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Comments on the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS)

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The Environmental Impact Statement Process has been inadequate and rushed which at best gives the appearance of going through the motions with the outcome already decided. Specifically:

1. The timeline for the EIS is unusually short for a NEPA process despite the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017 (Tax Act) allowing four years for leasing. This timeline compression makes commenting difficult and ultimately stifling which is contrary to the NEPA process intentions.
2. Expert analysis is shortchanged most especially from the real experts, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge staff, which has a third of its positions vacant. Internal documents throughout the process were rushed and limited in length. During the government shutdown no one was working on these issues and the public could not contact the Refuge staff or the BLM staff for information or questions. This further exacerbates the already abbreviated and inadequate time line.
3. The DEIS document is dense, difficult to follow and understand, poorly organized. It is also not readily available in print. In order to understand it, and make cogent comments, a person must commit significant time. The lack of print copies, disjointed organization and a multitude of appendices a computer with several screens is needed to make sense of the DEIS and comment upon it. This further inhibits public input.
4. The issue of oil and gas development in the 1002 area is also a cultural, social justice, and government (US) to government (tribal) question. The Gwich'in culture is tied to the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Any action, like oil and gas exploration and development, that may effect the Porcupine Caribou Herd, also effects the Gwich'in culture. The EIS process is therefore incomplete; it does not adequately address the cultural, social justice and government-to-government issues.

Recreation is one of the prime uses of the Arctic Refuge. The DEIS barely mentions recreation in the Arctic Refuge, a gross oversight and misrepresentation. Oil and gas development will have significant impacts on recreation.

1. Access is often denied in oil and gas lease areas. This is true all over the Arctic and areas in Alaska. Unless specifically addressed in the overall document and especially in the stipulations and regulations it will happen in the 1002 area. Boaters, hikers, hunters and other recreationalist deserve access to their public lands.
2. Visual resources are significantly diminished by oil and gas development. The coastal plain is flat and infrastructure is visible for miles. The amount of gravel required is staggering, and while gravel pits can be

"hidden" from river corridors, they cannot be hidden from the air, which is the primary way for access.

3. Soundscapes will be greatly affected. Man-made noise is a great detriment to the wilderness character of an area.

The stipulations and restrictions associated with any leases must:

1. Provide for recreational access on associated lands.
2. Incorporate Visual Resource Management techniques to minimize the visual intrusions that impact wilderness character, and wildland recreation.
3. Minimize man made mechanical sounds in order not to diminish the recreational experience.

Much of the recreation in the Arctic Refuge is on or around rivers. Three popular rivers are likely to be impacted by these leases.

1. Hulahula River, wild and scenic suitable, is in the area.
2. Kongakut River, a Wild and Scenic River, is outside the area but is very popular in the Arctic Refuge. It's wilderness character and view sheds should be addressed in the leases.
3. Marsh Fork of the Canning River, wild and scenic suitable is outside the area but is popular with high recreation value and high value fish habitat. Like the Kongakut it needs sufficient protections.
4. The other rivers in the 1002 area are currently not as popular for recreation, but they may be in the future, so that access, wilderness character, visual resources, and soundscapes need protection.

Tax Cuts and Jobs Act of 2017: While the Tax Act is the law of the land it does not supersede other laws and regulations, it must act in concert with them. For example:

1. The Wild and Scenic Rivers Act (1968). The US Fish and Wildlife Service is mandated to maintain current conditions for existing Wild and Scenic Rivers and suitable rivers until Congress decides not to include them in the Wild and Scenic system. The rivers mentioned above, Hulahula, Kongakut, and the Marsh Fork of the Canning, must be protected an undiminished.
2. The National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act (1997) requires every refuge to develop and follow a Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP). The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge completed a revision of their CCP in 2015. This document was years (not months) in development and was thoroughly vetted in the NEPA process. Any conflicts with the Tax Act of 2018 and the Arctic Refuge CCP must be adjudicated prior to leasing for oil and gas development.

Water. The critical factor limiting development in the Arctic is the availability of water.

1. Drilling wells require water; each well requires from 420,000 to 1,900,000 gallons of water. For 17 pads of 30 wells (540 total wells) this is a staggering 227 million to 1 billion gallons of water.

2. Ice roads require 1 million gallons of water per mile; each ice pad requires half a million gallons. Both these are required for winter use and exploration.
3. Each 50,000 barrels of oil produced requires 2 million of water.
4. Where is all this water going to come from? The cumulative withdrawals from streams with greatly impact their health and ability to provide sufficient habitat for fish and wildlife. This is contrary to the mandates for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Polar Bears and Caribou.

1. Polar bear denning sites are increasingly important with the decreasing amounts of sea ice.
2. Documented polar bear denning sites are often located within the lease areas and within the areas of high probability of oil development. The DEIS does not properly address this conflict while it admits that there is a high probability of injury or mortality for polar bears in an oil development area.
3. The Porcupine Caribou Herd uses much of the 1002 area as its calving ground. The exact area varies annually, but it centers on the areas that are likely to be the most impacted by oil and gas development.
4. Anything that moves the Porcupine Caribou Herd away from its calving ground is known to have deleterious effects upon the herd's numbers and overall health. If there is one place that should not be utilized for oil and gas development it is these calving grounds.
5. As mentioned earlier, the Gwich'in culture is strongly tied to the Porcupine Caribou Herd and development here will have a deleterious effect on the caribou and the people of the caribou.

The Tax Act stipulates that oil and gas development is limited to 2000 surface acres. The BLM interpretation of what is included in the 2000 acres is a clear abuse of public trust.

1. The DEIS excludes surface development and disturbances not associated with drilling pads. Thus ice roads and pads, surface and elevated pipelines, and gravel pits are not included in the 2000 acre limit. This is purely a smoke and mirror hoax.
2. Adding insult to injury, if a drilling pad becomes non-operational, it is no longer counted in the 2000 acre limit. It will not cease to exist because it ceases to produce.
3. If oil and gas development does occur, all surface disturbances need to be included in the 2000 acre limit set by Congress.

I believe the oil and gas resources in the 1002 Area are better reserved in the ground when and if future generations need it thus preserving the other above ground resources too. Because the Tax Act specifically excluded a No Action Alternative, which is generally included in the NEPA process, the DEIS includes four poor alternatives. Should this development go forward, Alternative D2 is the least bad of the alternatives. Its failures must be addressed before going forward.

1. Alternative D2 is a place to start but it includes more land for leasing than is required by the Tax Act (1,000,000 acres rather than 800,000). It should be trimmed to the minimum.
2. Stronger temporal limits need to be included in Alternative D2 in order to protect Porcupine Caribou Herd calving and post-calving periods ("when caribou abound, shut 'em down").
3. The stipulations and requirements mentioned earlier in this comment should be included in any alternative and lease, in order to protect traditional use by the Gwich'in and other local residents, and recreational users and protect the wildlife and wilderness values protected by the refuge.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Jason B. Keady", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.