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[EXTERNAL] TCC ANWR LEASING SCOPING COMMENTS

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Please see the attached comments from Tanana Chiefs Conference.

Thank you,

Marna Sanford

4 attachments



TCC-Coastal Plain Oil & Gas Leasing Scoping Comments.pdf

1211K



ATT00001.htm

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TCC-Coastal Plain Oil & Gas Leasing Scoping Comments.docx

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COASTAL PLAIN OIL AND GAS LEASING PROGRAM EIS

SCOPING COMMENTS

The Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) is organized as Dena' Nena' Henash or "Our Land Speaks"; the regional non-profit operating under the Tribal Authority of 42 Tribal Governments within the Interior region of Alaska. Formed in 1962 out of a belief in tribal self-determination and the need for regional Native unity in the face of a changing world, TCC today is a diverse organization that provides health and social services, tribal development, and fish, wildlife, and land management for the more than 15,000 Alaska Native Tribal Members in our region. The nine-member Executive Board is elected by the Board of Directors. The president of the Board of Directors is elected by the full board and serves as the chief executive officer of the corporation.

Our Mission is: provide a unified voice in advancing sovereign tribal governments through the promotion of physical and mental wellness, education, socioeconomic development, and culture of the Interior Alaska Native people. The traditional territories of the 42 Tribal Governments we serve expands roughly 235,000 square miles, one-third the entire Alaska landmass.

Our traditional ancestral hunting and fishing practices, and the ceremonies that accompany these practices, provide for the social, cultural, economic, physical, and spiritual health and wellbeing of our people. As Native peoples, without access to our traditional food resources our health, our wellbeing, our economic security and food sovereignty are threatened.

TCC resolution 2017-73 reaffirms all 42 tribes stand united for the protection of the Porcupine Caribou Herd (PCH), their birthing grounds, and their nursery grounds, within the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (the Refuge). We seek permanent protection of the coastal plain of the Refuge. The Gwich'in people have relied upon the caribou for countless generations for the wellbeing of their people. The coastal plain is a sacred place to the Gwich'in people, their place name for the coastal plain is *Iizhik Gwatsan Gwandaii Goodlit*, the "Sacred Place Where Life Begins."

We call for an independent panel of scientists to be assembled to study the impacts of human activity related to oil and gas leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors on the coastal plain, the 1002 area, the PCH birthing and rearing grounds, and on the PCH health, productivity, and migrations. In the light of the study's findings, we call for the study panel to be independent with state, federal and Native biologists and social scientists. We call for the resulting research study findings to be issued without subject to political review of DOI appointees who would have the power to bury or alter the report.

Subsistence Impacts

A complete study of subsistence use must be included in the EIS to ensure any impacts from oil and gas leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors within the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge can be fully understood and mitigated and to ensure compliance with the: Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980 (including Title I section 101, Title III section 303, and Title VIII) and the purposes of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Our way of life will be significantly impacted and restricted by oil and gas leasing,

exploration, and development on the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge. We call on BLM to conduct an intensive and comprehensive ANILCA 810 review.

Our peoples' subsistence way of life will be significantly impacted and restricted by any changes to the Porcupine Caribou Herd and Migratory Waterfowl migration, habitat, food and water resources, and/or birthing grounds caused by oil and gas leasing along the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge. All of 42 member Tribal Governments rely upon migratory waterfowl as a critical wild food resource in the spring. For thousands of years and spanning dozens of generations, the Gwich'in people have relied upon the PCH to provide for their health, wellbeing, economic and food security. Our peoples are all related, relying upon extensive social and trading networks to provide for their wellbeing, with the PCH providing an important wild food resource for the entire Yukon Flats Subregion.

The sites of the tribal communities of Arctic Village and Venetie were selected as permanent settlement for their strategic location for the reliable supply of critical resources, namely whitefish, migratory waterfowl, moose, caribou and other migrating animals. It is documented within numerous studies that the migratory PCH has long been the primary means of subsistence for the Gwich'in.

Historical and current harvest and use data of the PCH by the Yukon Flats subregion is extremely limited. A complete study of subsistence use of PCH and migratory waterfowl must be included in the EIS to ensure any impacts from leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors can be fully understood and mitigated and to ensure compliance with the: Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980 (including Title I section 101, Title III section 303, and Title VIII) and the purposes of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments coauthored Technical Paper No. 377 (TP 377) with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence in 2012, *Subsistence Land Mammal Harvests and Uses, Yukon Flats, Alaska: 2008-2010 Harvest Report and Ethnographic Update*. TP 377 demonstrates a strong reliance on caribou in the Yukon Flats Subregion in 2008-2009 30% of Yukon Flats households reported using caribou (primarily PCH), with 98.4% of Venetie households reporting using PCH. TP 377 demonstrates extensive caribou trading and sharing networks among Yukon Flats villages, *"the information from past research presented above reveal an active network of caribou barter and gift giving in several of the participating communities. This also was corroborated by the ethnographic research, which further clarified that the exchange of caribou meat among the various Yukon Flats communities is an important customary and traditional practice."* TP377 does include Arctic Village, the community with primary reliance on the PCH and only reports two harvest years.

