



CoastalPlain_EIS, BLM_AK <blm_ak_coastalplain_eis@blm.gov>

[EXTERNAL] Comment on languages used in Scoping EIS1 message

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To the BLM:

A basic principle of democracy is that those who are affected by a decision get an equitable say in making that decision. Implicit in this principle is the ability to understand and be understood, which requires translation of languages for those who don't speak the same one. Those most directly affected by Coastal Plain drilling plans are Alaska Natives—particularly the Gwich'in Nation—who have long called this place "Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit" or "the sacred place where life begins" because it provides a sheltered calving ground for the Porcupine caribou herd they depend on nutritionally, culturally, and spiritually. Several hundred people speak Gwich'in. Moreover, Iñupiat groups have inhabited the Arctic Refuge region for millennia, with lifeways directly and intimately tied to this area. Several thousand people speak Inupiaq. At the very minimum, all materials pertaining to the leasing of and drilling decisions within the Coastal Plain must be translated into these two languages.

Furthermore, this scoping process and all decisions pertaining to Refuge uses need to honor the cultural heritages of thousands of speakers of other first languages within four Alaska Native language families, not to mention (as we are talking about federal land) many speakers of other Native languages countrywide.

In addition to the practicalities of communication, the U.S. Government must translate languages out of respect for indigenous peoples. This respect must acknowledge wrongs to many tribes whose children were forbidden to speak their first languages in schools in abusive projects of colonization and cultural "assimilation." We must not continue those abuses, but all the more make efforts to honor the sovereignty and cultural heritages of Native Nations.

How else can we come to a truly equitable decision about developing this precious land?

Sincerely,

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