



CoastalPlain\_EIS, BLM\_AK &lt;blm\_ak\_coastalplain\_eis@blm.gov&gt;

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**[EXTERNAL] Attn: Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS**

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Faith Gemmill <redoilone@gmail.com>  
To: blm\_ak\_coastalplain\_EIS@blm.gov

Tue, Jun 19, 2018 at 9:17 PM

Attn: Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program EIS

222 West 7th Avenue, Stop #13

Anchorage, Alaska 99513

Email: [blm\\_ak\\_coastalplain\\_EIS@blm.gov](mailto:blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov)

Comments of Faith Gemmill

Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program

Environmental Impact Statement

Public Scoping Comments

May 24, 2018

Greetings.

I am Neets'aii Gwich'in, Pit River and Wintu. I was raised in Vashraii K'oo. This is my community. (Lineage introduction)

I will only tell the lineage of my mom's side since I was raised in our Neets'aii Gwich'in way of life. Growing up we always had caribou as part of our diet, the herd represents 80% of our food security. Every fall---we go up on the mountain to hunt and harvest for the winter.

The Porcupine Caribou Herd is vital to our cultural way of life, we use every part of the animal to meet our needs, in the past, even our homes were made of caribou hides, but now we still use the bones to make cultural tools, and the hides for many cultural articles of clothing. Hunting itself is a cultural practice.

At the time when the herd is in our territory, we practice many of our own spiritual beliefs that have been taught to us and handed down from our ancestors, thereby we are spiritually bound to the caribou. Gwich'in Creation Story-There was a time when humans had characteristics of animals, then humans were created from the animals, it is said in our creation story that the Gwich'in came from the caribou, and when we did, we made an agreement with each other. From that time on, the Gwich'in would maintain a part of the caribou heart, and the caribou would maintain a part of the Gwich'in heart. We are one and the same in a spiritual sense.

The herd also represents an important facet of the social fabric of our community. At the time when we are hunting caribou on Dachanlee, that is the time many important teachings and roles of men and women are taught. Roles of Men--there are specific roles that are important for our men to learn, and those roles are taught at our hunting time, such as

how to respectfully take the caribou, give proper thanks for the take, which season to hunt which caribou and various other issues around being a provider. The women on the other hand also have specific roles, such as taking care of the meat properly to dry and to store, which parts of the animal young women are not allowed to eat, which parts are only given to elders and many other important cultural teachings that women must know. It is one of the most important times to pass on traditional teachings.

We do not have large grocery stores in our community, we are economically dependent on our caribou, we live our subsistence way of life because we truly have to...we cannot live without the herd.

As you can see the herd is critical to our physical, cultural, spiritual, social and economic needs.

Growing up in this community, our elders have always uplifted our way of life and taught our people to have respect for the land, and value the land. Money is short term, will not last, nor will it provide for us forever, but our land will always provide for us. We are only sovereign if we are able to live and be who we are. We are only sovereign if we govern ourselves based upon the values and teachings of our people, we are only sovereign if the land that we are entirely dependent upon is intact and protected. We have a reciprocal relationship with the land since time immemorial, the Creator bestowed us this place and this herd, which is why we are here standing before you today. We follow the Creator's laws/Natural law. The western values and system have forgotten the original laws of Creator and now we see a threat to the very existence of humankind.

**The burning of fossil fuels is the major human cause of emissions that are resulting in global warming. Global warming is leading to shifts in the world environment that are resulting in a significant increase in devastating and alarming weather patterns. Effects of global warming in Alaska alone include altered weather patterns, more severe storms, erosion of coastal areas, greater precipitation, thawing permafrost, melting sea ice, receding glaciers, increased instance of spruce bark beetle infestation, increased and severe forest fires, declining fish populations, migratory and habitat disruptions of key subsistence resources, and disruption of all natural cycles of life. These impacts lead to loss of subsistence resources and rights, relocation of communities, and to negative social statistics related to human health. One of the major impacts is Alaska Native communities are struggling with forced relocation as coastlines no longer protected by sea ice erode, they in essence are now becoming environmental refugees or climate refugees.**

**The current impacts of climate change on Alaska's Indigenous peoples are perpetuated by the incessant demand for energy to feed the high consumption appetite of America. Current energy policy disproportionately targets our homelands and continually puts our subsistence way of life at risk.** The sovereign authority of Alaska Natives is undermined as our ancestral ways of life and homelands are imperiled by devastating proposals for further resource extraction of fossil fuels and minerals. The devastation is compounded by climate change and vice versa.

