threatened Southern Beaufort Sea polar bears and an array of animals like caribou, migratory birds, and marine mammals, whose biodiversity and species' health sustains an interconnected system of Arctic life.

We're certain that if BLM is held accountable to the law, thoroughly engages the public, and uses legitimate science to do a thorough and up-to-date analysis of impacts and alternatives, the Biden administration will conclude that ConocoPhillips' Willow proposal does not belong in the western Arctic or our climate future.

(Impacts on traditional hunting and food sources, p. 11-13 of comment letter.)

(Impacts on animals and biodiversity, p. 49 to 56 of comment letter)