



September 19, 2023

Honorable Bruce Westerman  
U.S. House Committee on Natural Resources  
1324 Longworth House Office Building  
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Honorable Westerman,

We, the Native Village of Kaktovik, Kaktovik Inupiat Corporation, and the City of Kaktovik, are writing to you under a single letter to represent our community of Kaktovik, Alaska and to show a united front on issues related to the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (“ANWR”). We are outraged by Secretary Haaland’s (“Secretary”) unilateral decision to cancel the leases that were held by the Alaska Industrial Development Export Authority (AIDEA) without governmental consultation with the Native Village of Kaktovik (“NVK”) our federally recognized tribe. Our community is the only Alaska Native Village inside the boundaries of ANWR and the Coastal Plain represents our well-documented and undisputed homelands. How can the Secretary of Interior make a decision that has such an economic impact on our community of Kaktovik without any formal Tribal Consultation through our sovereign relationship with the federal government?

This is not the first time, nor do we expect it to be the last time, that this Secretary refuses to acknowledge us. When Secretary Haaland was Representative Haaland she told our leaders in 2019 in a hearing before this committee on H.R. 1146 “Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act” that our testimony against this Act was not credible. As, Inupiaq, we have a long memory, and even though this wasn’t that long ago her work in this Administration has not been one of Strengthening Nation-to-Nation Relationships with Tribes, certainly not with ALL tribes, our experiences are that if you are on the other side of her position, which we have been by supporting oil and gas within the Coastal Plain, then you are ignored – which the recent decision clearly demonstrates. This is also clearly demonstrated in the newly released Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (“CP SEIS”).

We are also disturbed that Deputy Secretary Beaudreau, in his September 18, 2023, interview with the Anchorage Daily News seems to represent that he knows ANWR and the Coastal Plain better than we do, yet to our knowledge he has never visited our village, or he would understand the hardships we have trying to develop a local sustainable economy while locked inside an national refuge. This again speaks to the tone-deaf nature of this Department of Interior (“DOI”) to all tribal governments. The Kaktovikmiut were forced, against our will, into a refuge under the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands

Conservation Act (“ANILCA”). Yet ANILCA was to provide us with means for economic development that we are still fighting for over 40 years later. One of those opportunities was under Sections 1002 and 1003. These two sections have remained our hope for the last 40 years, to have an opportunity to build our economy through oil and gas – we were very active in 2018 in fighting for the Tax Cuts and Jobs Act for the very shortly written section called Section 20001. Unlike many inside the current DOI we think the language in this section is very clear. Unlike Mr. Beaudreau we do not think the original language in the 2020 Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program Final Environmental Leasing Program (“FEIS”) has “serious legal deficiencies”. It appears to our three entities that the DOI is using this argument as a façade to eliminate the very act of Congress that Secretary Haaland voted against. NVK stands behind the findings and decision of the FEIS and have been burdened unnecessarily by having to go through this process again when its clear that our voices are being muted and ignored – because we are inconvenient voice standing up for ourselves.

Believe it or not we are the only community that is directly affected by this decision. The argument for leasing is frequently tied to the Porcupine Caribou Herd (“PCH”) calving areas – we are also dependent on the PCH and do not want to have a negative impact on them. That’s why we agreed with the last Administration to drop most that the area that PCH may use at some point in the future. We say ‘may’ because the PCH do not calve in the same area’s year-to-year, and in fact have been calving outside the 1002 Area, to the east along the border with Canada. We know this as the local indigenous people, and the biologists also know this.

We will say that this area is sacred to us as a people, it’s the land that our forefathers have walked for thousands of years, it’s the land that our children are born on, it’s the land that, we the Iñupiat are buried on. When is this debate going to be about us, as the indigenous people of this area? The 1971 Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (“ANSCA”) promised us economic freedoms as a people, the 1980 ANILCA promised us economic opportunities and here we are still living with the broken promises because the various Administrations that oversee these Acts have not implemented them in a many that was intended by Congress.

Thank you for your time on our behalf. We hope we are being heard because otherwise we are being erased from our own homelands and the landscape that we have inhabited as Iñupiat for thousands of years.

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CC: Senator Dan Sullivan  
Senator Lisa Murkowski  
Representative Mary Peltola