The Profit at all cost and business as usual mentality of the US is our greatest challenge. Why are we in this situation? The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)

The United States (US) Congress unilaterally passed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (known as ANCSA) in 1971 to legitimize US ownership and governance over Indigenous peoples, our lands, and access to our resources. Under ANCSA for profit corporations were established and they partner with the companies in our territories. The sole purpose of a corporation is profit at all cost; a corporation does not look out for the health and well being of the people. Whereas the Tribes purpose is the health and well being of the people. Two contradictory purposes now in place. Many Alaska Natives believe ANCSA was an illegitimate infringement upon our inherent right of Self-Determination and Subsistence. ANCSA was put forth to eliminate aboriginal title to our ancestral territories, to access and exploit our resources, to assimilate Alaska Natives and incorporate us into western society and value system, but ultimately to divide and conquer Alaska Natives. This is the same tactic that the US implements when dealing with Indigenous peoples throughout the world. Today, our ancestral homelands are compromised by exploitation and polluted beyond reparation

**With continued fossil fuel and mineral exploitation the only lasting result is violations to our human rights, lands and territories, health and well being of our peoples at this time when we are in Climate Crisis. This situation must change if our Peoples are to survive, especially our future generations.**

No Free Prior and Informed consent has been ensured in the case of the Gwich'in and The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The US is a signatory to the Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. This declaration gives Indigenous communities the right to say NO to any such development. As you move forward you are in Violation of the Human Rights of the Gwich'in Nation.

The US government is a signatory to the International Treaty and Agreement on the Conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd Calving and Post Calving Grounds. As the Trump Administration moves forward, the US is in violation of this Legally Binding International Treaty.

We strongly recommend a moratorium on all new exploration for oil, gas and coal as a first step towards the full phase-out of fossil fuels with a just transition to sustainable jobs, energy and environment. We take this position and make this recommendation based on our concern over the disproportionate social, cultural, spiritual, environmental and climate impacts on Indigenous Peoples in Alaska

During the discussion of timeline yesterday, the Department of Interior officials requested our people to tell them when it would not be harmful to drill there. Never. There is not any time development would be safe in the calving grounds.

The US congress passed the tax bill without full debate on the issue, essentially shutting out the American Public—the coastal plain represents the last 5% of America's only Arctic coast. 95% of the North Slope coast is open to oil and gas development. This issue has been debated for nearly 40 years, how could congress railroad this issue through as with the tax bill, not allowing debate on the merits of the issue, and now you are here trying to rush the process. In your hastiness you will make mistakes and an American treasure and our culture will be lost due to this. For once the US Government should treat Indigenous Peoples respectfully. We have the opportunity to do it right. I believe there is a sleeping giant about to rise, the American Public must AWAKEN to reality.

In my comments today, I reiterate and strongly support the requests of the Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government made in our Government-to-Government consultation.

- The Federal Government is required to consult with our people and we want to be informed and engaged every step of the way.
- We should be granted official cooperating agency status that recognizes our special expertise and sovereign interests in the lands and resources at stake.
- The BLM must take the necessary time to fully engage us and fulfill its trust responsibilities. That means working with the tribes on a timeline and in a manner that suits our unique sovereign interests and needs. It should not rush this process.

#### **Protecting the original purposes of the Arctic Refuge, including subsistence:**

The new oil and gas purpose of the Arctic Refuge appears in conflict with the other purposes of the refuge. We are concerned that oil and gas development will degrade subsistence resources and access to these resources, including wildlife, plants, water, and air quality, among others. BLM needs to:

- Address competing mandates of these purposes and assess how the agency will manage and prioritize these purposes and fully analyze how this new oil and gas purpose may impact subsistence resources and access to them, and how BLM intends to minimize these impacts

#### **ANILCA 810 Analysis**

- Consult with tribes to complete an ANILCA 810 analysis and address subsistence impacts for all of the communities that rely on the resources of the coastal plain, not just those communities on the coastal plain

There are many potential harmful impacts to the land, water, and subsistence way of life. BLM needs to assess how oil and gas leasing and development will affect:

- Social and cultural resources for Alaska Natives, including Gwich'in
- Archaeological resources
- Environmental justice

Finally, I strongly register my objection to drilling or leasing the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. I also strongly request that a **No Action** Alternative is included in the EIS.

Thank You,

Faith Gemmill, Neets'ait Gwich'in



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