

**Statement of Dana Tizya-Tramm, Chief, Vuntut Gwitchin,  
to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Energy  
and Mineral Resources hearing “The Need to Protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Coastal  
Plain” on H.R. 1146, The Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act**

Long ago the Gwitch'in followed the caribou to see where they went and to learn their ways. They lead us to the North East Coastal Plains of what is now called “Alaska”. It is here that we made treaty, it is here we became one. We did this by the exchange of half of one another's heart. In this way we would always be connected, forever. The immense value of their calving grounds was recognized on this day over a millennia ago, and why today all Gwitchin call it, “Iizhiik Gwats'an Gwand'aii Good'lit”, “the Sacred Place Where Life Begins”.

Among the Gwitchin the expanse from the North East of Alaska, through Northern Yukon Territory, to the mid-Western region of the North West Territories, vahdzaii (caribou) is known as the lifeblood of our people, as well as our connection to them. As a people who define themselves by the life giving lakes in a region called the “Crow Flats” the term “Vuntut Gwitchin” literally translates to “They Who Dwell Among the Many Lakes”, and the Gwitchin in North Eastern Alaska residing in the “Yukon Flats” refer to themselves as the “They Who Dwell in the Flats” and so on, every region of our people their identity, reflected in our names that represents the body of our persons, and the deep understanding of our person, and its connection to our lands, but we are all a caribou people.

As a young man today I can see our past traditional world as we were the last to have made contact with the “oonjit” (outsiders) or “white people” which were the colonial explorers. I can see where our people came from and the exponential pace at which this new world has affected us. A world that seeks dominion over the lands, animals, and resources opposed to our traditional one that teaches that we must have a respectful relationship with each. The respect taught to us by our ways so strict that we are never, ever to laugh, or make fun of any animal. Now we must carry our traditional values and principles taught by our traditions and elders from the past into the future in a way in which they may be realized in contemporary ways. The onslaught of technology, alcohol, drugs, and outside pressures from our new non-indigenous partners and their new world is completely changing the ancient world of our culture and lives leave us in possibly one of the most important points in our people's history. How will we continue our way with the land, waters and animals? Will we be able to balance the best of both of these worlds to gift our coming generations a totally balanced and new world in which we have woven our traditional guiding principles into new works? Or will the velocity of alcohol, drugs, and new influences swallow our people, our identities, our relationships, our connections to our ancestors and future generations?

The Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Signed our Self-Government Agreement with the Crown of Canada in 1995 establishing our own government, the certainty of our lands, as well as the laws that govern this relationship and the frameworks that we are to build from together. This mechanism defines our peoples right to self-determination, and self-governance and from this we have thrives as a people free from the confines of the “Indian Act” under Canadian law. This however if not hot our relationship began and we have a significant legacy of changes both good and bad, both chosen and forced. When it comes to our lands specifically we created “Special Management Areas” and even large swaths of lands in our traditional territories designated as federal parks although we still retain the right to harvest within these lands. Though our agreement and partnership with the Canadian Government we have protected all of our headwaters and the most important lands that sustained flora and fauna.

**Statement of Dana Tizya-Tramm, Chief, Vuntut Gwitchin,**  
As a leader of my people I must say how, to be retained by outside people, government, and  
**to the U.S. House of Representatives Committee on Natural Resources, Subcommittee on Energy**  
systems of my people that the development of the "1002" lands as designated by ANILCA,  
**and Mineral Resources hearing "The Need to Protect the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Coastal**  
known to my people as "Izhik Gwats an Gwand an Gboodit" is certainly the highest practice of  
**Plain" on H.R. 1146, The Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act**

cultural genocide of the entire Gwitchin Nation as it will lead to the destabilization of the Porcupine Caribou herd which carries the spirit, intent, and founding of our nation as a people. No word on any format can replace the meaning of the last, and largest land animal migration left today that drives northern arctic ecosystems in which we belong to. No words can ever truly convey to people in which I am mandated to convince to support the protection of these lands to side with a people they know nothing about to understand that our existence is dependant on an animal as humble as the caribou. On behalf of my people I plead that we be recognized, that our internationally recognized human rights be honoured, that our international agreements between Canada and the U.S.A. are honoured, that from the misty fundamental place from whom ever reads this helps to protect the most fundamental part of who my people are because obviously this is beyond just our control, and is now in your hands. Support this legislation that will not just stop oil and gas development of the "1002" lands, but will ensure the living of an ancient ecosystem and an ancient people that depend on them.