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**Alaska Native Organizations Welcome New Opportunity to Protect Lands and Communities in the Western Arctic**

*Opportunity to Prioritize Subsistence Activities and Wildlife with New Special Areas in the NPR-A*

**(Nuiqsut, Alaska) –** Alaska Native organizations are welcoming a new opportunity to protect their subsistence, cultural, and traditional activities following the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI)’s [request for information](https://www.blm.gov/press-release/blm-welcomes-input-special-areas-alaskas-western-arctic) about how to better protect the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska’s (NPR-A) Special Areas.

Through this process, the public will be able to weigh in on where and why new specific lands deserve to be protected as “Special Areas” – a federal designation unique to the NPR-A that recognizes and enhances protections for areas with significant subsistence, wildlife, recreational, historic, or scenic value. Yet, these resources are at risk from ever-expanding industrial activity and climate change that pose dire impacts to subsistence and environmental justice.

**Alaska Native communities and groups welcome this opportunity for expanded Special Areas protections and call for urgent action below:**

“The lands in the NPR-A are absolutely critical for the hunting, fishing, and gathering that has sustained my communities’ way of life for millennia. I am glad that the administration is taking steps to prioritize subsistence on these lands– including by protecting the Teshekpuk Caribou Herds’ migration and wintering grounds– over harmful industrial activity. This work is necessary to ensure that Alaska Native communities can flourish for years to come,” **said Rosemary Ahtuangaruak, Founder, Grandmothers Growing Goodness.**

“There is no time to waste in ensuring that Indigenous knowledge, leadership, and voices are prioritized over oil and gas development. For too long, the drive for profit has threatened the lands and wildlife that native communities in the Western Arctic have stewarded and relied upon since time immemorial. The Biden Administration must build on growing momentum to slow the rate of global warming, and take the necessary next step to limit development and ensure that the critical lands and ecosystems in the region receive the strongest safeguards possible.” **said Austin Ahmasuk, Environmental Justice Director, Native Movement.**

“This announcement by the Biden administration is another opportunity towards advancing protections on ancestral lands for our communities in the Arctic. These steady and incremental steps towards protecting lands, water, wildlife and traditional ways of life are creating a path towards more empowered community involvement. This is vital for balancing the systematic disempowerment that’s happened in our region for decades. Many forget how recent these massive shifts have happened. In my Aaka’s (Grandmother’s) lifetime, she witnessed the transition from living a traditional lifestyle to experiencing the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System being constructed and oil fields erected close enough to her traditional lands to be seen, heard, and lead to evacuations for Nuiqsut (the most impacted village from oil and gas development on the north slope of Alaska) as recently as 2022. We welcome this most recent announcement, and will continue to work towards building stronger communities in ways that lead to autonomy and self-determination on our traditional lands, **said Nauri Simmonds, Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic.**,” **said Nauri Simmonds, Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic.**

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*Grandmothers Growing Goodness is an Inupiat group dedicated to elevating the understanding and protection of Inupiat culture and people in the face of rampant oil and gas development and climate change. Its core purpose is to help support equity for communities facing significant environmental justice threats and to strengthen equity for the Inupiat.*

*Native Movement is dedicated to building people power, rooted in an Indigenized worldview, toward healthy, sustainable, & just communities for ALL. Native Movement supports grassroots-led projects that align with our vision, that endeavor to ensure social justice, Indigenous Peoples’ rights, and the rights of Mother Earth.*

*Sovereign Iñupiat for a Living Arctic’s mission is to create space for healthy communities, spiritually, mentally, and physically; fostering the connection between people, culture and land. We are empowered as frontline communities and those who have inherent connection with the land and what it provides.*