



CoastalPlain_EIS, BLM_AK <blm_ak_coastalplain_eis@blm.gov>

[EXTERNAL] Scoping comment-Coastal plain: Diagnose climate-oil illogic, respond sensibly1 message

Julianne Warren <coyotetrail.net@gmail.com>

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To: blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov

Alaska's Senator Lisa Murkowski, Chair of the US Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, who secreted the coastal drilling authorization law into the tax bill, is one of a number of politicians lately delivering a schizophrenic message on climate change. The message is this: Climate change is real and destructive—including undermining millennia of conditions supporting Gwich'in and other Alaska Native lifeways. Climate change is caused mostly by carbon emitted from burning oil and gas. Yet, we will keep on mining and burning fossil hydrocarbons even though we have better options. We can keep on burning oil and gas and protecting the "environment," Murkowski says.

This is not the talk of honest and/or healthy minds. This sort of argument must be diagnosed as illogical reasoning as part of this scoping process.

In fact, on December 12, 2015, most of the world united on the Paris Agreement to curb mounting risks by committing to limit global temperature rise this century to 1.5-2 degrees Celsius above pre-industrial levels. Earth's temperature has risen approximately .85 degrees Celsius since 1880, already half of the maximum.

According to the IPCC Report, remaining below a two-degree rise will require keeping atmospheric carbon dioxide (eq) concentrations below 450 ppm in 2100. This will require reducing global greenhouse gas emissions by 40 to 70% of 2010 levels by 2050, and bringing "emissions levels near zero or below" by the end of this century.

According to the International Energy Agency, carbon dioxide from fossil fuel combustion contributes almost 70% of total global greenhouse emissions from human activity. Keeping carbon dioxide concentrations down, therefore, as the IPCC Report states, will require phasing out fossil fuel power generation by the end of this century. This means keeping at least two-thirds of proven fossil fuel reserves under the ground. Avoiding climate catastrophe requires a different global investment landscape. It requires shifting hundreds of billions of dollars to low-carbon ventures, stranding investments left in fossil fuels.

Drilling in the coastal plain is economically as well as prudentially and morally senseless. It is unwanted by a large majority of registered U.S. voters. It is unwanted by those who it would be most directly affected, the Gwich'in Nation whose lifeways are entwined with the caribou for whom this landscape is for calving, sacred.

This scoping process must recognize the dangerous illogic supporting the will to drill in the coastal plain. We must respond in defense of healthy lands, waters, cultures, and minds and truly durable economies. We must find the legal, just avenues for keeping any oil and gas that might be found in the coastal plain in the ground.