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[EXTERNAL] Comment on inclusion of Native voices1 message

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To the BLM:

In 1867, the U.S. government paid Russia a few cents per acre for lands never ceded by Alaska Natives to either country.

In 1971, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act [ASCSA] was signed by President Nixon to resolve land claims impeding the Trans-Alaska Pipeline System construction. The settlement "transferred" about 44 million acres—about 1/10 the lands historically occupied by Alaska Native tribes—and \$962 million to 12 newly formed Alaska Native development corporations. These corporations are for-profit and are largely invested in the Alaska oil industry. Tribal members are stockholders and get annual dividends.

In the case of the Arctic Refuge, the for-profit corporations, particularly the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation, are pitted against sacred tribal values and sovereignty. It remains the case that tribes have sovereignty, not the corporations. In the words of Gwich'in Steering Committee Executive Director Bernadette Demientieff, "Corporations don't speak for us." Yet, those corporations have the ears of the Alaska congressional delegation and are taken as the only Native voices that are being heard. Among Alaska Native tribes, there is also large and growing distrust of oil and gas companies, their promises, and the risks to land and life stemming from development. In the words of Eyak Athabaskan subsistence and commercial fisherman Dune Lankard, "There's a large and growing concern among Alaska Natives who are standing up against more oil and gas drilling in Alaska. Native people make up approximately 17 percent of Alaska's population—and the fact is that ANCSA corporations don't truly represent the indigenous people of Alaska. By law, they represent their corporate self-interests. But in reality they don't speak for those of us coming together to save what remains of our wild lands and irreplaceable subsistence way of life."

The law legalizing oil and gas drilling in the Refuge, P.L. 115-97, was passed disregarding tribal sovereignty. This continues a U.S. government legacy of disrespect and injustice and is deeply disturbing with regard to upholding the democratic values of this country. Extra effort must be made in this scoping period to ensure hearing all Alaska Native voices in ways that matter. This should include adding many more public meetings throughout the state and ample time for meetings to be held.

Sincerely,

James Perrin Warren

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