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[EXTERNAL] Scoping comment-coastal plain: Voices must both be heard and be shown to matter

1 message

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This scoping period is crucial for giving voice to people. But, voice must include both chances to give accounts of ourselves as well as ways to know listening is happening. Having a voice means that our accounts matter in relation to advancing goals and living values.

At the scoping meeting in Fairbanks last night, Dana Tizya-Tramm, a Vutnut Gwich'in Councillor from Old Crow in the Northern Yukon, Canada said, "I am going to use my voice today. My people were first to be here...this voice has travelled to me" across many generations of ancestors. In an October 25, 2017 CBC Yukon interview, Tizya-Tramm said, "the land speaks for itself but for those who cannot hear, the Gwich'in will speak even louder." The Refuge process has, he said, represented the "complete degradation of your democracy. This process has not upheld "free, prior nor informed consent" as required by the UN Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples.

Bernadette Demientieff, Executive Director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee from Fairbanks, Alaska, said that she had requested an extension on the scoping period from BLM, but had not heard back. She would like an answer. "We're not asking...for schools...jobs...We're asking to live as we always have."

Steve Ginnis, Gwichyaa Zhee Traditional Chief from Fort Yukon, Alaska, stressed that the process to open the Refuge was unfair. The Gwich'in would be most affected, yet they had never been invited to meetings about it, never were directly consulted. "In my worldview," he said, "that's not a democratic process...[that is] ramming through...We're the ones that are going to pay the price for this—big time...We are talking about our People's long-term survival."

Rhonda Pitka, First Chief of the Beaver Village Council and Vice Chair of the Council of Athabaskan Tribal Governments, said the Council chiefs had been requesting meetings as well as translation of scoping and other related materials into Alaska Native languages, but this request had not been respected. She "strongly opposes development in the Refuge...coastal plain."

Adeline Raboff, an author in Fairbanks, said, as a Gwich'in person and also a member of this world—as we all are—one meeting after another, year after year, these continual demands to defend land and lifeways are "innervating." The energy dominance "manifestation of Manifest Destiny," she says, this attitude that means "destruction of everything in its path...this has got to stop." We must "find another way."

For decades, Gwich'in and other Alaska Natives have been fighting, and a majority of U.S. voters have been saying "no" to drilling in the Refuge. Who is listening? How will we know?

As an Inupiat member of the Caribou Clan (whose name, unfortunately, I missed), asked BLM representatives last night: "How do you plan to...catalogue this data?" How will our voices count in this scoping process? How will we be able to know that they count?

The Fairbanks meeting gave time and space for some voices, but not nearly enough. There were at least 30 people lined up at the mic when the BLM representatives ended the meeting at 9pm:

Each of those people requested another scoping meeting in Fairbanks, as well as meetings in all villages that would be affected by leasing and drilling.

We also requested meetings outside in each of the U.S. states, since we also are talking about federal public land.

We also requested an extension of the scoping period. For instance, Rhonda Pika explained that being there last night meant missing helping her grandmother set up fish camp. She recommended at least a 120 day extension to cover much of the fishing season.

We also requested translations of all information into and testimonies from Native languages through this process.

We need to know—all of us—that BLM is listening to the vast majority of voices last night who raised concerns and opposition to leasing and drilling in the Refuge. BLM must make clear that our representatives, that the administration, are listening to us.

We need to know—all of us—how BLM is listening to those who would be most directly affected by leasing and drilling in the Refuge—that is, Gwich'in People and other Alaska Natives. BLM must make clear that their people are listening to Gwich'in People and other Alaska Natives.

We need to know—all of us—how BLM is listening to those outside, in the other 49 states. BLM must make clear that our government administrators are listening to the public concerning how public lands are treated.

This scoping process must be extended and must also include more times and spaces for people to speak.

This process must not allow the oil and gas industry to drown out the voices of real people and the land that speaks.

This process must not allow the values of Manifest Destiny to overshadow the voices of real people and the land that speaks.

Show us that our voices count—that our government is our government. Show us that our government is for each

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and all—for land that is not free of destruction is not the land of the free. Show us that our government is not for corporations, as Misty Nickoli, Denaa of the Gaath Doh (Kaltag) and Tsimshian of Metlakatla, challenged last night, but is for communities and their members.