



Gwich'in Steering Committee

201 1st Ave. Suite 124 Fairbanks, AK 99701 Office- (907)458-8264 Fax- (907)457-8265

"In no case may a people be deprived of their own means of subsistence."
International Covenants on Human Rights

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Gwich'in Refuse To Back Down From Protecting the Calving Grounds of The Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Today, The Gwich'in Nation took the next step in protecting the birthing grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd by suing the Interior Secretary for an unlawful lease program that would hand sacred lands to oil companies.

"The way the government went about the process was unfair considering they had no communication with local tribes. The agency's record of decision allows the most damaging leasing program that would let drilling happen on lands we have always protected and consider sacred. The administration should treat the Alaska Native tribes with more respect. This whole process should be redone. It's our children who will have to live with the decisions that this administration makes." -- Michael Peter, second chief of the Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in Tribal Government

"The Gwich'in Nation has survived in partnership with the Porcupine Caribou Herd for tens of thousands of years on our Native homelands. We now see some Republican leaders willfully pose a greater threat to the largest land animal migration left on earth, our brother the Caribou and their life giving calving grounds. The record of decision validates our experience of the erosion of integrity in assessments, process and respect. In light of our best efforts we are left no other option than that of filing legal action to hold those accountable as we the Gwich'in are held accountable by our future generations. Our rights, future and the land and animals cannot be bought yet others try to sell it." -- Chief Dana Tizya of Tramm/Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

"Going into this sacred area is not good for the animals and not good for the calving grounds that we need to keep clean. To go into such a beautiful and untouched place is not a good idea. This is common sense, especially with the water because it's all connected. If water up that way gets damaged, it goes into the Yukon River and that is also not good." -- Mildred Allen, a Gwich'in leader from Arctic Village

“This is not about jobs or the dependency on oil but to get elected and it shouldn’t be this way. The issue behind all this has never been completely publicized. There’s still a lot people don’t know.” -- Walter Flitt, a Gwich’in elder

“When this administration said it would let oil companies desecrate the entire coastal plain, it let us know that they had no respect for our food security or our way of life. Our elders directed us to protect the Porcupine Caribou Herd calving grounds and to never trample the sacred lands where they give birth. Those who push for drilling on this place disrespect our knowledge, our way of life, our elders and our future. We will forever protect this place.” -- Kaila Druck, Gwich’in Youth Council

“The Trump Administration’s complete and utter disregard for the human rights of the Gwich’in people is apparent as he continues the attack on the Arctic Refuge. Last week’s record of decision for the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program in what my people know as “the Sacred Place Where Life Begins,” would have devastating impacts on the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the Gwich’in way of life. For anyone in this world, food security is a huge concern, especially during this pandemic, but even more so for Indigenous people who still rely on the land and animals for our food security. The Gwich’in people will never give up defending our way of life for future generations, until this sacred land is permanently protected.” -- Jody Juneby Potts, Han Gwich’in leader, Eagle Village, Alaska.

“Like the Porcupine Caribou Herd, the Gwich’in Nation spans borders. We are deeply connected and our fates are intertwined. Gwich’in have depended on vadzaih - caribou - for countless generations and they are the heart of our cultural and individual identities. There’s no doubt that vadzaih will be negatively impacted by development in the Arctic Refuge and, in turn, so will the Gwich’in. We are fighting for the right to continue the independent and proud lifestyle that we have lived for thousands of years.” -- Jeffrey Peter, Vuntut Gwich’in, Old Crow, Yukon, Canada

“As our ancestors before us, we will stand and fight for our future generations, for the Porcupine caribou herd, and the Gwich’in way of life. We will not allow BLM or DOI to come into our ancestral homelands and do as they please, not when the survival of future generations is at risk. This short term gain is not worth the thousands and thousands of years of history that our ancestors passed down from generation to generation. We will stand up to anyone who seeks to destroy the calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd.” -- Bernadette Demienteiff, executive director of the Gwich’in Steering Committee

We are not environmentalists or activists. We are mothers, fathers, grandparents and people that care about our future generations. The Gwich’in Nation of Alaska and Canada will continue to stand united to fight for permanent protection of the calving grounds of the porcupine caribou herd and the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge coastal plain.