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[EXTERNAL] Submission on DOI scoping consultation for Arctic Refuge

1 message

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Wed, May 30, 2018 at 10:42 PM

To: blm_ak_coastalplain_EIS@blm.gov

Cc: catherine.mckenna@parl.gc.ca, justin.trudeau@parl.gc.ca, chrystia.freeland@international.gc.ca, eactivist@cpawsyukon.org

Dear Bureau of Land Management,

We are students of Quest University Canada, studying the intersection of land use, climate change, and wildlife.

The Porcupine Caribou Herd (PCH) holds immense cultural, economic, and social importance. Research has demonstrated that development within caribou migration routes and calving grounds can have detrimental impacts on their population as well as individual health. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) is an important calving ground for the PCH and we are requesting that oil and gas development not be permitted within this area.

The PCH undergo long migrations between their wintering grounds in the Yukon and the Northwest Territories and their calving grounds in Alaska, ignoring international borders. This is therefore not only an issue worthy of US attention, but also that of Canadians, and the Gwich'in people. The Gwich'in have lived alongside these magnificent caribou herds since time immemorial, long before international borders were drawn.

The health of the PCH, is of vital importance to the culture and livelihoods of the Gwich'in people. Gwitchin villages, strategically located along the PCH's seasonal migratory route, still depend on the migration of the herd for their survival and the survival of their culture. Caribou are an important source of food, clothing and traditional craft material.

Oil and gas development is known to have detrimental impacts on caribou. Caribou are particularly sensitive to noise and light disturbance during their calving period. Increased oil and gas exploration will lead to more roads and more traffic, potentially resulting in more vehicle collisions and greater hunting access (Cameron et al., 2005). Additionally, through sensory disturbance, roads significantly increase caribou energy outputs compared to undisturbed caribou, which can have bioenergetic consequences such as decreased fitness and reproductive potential (Murphy & Curatolo, 1987; Cameron et al., 2005). Development can also shift herd distribution, create barriers to movement, and lead to functional habitat loss (Frid & Dill, 2002; Kendrick et al., 2005; Joly et al., 2006). Predator mobility can also be increased by compacted roads and associated developments.

ANWR, is of particular importance to the PCH due to a low number of predators, high-quality forage, and sea breezes that deter mosquitoes; all critical elements to maintaining high survival rates in calves (Gov.Yukon, 2018). Development within this region could hinder caribou migration and calving success, and cause caribou to relocate their calving grounds to a less desirable area at increased energy costs.

Caribou conservation is deserving of serious attention as there are many uncertainties regarding climate change's effects on the ecosystems that caribou rely on and are a part of. There has already been evidence to suggest that caribou are being negatively affected by the impacts of climate change. Studies have identified that Caribou and reindeer herd populations are declining across their circumpolar range, coincident with increasing arctic temperatures and precipitation, and anthropogenic landscape change." (Vors & Boyce, 2009).

Currently, the PCH population is growing, this success has been attributed to effective management strategies and minimal disturbance within their range (Gov. Yukon, 2018). Development within their calving grounds could cause compounding negative effects, which could in turn push this herd into a decline (Cameron et al. 2005). It is therefore essential for caribou well being and for the Gwich'in nation that the ANWR remain intact and that industry drilling, and the associated impacts and disturbances, continue to be prohibited within the refuge.

Sincerely,

Amaya Cherian-Hall, Matthew Peck & Heather Waterous
Quest University Canada

5/31/2018

DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR Mail - [EXTERNAL] Submission on DOI scoping consultation for Arctic Refuge

cc: Hon. Catherine McKenna
House of Commons

cc: M. Justin Trudeau

cc: Minister Chrystia Freeland

cc: Ms. Nadine Sander-Green