



CoastalPlain_EIS, BLM_AK <blm_ak_coastalplain_eis@blm.gov>

[EXTERNAL] Comment

1 message

Christin Anderson <mushroomchristin@gmail.com>

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To: blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov

Bernadette Demientieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee said this in an interview for "On Call" on May 23 (<http://kalw.org/post/gwichin-nation-resisting-drilling-arctic-refuge-matter-survival?platform=hootsuite#stream/0>):

My elders are my scientists. They have been living in this area a lot longer than any body else. And, when they say this is the wrong thing to do, when they say that our way of life is at risk, I'm gonna take their word before anybody else's. They know our animals, they know how, they know that...[sobs] I'm sorry...I'm just trying to really protect our identity as Gwich'in, and our way of life. And, it's all connected. It's connected to the land, to the water, to the animals. And, it's scary to think that, you know, we're having people making decisions about our future, and they're not even involving us. We're adults. We are, you know, one of the First Nations of this country. And, they're just coming in demanding changes, and tearing apart our homelands. And, that's just not ok.

It's not ok, in the first place, that this law legalizing drilling in the coastal plain passed without consultation with the Gwich'in Nation and other Alaska Native tribes—those most directly affected.

It's not ok that this law was purposely passed quietly as a rider on the tax bill, and not out in the open. It is not ok that this law passed against the will of 70% of U.S. registered voters.

It's not ok, that the scoping process is happening in such haste and with such minimal outreach. Today, in Fairbanks, one of merely six public meetings scheduled by the BLM is to take place. There is another in Anchorage tomorrow. There is one in Washington D.C. on June 15. There have been four scheduled in Alaska Native—Inupiat and Gwich'in—villages: Kaktovik, Arctic Village, Utqiagvik, and Venetie. This is not enough. There should be public meetings, at least, in all thirteen Gwich'in villages whose ways of life depend on the Porcupine Caribou Herd who depend on the coastal plain as their nursery. There should be public meetings in all 33 coastal villages already dealing with thawing permafrost, rising seas, and erosion, as well as declining food security, connected with climate change from burning fossil fuels. The coastal plain is also U.S. federal land. There should be meetings not only in D.C., but outside Alaska in all the other 49 states.

The narrow value of fossil fuel profit driving drilling in the coastal plain also is not ok. It is not ok that this harmful industry and a few politicians be allowed to talk over the knowing voices of Gwich'in People and over most of the rest of us in the U.S. It is not ok to trample democratic process and values that hold us together as human beings—including respect for elders, food security, land and human health, sacred beauty, and the flourishing of future generations. These are responsibilities, as Bernadette notes, that Gwich'in take seriously. These responsibilities also belong to all of us. The BLM scoping process must uphold the capacities of the Peoples of this country—foremost the First Nations who know the land better than anyone—to carry out their responsibilities.