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Gwich'in Steering Committee and allies go to court to defend Biden administration's suspension of oil and gas leases in the Arctic Refuge

ANCHORAGE (AK)— The Gwich'in Steering Committee and allied groups filed a motion in court today to join a lawsuit defending the Department of the Interior's suspension of leases and oil and gas activities on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

“We support Secretary Haaland's suspension order and will defend it, along with our traditional way of life, against this lawsuit attempting to revive an illegal, disrespectful leasing program,” said **Bernadette Demientieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee**. “We will always protect these sacred lands that connect our people culturally and spiritually, and today that means going to court.”

The Interior Department suspended leases to conduct a new environmental analysis of a deeply flawed leasing program in early 2021. Our filing today on behalf of 13 clients aims to defend against the November 2021 lawsuit filed by the Alaska Industrial Development Export Authority, a state of Alaska–owned entity that obtained leases in the Arctic Refuge during the [flop lease sale](#) on Jan. 6, 2020. The AIDEA lawsuit seeks to undo the suspension of leases.

The Venetie Tribal Government also filed a motion today to defend the suspension of leases.

These actions seek to uphold the administration's suspension of industrial activities so that BLM can review the unlawful leasing program. Our filing today includes the same 13 groups that brought a previous lawsuit in [August](#) 2020 charging the U.S. Bureau of Land Management with breaking multiple laws when finalizing the leasing program.

“AIDEA bought these leases in the coastal plain in an illegal sale that never should have happened, and was frankly an embarrassment,” said Scott Fogarty, executive director of the Northern Alaska Environmental Center. “The waste of state funds on the sale itself and now on

ongoing litigation defending their bad choices is absurd, especially given the urgent need for Alaska to move beyond oil and build a robust, diversified, and sustainable economy that serves our communities. The Northern Center remains committed to standing with the Gwich'in in protecting this sacred place from oil drilling, and if that means ongoing legal battles, we'll be there every step of the way."

Law firm Trustees for Alaska represents 13 clients in today's motion: Gwich'in Steering Committee, Alaska Wilderness League, Alaska Wildlife Alliance, Canadian Parks & Wilderness Society-Yukon Chapter, Defenders of Wildlife, Environment America, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, National Wildlife Federation, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Northern Alaska Environmental Center, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, and Wilderness Watch.

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