



CoastalPlain_EIS, BLM_AK <blm_ak_coastalplain_eis@blm.gov>

[EXTERNAL] Written testimony from Fenton Rexford

1 message

Fenton Rexford <Fenton.Rexford@north-slope.org>

Tue, Jun 19, 2018 at 12:35 PM

To: "blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov" <blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov>

To whom it may concern,

Please find attached my written testimony for the ANWR Scoping. I submit this for the record. Thank you for this opportunity.

Fenton Rexford

P. O. Box 9

Kaktovik, Alaska 99747

Fenton Rexford

DEPUTY ADVISOR

North Slope Borough | Mayor's Office

M: (907) 346-7593

**Fenton Rexford Testimony at ANWR DC Scoping.DOCX**
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**Washington, D.C. Scoping Meeting
ANWR Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing EIS**

**Testimony of Fenton Rexford
North Slope Borough, Alaska
June 15, 2018**

Hello. Thank you for the opportunity to present my comments to you at this scoping hearing.

My name is Fenton Rexford and I come from the community of Kaktovik, where I was born and raised, to speak to you on behalf of my people and myself.

I know that this Washington hearing was a late addition to the Scoping Hearing schedule and is the result of the letter submitted by environmental organizations on behalf of the millions of Americans who consider themselves co-owners of our homelands.

I'd like to give a short history of our land.

The military first came to our island in 1947. They were authorized to assume control over Barter Island – including the site of the village and cemetery – to build a runway and establish Distance Early Warning sites that were meant to give the United States pre-eminent warning of an air attack.

Over the course of the military occupation of Kaktovik, the village and its people were forced to relocate three times. Heavy equipment and machinery was stored on the island, our traditional sod houses and ice cellars were bulldozed over, our people were subjected to radioactive iodine testing in an attempt to determine our adaptation to extreme cold, and toxic materials and waste were haphazardly dumped on our land.

We have received no restitution and no acknowledgement for what has been done to our community. There was no outcry from you, who consider yourselves to be the protectors of this land.

Our homelands extend from the continental divide in the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean; from the Sagavanirktok River on the west, well into Canada on the east. Our tribe inhabits 23 million acres of lands that we have used for hunting, fishing, gathering, and raising our families for over 11,000 years. In the 1970's, the government legally extinguished our aboriginal title to those 23 million acres while granting us a legal right to take Western title to 92,000 acres around our village.

The "deal" was that this land they "gave" us was locked up, we couldn't use it – no, it is part of a Wildlife Refuge. We have had difficulty protecting our legal right to use traditional means of accessing our Native allotments and inholdings and traditional subsistence use sites.

Now, we finally have permission from Congress to develop our own lands-for our own economic means-and we mean to seize this opportunity and actively participate in the process.

The Iñupiat have always been able to adapt and embrace the opportunities we are given – We consider the resources that the land provides to be our greatest gift. We are not victims, and we have a right to economic self-determination.

We are committed as a community to engaging with the BLM during this process. To do this, we will need help and Technical Assistance from your agency. At the very least, we need a tribal liaison through the Native Village of Kaktovik who can aid both parties in setting up meetings and consultation. This person should be a community member who knows our customs, our entity structures, our harvest and subsistence schedules, and how and when to gather our community.

The liaison should be hired directly by the Native Village of Kaktovik and funded through the BLM. This should not take the place of the impact aid contemplated under Congressional legislation; it should be in addition to it.

We have long been promised a fund that would be set up to help us plan to mitigate impacts in our community, to fund projects and programs that expand public facilities, and to address our needs as they relate to oil and gas exploration and development. While this fund is making its way through Congress, the BLM needs to provide funding for Kaktovik in the interim.

As we move forward through the leasing EIS, our Native Village of Kaktovik, which has accepted the BLM's invitation to be a cooperating agency, will need assistance in increasing capacity. Our two Native Village employees will not be able to keep up with the pace of this process nor the quantity of information to review. Effective engagement from my community is critical to this process and must be made a priority.

We will need a review of our traditional Native allotments; at least 25 people from Kaktovik were denied their rights to their family's traditional land with no explanation. We will also need new rules about how we are allowed to travel in the 1002 area and across the Refuge. There is a problem if we are not even granted access to our own lands. The Federal government has reserved easements across the Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation lands that surround our village to access federal lands; we should have reciprocal easements across federal lands to access our inholdings.

We hope that since the Fish and Wildlife Service will continue their surface management of these lands and wildlife they will consider entering into a cooperative agreement with the Kaktovikmiut in their management. We do, after all, have many years more experience.

Additionally we will, of course, need the most extensive protections that industry and the government can provide for our lands and animals. I feel that this goes without saying, but I know that part of the Scoping process is that we should make sure we cover everything. These protections should be structured with maximum local input, and should be at least as strict as the regulations that have been established in the National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska which have been so successful in mitigating impacts to caribou, polar bears, and other wildlife.

Lastly, of critical importance is to establish a baseline Village Health Assessment. We will not sacrifice the health of our people for development, and we don't have to. Careful health assessments and air quality studies right from the start will help us to inform development decisions, and ensure our people are well taken care of well into the future.

Thank you for the opportunity to present my suggestions to you.

We have been fighting for over 40 years for the right to develop on our own lands. Our community, like many communities around Alaska and across America, has had so much taken from us; but now, hope and opportunity has returned to Kaktovik. Quyanaq.