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[EXTERNAL] Submission on DOI scoping consultation for Arctic Refuge

1 message

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Mon, Jun 18, 2018 at 10:32 AM

To: blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov

Cc: catherine.mckenna@parl.gc.ca, justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca, chrystia.freeland@international.gc.ca, eactivist@cpawsyukon.org

Dear Bureau of Land Management,

I am currently a Visiting Scholar at McGill University in Montréal, Canada. My doctoral research examined efforts by First Nations, Inuit, and their allies in labor, faith, and conservation communities, to publicly share their concerns about proper stewardship of the Porcupine caribou herd, and to ensure that the herd was legally protected throughout its range.

As many experts and indigenous people have shared with the Bureau Of Land Management throughout this scoping process, the Porcupine caribou herd are vital to Gwich'in, Inuvialuit, and other indigenous people in Northern Canada and Alaska. Through my time living in the north, as well as through my fieldwork with specific Gwich'in and Inuvialuit communities, I have seen firsthand just how important this herd is both to the subsistence economy and as a cultural touchstone helping people stay connected to their identity and to living in "the good way."

In my fieldwork, it was brought home to me again and again how, in negotiating final land claim and self-government agreements — and setting in motion the modern era of land claim and self-government agreements in Canada — a primary, centering concern for both Gwich'in and Inuvialuit communities was protection of the Porcupine caribou herd. Working on both sides of the Canada – US border, indigenous communities played a key role in instigating the Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on the Conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd. This agreement, which sets a very high bar between the parties for ensuring the protection of the caribou herd, is an international treaty/bilateral agreement. The treaty relationship is at the highest level of diplomacy between nations, and honoring such relationships is crucial to the United States' reputation and place within the international order.

There is no part of the Porcupine caribou herd's range that is as essential to its health and survival as the caribou calving grounds that straddle the border between the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and northern Yukon. In Canada, these grounds have complete protection from development. The vast majority of caribou experts on both sides of the border agree that oil and gas development in the calving grounds poses an unacceptable level of risk to the long-term survival of the herd. An adequate scoping review must take into consideration all the evidence from these experts, including long-term studies that document the disturbance and environmental degradation that has accompanied oil development in Prudhoe Bay, and the impact that this has had upon caribou herds in the region.

The fate of the Porcupine caribou herd is a matter of highest-level international concern for Canada. I hope that the scoping review will take into account the full implications of this international dimension, both in terms of meeting the bar set by the international Agreement for conservation of the caribou, and in terms of enacting the level of international cooperation and shared input required to effectively protect the Porcupine caribou herd.

Sincerely,

Shirley Roburn
Visiting Scholar, McGill University
Montreal, Canada

cc: Hon. Catherine McKenna
House of Commons

cc: M. Justin Trudeau

cc: Minister Chrystia Freeland

cc: Ms. Nadine Sander-Green

