



## Gwich'in Steering Committee

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*"In no case may a people be deprived  
of their own means of subsistence."  
International Covenants on Human Rights*

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We, the Gwich'in Steering Committee and undersigned, oppose any efforts to develop oil and gas in the remote and intact Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northeast Alaska. We ask oil and gas companies, and the banks that fund them, to stand with the Gwich'in Nation by not initiating any oil and gas development in the Arctic Refuge.

In late December 2017, the U.S. Congress passed a budget that for the first time opens the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to oil and gas development. This is sacred land for the Gwich'in Nation, who have lived in this region of the Arctic for thousands of years. The Gwich'in Nation is unanimous in its defense of the coastal plain. This incredibly fragile corner of the world supports the 200,000-strong Porcupine caribou herd, the source of 80% of the Gwich'in diet. In Gwich'in the coastal plain is called "Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit" or "the sacred place where life begins" because the coastal plain provides a sheltered calving ground for the herd. Any disturbance of the coastal plain would have devastating human and ecological impacts.

Over 70% of Americans agree that the Arctic Refuge is no place to drill, according to [research](#) commissioned by the Yale Program on Climate Change Communication.

As the world rapidly shifts towards clean energy sources, we are also gravely concerned about the climate, financial and reputational risks associated with pursuing a speculative fossil fuel source that will likely become uneconomical. It is both deeply unethical and unwise to permanently destroy the Gwich'in homelands to pursue this high-risk gamble. Any oil company or bank that supports drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge faces enormous reputational risk and public backlash. Their brands would be associated with trampling on human rights, destroying one of the world's last remaining intact wild places, and contributing to the climate crisis.

Many corporations, governments and investors are developing business plans that assume a two degree Celsius climate risk scenario. Financial regulators, analysts and other experts have also endorsed the importance of climate risk analysis, noting that a carbon budget consistent with a 2°C target will render most fossil assets unburnable. Thus, making any capital investments to pursue Arctic Refuge oil would be an irresponsible business decision, at the very time when we are transitioning away from fossil fuels. Oil company assessments and independent research analyses all project that global oil demand will soon decline as electric cars and other clean technologies continue to increase market share.

Arctic Village – Yukon Flats – Venetie  
Old Crow – Tsiigehtchic – Fort McPherson

Finally, the 19 million acre Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is one of the wildest places left on the planet. This wilderness supports the Porcupine caribou herd and, in turn, the Gwich'in people. The Arctic Refuge also protects more abundant and diverse wildlife than any other conservation area in the five nation circumpolar north, including rare musk oxen, denning polar bears, and millions of migratory birds that nest or stage in the Refuge before traveling through every U.S. state and five continents. This place was originally set aside by President Dwight Eisenhower in 1960 as a Refuge, not for development. Roads, pipelines, gravel mines, airstrips and other facilities that would be developed to support exploration and development on the coastal plain would undermine the wilderness character of the Refuge, fragment habitat and displace wildlife. Millions of gallons of fresh water, needed to support drilling activities, could be drained from fragile Arctic rivers. And oil spills, which already occur on the North Slope, would harm fish and wildlife.

Any development in the fragile coastal plain would permanently destroy the primary food source of the Gwich'in people, our culture, and way of life; and we ask you to join us and the majority of Americans throughout the U.S. in our longstanding fight to defend the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge. Your leadership is needed now more than ever.

Signed,

X  
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