In addition to providing a primary food source, traditional hunting and fishing practices maintain cultural norms and language. They reinforce the deeply embedded value of a shared sense of community and responsibility for providing for others. Among our people it is common for those who are better equipped to hunt and fish, to distribute food to those who cannot provide for themselves. For many the act of hunting and fishing is ceremonial. Accordingly, subsistence is more than what Alaska Natives do; it embodies who we are as a people as traditions are passed down from one generation to the next. Impacts to our subsistence way of life are far reaching as noted here in Health Impacts.

Fish, Wildlife, and Habitat Impacts

A complete study of impacts to fish, wildlife and habitats within the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge must be included in the EIS to ensure any impacts from oil and gas leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors within the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge can be fully understood and mitigated and to ensure compliance with Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980 (including Title I section 101, Title III section 303, and Title VIII) and the purposes of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, and those listed here.

The coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge is one of the last great intact wilderness ecosystems in the world, and any leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors will have long-lasting and irreversible effects. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is the largest in the nation, yet only one of three in the nation managed remotely. There is very limited and inadequate data and information regarding the Refuge, its habitats, its keystone species, and the reliance on critical and threatened resources.

The Porcupine Caribou Herd (PCH) has been documented by scientist to have been inhabiting the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge for over 2,500 years (antler carbon dating) to provide safe haven for birthing grounds and nurseries for rearing their young. For survival, the PCH rely upon the unique variety of habitats the coastal plain offers within close proximity and access, from the coastal wetlands and lagoons to the sedge tundra to the river corridors to the uplands. The PCH must have the ability to access and utilize all unique of habitats of the coastal plain and 1002 to remain a productive, healthy herd, including the: sedge tundra which provides the most highly nutritious highly concentrated food source and the uplands which provide a dry and bug free habitat with a low density of predators both necessary for birthing and rearing calves. Mobility across the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge is necessary for PCH productivity. PCH have been documented to migrate in both east/west and north/south migration patterns across the coastal plain and 1002 area. A complete study must be included in the EIS to ensure impacts from leasing, exploration, development and transportation corridors to the PCH can be fully understood and mitigated and to ensure compliance with the Agreement Between the Government of Canada and the Government of the United States of America on the Conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd of 1987. Impacts to the PCH will greatly impact our subsistence way of life as noted here in Subsistence Impacts.

Multiple species of migratory waterfowl from 6 continents rely upon the coastal plain lagoon and wetlands for nesting and breeding grounds, including threatened vulnerable species of Steller's Eiders. A complete study must be included in the EIS to ensure any impacts from leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors can be fully understood and mitigated and to ensure compliance with the Migratory Bird Treaty Act of 1918. Impacts to migratory waterfowl will greatly impact our subsistence way of life as noted here in Subsistence Impacts.

Polar bears are a threatened vulnerable species in the U.S. under the Endangered Species Act since May 2008. The survival and the protection of the polar bear habitat are urgent, because of ongoing and potential loss of their sea ice habitat resulting from climate change. Polar bears are increasingly relying upon the coastal plain and 1002 area for denning, birthing grounds, and nursery grounds with multiple dens documented in the area. A complete study must be included in the EIS to ensure any impacts from leasing, exploration, development, and transportation

corridors can be fully understood and mitigated and to ensure compliance with the: United States-Russia Polar Bear Conservation and Management Act of 2006, the Marine Mammal Protection Act of 1972, Amended 1994, and the Endangered Species Act of 1973.

Health Impacts

The EIS must include a complete study of all potential health impacts to affected communities with the Yukon Flats Subregion. The independent study must consider all health impacts associated with the restriction of our Tribal peoples to practice their traditional way of life, including the ancestral harvest of the PCH and migratory birds due to shifts in migration or population crashes. Potential health impacts include rates and occurrences of diabetes, obesity, suicide, mental illness, sexual and domestic violence. It has been documented time and again that the Alaska Native community is at the greatest risk for health disparities.

The communities of the Yukon Flats Subregion require a secure, healthy, and sustainable wild food system for their health and wellbeing. In the absence of wild foods, and with an increase in the cash economy, consumption patterns will shift towards store-bought foods high in fat and sugar. If Tribal Members do not have access to healthy traditional food resources, direct health impacts from poor diet will occur, medically, socially, and economically. Therefore, any health impacts from loss of access to traditional foods and physical activity associated with traditional ways of life could be devastating.

According to a study by the Alaska Native Medical Center, Alaska Native children are experiencing adult onset diabetes at three times the rate of Alaska Native adults. In a Childhood Obesity study by the State of Alaska Department of Health and Human Services (2009), 21% of the Alaska Native high school population is overweight and 13% are obese. The Yukon-Koyukuk Census Region ranked 21st among 22 regions in the state in terms of Health Factors. In this calculation are statistics on Health Behaviors (including a 29% Adult Obesity rate), Clinical Care, and Social & Economic Factors (including a 31% Children in Poverty rate), and Physical Environment (including a minimal 20% Access to Healthy Foods Rate). The State of Alaska Department of Health and Social Services produced *Childhood Obesity in Alaska* in March 2009. Their limited data showed Alaska Native youth had a 35% rate of overweight and obesity combined, over a 24% rate of their white counterparts.

