I am a Gwich’in Alaskan. My name, Tchegeownta, is a family name chosen for me from my parents. It means “one who brings an unborn caribou calf.” One of my ancestors was given this name when he saved a starving family with the gift of caribou. To the Gwich’in, the Arctic Coastal Plain is the “sacred place where life begins.” It is the birthing ground and nursery ground for the Porcupine caribou herd and the source of the caribou for my ancestor Tchegeownta.

We are still connected to this place in our modern lives. Our current subsistence links us to a history that goes back to the beginning of our origin stories. Unlike the experience of many other Americans, the place we are connected to still exists, in its’ natural wilderness form.

The proposed program of leasing, development, production or transport of oil and gas in and from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Coastal Plain will forever damage the ecology and threatens the natural resource we have relied on for thousands of years. How would this ever be replaced? How will the risk to the Gwich’in way of live, and existence, be protected?