



VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

P.O. Box 94,
Old Crow, Yukon
Y0B 1N0

Phone: (867)966-3261
Fax: (867)966-3800
Web: www.vgfn.ca

Vuntut Gwitchin Government Statement on Suspension of Leases of *lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit*

(Old Crow, Yukon – June 2, 2021)

Yesterday, the Department of Interior [announced](#) that it will be suspending oil and gas leases of *lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit* (The Sacred Place Where Life Begins) pending completion of new comprehensive analysis of potential environmental impacts of the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program.

Nine oil and gas leases of *lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit*, also known as the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, were issued during the final days of the Trump Administration. Days after these leases were issued, on his first day in Office, President Biden placed a temporary moratorium on activities related to the implementation of the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program (Program) through an [Executive Order](#) which cited the alleged legal deficiencies underlying the Program including the inadequacy of the environmental review.

Yesterday's suspension of the oil and gas leases means that while the leases issued may remain in place until the new analysis is conducted and the legal deficiencies are addressed, no action on these leases will proceed. This is another important step towards protecting these lands in the short term but legislative action is still needed to protect these lands for future generations.

Vuntut Gwitchin Government acknowledges and commends the actions that President Biden and Secretary Haaland have taken to support protection these sacred lands. We will continue to work with the U.S. Administration, our partners, and our allies to ensure that our voices are heard and that *lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit* is permanently protected.

Quotes:

"We are grateful for yesterday's news which will ensure that no work proceeds on leases of our sacred lands which were unlawfully granted. While this is welcome acknowledgment that the environmental review conducted was rushed and inadequate, it still does not right the wrongs that allowed a lease sale to proceed in the first place. For decades we have warned what will happen if drilling is allowed in the calving grounds of *Vadzaih* (caribou) and have worked tirelessly to ensure that drilling does not proceed, but until these lands are permanently protected through legislation, our work will not stop. Hai' President Biden and Secretary Haaland for taking this next step. We look forward to your continued support as we seek permanent protections." – Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm, Vuntut Gwitchin Government

For Media Inquiries Please Contact:

Rebecca Shrubbs
Associate Director, Intergovernmental Relations & Governance
Vuntut Gwitchin Government
rshrubbs@vgfn.net

VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

Background:

In 2017, a lease sale of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for oil and gas development became law through a provision slipped within the [Tax Cuts and Jobs Act](#). Specifically the provision mandates two lease sales, of at least 400,000 acres each, in the Refuge's Coastal Plain for oil and gas development, production and transportation 'by not later than 10 years after the date of enactment'.

In 2018, BLM officially started the Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) process for the [Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program](#). Throughout this process, our government, our citizens, our partners and our allies raised significant concerns about the inadequacy of the process being implemented by the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM). The aggressive timeline followed resulted in an inability to compile adequate baseline information or to undertake the full impact analysis necessary to determine potential implications for the Porcupine caribou herd, climate change, our sacred lands, and our inherent rights.

Further, at no point throughout the process did the BLM acknowledge, consult, or provide reasonable opportunities for participation by Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation. Despite this purposeful exclusion, our government and our citizens worked tirelessly to participate as best we could and to voice concerns.

On August 17, 2020, the BLM released the [Record of Decision](#) (ROD) and adopted the most destructive leasing alternative, offering the opportunity to lease the entire Coastal Plain.

On August 24, 2020, the Gwich'in Steering Committee, representing the Gwich'in Nation of Alaska and Canada, [sued](#) the U.S. Administration for violating a number of laws and regulations in approving the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program. This was one of four lawsuits, representing dozens of Plaintiffs, against the Program. These lawsuits asked the Court to deem the environmental review as unlawful and to vacate any leases which resulted from it.

On January 6, 2021, the BLM held a [lease sale](#) of the Coastal Plain. Leases to nine tracts of land, totaling over 400,000 acres, were issued to the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), Knik Arm Services LLC and Regenerate Alaska Inc. The lease sale yielded just over \$12 million, less than 1 % of the \$1.8 billion in revenue projected by proponents to support its inclusion in the 2017 *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* to pay for tax cuts made.

On his first day in Office, President Biden placed a temporary moratorium on activities related to the implementation of the Coastal Plain Oil and Gas Leasing Program (Program) through an [Executive Order](#) which cited the alleged legal deficiencies underlying the Program including the inadequacy of the environmental review.

Following the Executive Order, the Department of Interior requested a [stay](#) in the ongoing litigation so that "new Administration officials may evaluate the litigation and determine whether and how the Executive Order and the policy direction described therein may impact the government's position in this case."

Following their first bilateral meeting, President Biden and Prime Minister Trudeau released the "[Roadmap for a Renewed U.S. – Canada Partnership](#)" within which they recognized the importance of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and "agreed to work together to help safeguard the Porcupine caribou herd calving grounds that are invaluable to the Gwich'in and Inuvialuit people's culture and subsistence."