Tribal peoples suffer greatly when their traditional livelihoods and ways of life are impacted by oil and gas exploration and development, causing increases in suicide, mental illness, sexual and domestic violence. Alaska Natives suffer the highest suicide rates in the country. As documented by the State of Alaska Department of Health and Human Services, “The rate of suicide among Alaska Native peoples was 35.1 per 100,000 people in 2007.” In terms of sexual violence, “Native Alaskans make up 61 percent of rape victims in the state, making Alaska Native women 9.7 times more likely than other Alaskans to be victims. Remarkable though they are, these numbers are by all accounts conservative, as the reported assault rate comprises only a portion of the overall rate of incidents.” (State of Alaska).

Economic Impacts

A complete study of the economic value and impact of wild foods harvested from the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge, namely migratory waterfowl statewide and PCH across the

northeast of Alaska and northwest of Canada, must be included in the EIS to ensure any impacts from leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors can be fully understood and mitigated and to ensure compliance with Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980, specifically Title VIII, and the purposes of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The cost of living in the Yukon Flats Subregion is high. The average rate of unemployment within a village is exorbitant at 26.21 % (US Census 2000). The median annual income in the region is estimated at \$19,317 (US Census 2000). Prices in local food stores can be up to five times acceptable prices in the remainder of the country. High freight, utility, fuel and food costs reduce an income to half its purchasing power.

According to the Federal Subsistence Management Program, *“the state’s rural residents harvest approximately 22,000 tons of wild foods each year – an average of 375 pounds per person. ...Nowhere else in the United States is there such a heavy reliance upon wild foods.”* One pound of organic meat would average a minimum of \$18, if not \$25, in a rural community. At 375 pounds per person, the annual value of this food source would be \$6,750 - \$9,375 and for a family of four would be \$27,000 - \$37,500. This would not be possible for the vast majority of households.

A complete study of the economic impact to recreational guiding must be included in the EIS to ensure impacts from leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors to the recreational guiding community can be fully understood and mitigated. Many Alaskan recreational outfitters rely upon the untouched beauty and splendor of the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge for their income through recreational guiding, bringing financial resources into the state from across the nation and internationally. The rivers are critical recreational corridors within the coastal plain and 1002 area of the Refuge, namely but not limited to the Canning River, the Katakturuk River, the Sadlerochit River, the Hulahula River, and the Aichilik River.

Economic impacts of severe health impacts and severe health disparities must be included in the EIS. Increasing health disparities such as obesity and diabetes are costly to health care systems including Indian Health Service and State of Alaska Public Health. Economic impacts of rapid and drastic changes caused by climate change must be included in the EIS.

Climate Change Impacts

The EIS must include a complete study of all related climate change impacts from oil and gas leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors to ensure impacts from leasing, exploration, and development can be fully understood and mitigated. Dozens of communities in Alaska alone are suffering direct impacts of climate change including but not limited to: melting permafrost resulting in infrastructure and transportation impacts; severe erosion resulting in forced relocation and dispossession of entire communities; rapid and drastic habitat change resulting in rapid and drastic change in critical fisheries and wildlife resources causing food insecurity; and rapid and drastic change in snow and ice patterns resulting in flooding, and infrastructure and transportation impacts. As an example, many lives have been lost across Alaska alone due to thinning ice causing unsafe travel along traditional travel routes. Alaska’s indigenous peoples suffer the most severe impacts and consequences of climate change.

The social, cultural, physical health and wellbeing, economic, and national security ramifications of climate change caused by the leasing, exploration, development, transportation corridors, and use of fossil fuels must be included in an EIS for oil and gas leasing within the Refuge coastal plain and 1002 area. Climate Change impacts, such as those listed above in Alaska alone, are costly and have tremendous economic impact for the State of Alaska and the Nation.

Our Call

We continue to ask that the entire EIS process, including ANILCA 810 review and NHPA 106 analysis, are carried out in good faith, are comprehensive, holistic, and thorough to ensure compliance with all federal laws, regulations, agreements, and treaties.

We call for an independent panel of scientists to be assembled to study the impacts of human activity related to oil and gas leasing, exploration, development, and transportation corridors on the coastal plain, the 1002 area, the PCH birthing and rearing grounds, and on the PCH health, productivity, and migrations. In the light of the study's findings, we call for the study panel to be independent with state, federal and Native biologists and social scientists. We call for the resulting research study findings to be issued without subject to political review of DOI appointees who would have the power to bury or alter the report.

We further call for:

- A comprehensive ANILCA 810 review with adequate tribal consultation with all affected Tribal Governments;
- A comprehensive NHPA 806 analysis with adequate tribal consultation with all affected Tribal Governments;
- Ensure all Tribal Governments serving as Cooperating Agencies are adequately and meaningfully included in the entire EIS process;
- Ensure all Tribal Governments requests Government to Government consultation are honored.