



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: September 6, 2023

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A statement from Nagruk Harcharek, President of the [Voice of Arctic Iñupiat](#) ("VOICE"). VOICE is a nonprofit organization established in 2015 by the region's collective elected Iñupiat leadership to speak with a unified voice on issues impacting the North Slope Iñupiat, their communities, their economy, and their culture. Its members include local governments, Alaska Native Corporations, federally recognized tribes, and tribal non-profits across the North Slope of Alaska. In 2017, VOICE's board passed a resolution in support of opening of the 1002 Area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil and gas exploration and development.

"Today's announcement by the Biden administration to rescind leases in the ANWR and further 'protect' 13 million acres of our ancestral homelands flies in the face of our region's wishes and self-determination. As stated by the [2023 Arctic Peoples Conference](#), 'Climate change cannot be an excuse to infringe on our distinct rights as Indigenous Peoples.' Today's decision again shows that the administration prioritizes their agenda over the will of local Indigenous communities.

"To be clear, this decision was mandated by an administration that has repeatedly pledged to listen and work with Indigenous communities. President Biden himself stated in the [Memorandum on Tribal Consultation and Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships](#), 'We best serve Native American people when tribal governments are empowered to lead their communities, and when federal officials speak with and listen to tribal leaders in formulating federal policy.' Today's decision contradicts this Memorandum and advances policies against the wishes of North Slope communities and their elected Indigenous leaders.

"For years, our board – which represents elected village and regional leadership across the North Slope – has been steadfast in their support of locally-driven decision-making for our homelands, which just so happen to be located in ANWR and NPR-A. As expressed through a resolution passed by our Board of Directors in 2017, we will continue to support the opening of the 1002 Area of ANWR to exploration and development projects.

"The Indigenous people of this region, along with its elected leaders, have been steadfast with our positions on issues affecting our homelands. Yet, from administration to administration, working with the federal government has proven to be a rollercoaster ride, with inconsistent, unpredictable, and insufficient policymaking and consultation.

“No one knows the North Slope better than its original stewards and their descendants. We urge the Biden administration to center our Indigenous voices, as well as our self-determination, in future decision-making affecting our region.”

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