

## Caribou Coordination Newsletter May 2020

As Caribou Coordinator for Vuntut Gwitchin Government, I wanted to take a moment to acknowledge what would have been Caribou Days weekend and use this opportunity to provide a (virtual) update on the work being done by the Caribou Coordination Department.

I first travelled to Old Crow for Caribou Days last year. I was so happy for the opportunity to meet so many of you, to celebrate, share meals and even try my best at jigging (which I recognize may not have been very good). While I am disappointed that I won't be in Old Crow this weekend celebrating the return of the caribou with all of you, I applaud the leadership that Chief and Council have shown to protect the community during these uncertain times. I would like you to know that I am thinking of the community often and eager for the day I can return. In the meantime I shall practice my jigging at home as I know I need the practice.



Photo 1: Fashion show at Caribou Days 2019.

In the meantime, I am happy to provide this update to the community on the work being done to protect the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (Arctic Refuge), to recognize the progress that has been made since my previous update (see my update in the [January 2020 Newsletter](#) available on our website) and to highlight where we need to go from here.

### Schedule to a potential Lease Sale of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

With national and international focus on the ongoing coronavirus pandemic and a crash in oil prices, resulting from a dramatic increase in supply from Russia and Saudi Arabia and dwindling global demand due to global travel restrictions and closures, some have speculated that a lease sale of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge may not proceed until following the 2020 U.S. presidential election given a 'successful' lease sale (i.e. one that generates the revenue originally envisioned), unlikely before, is even less likely now.

Despite current conditions, Secretary of the Interior David Bernhardt was quoted earlier this week saying "I know there will be a record of decision signed, I believe there will be a call for nominations, and I believe there will likely be a lease sale", while speaking about the outlook for a lease sale of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge this year. At the same time he acknowledged that he unpredictability of the coronavirus pandemic has made it difficult to be unequivocal about anything.

### Interior chief predicts interest in Alaska National Wildlife Reserve leases despite oil price crash

By JENNIFER A. DLUOHY on 5/11/2020

Full article available [here](#)

Regardless, there are still a few process steps that need to be completed before a lease sale could proceed. These steps could be completed as early as the coming months and are outlined below.

## **Environmental Impact Statement**

The environmental impact statement process is still in progress and must be completed before a lease sale can proceed.

The Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) was released in September, 2019. The Final EIS identified the most aggressive and destructive drilling alternative, which offered the opportunity to lease the entire Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge, as the preferred alternative to proceed with. In doing so, it failed to address the comments and concerns that Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation citizens, as well as millions of others across Canada and the United States, raised through public comment periods and hearings.

While there was no official comment period on the Final EIS, Vuntut Gwitchin Government used this as an opportunity to provide feedback on the Final EIS and the process that was followed. See [our response](#) to the Final EIS on the Porcupine Caribou Management Board's website.

The final step in the process is the release of a Record of Decision (ROD). The ROD may be released any day now and will identify the leasing alternative that they will be proceeding with and the lease stipulations that will be attached to any leases granted. The ROD will be based on a what was an extremely rushed and inadequate environmental review process that did not address the issues raised and we believe that the work we have done to participate in that process will play an important role in the official record which demonstrates this.

## **Lease Sale**

Once the Record of Decision is released and the environmental impact statement process 'complete', we expect the official lease sale process to begin. The lease sale process will require a few steps to be followed before the lease sale date. This will include a public comment period on the specific areas of land to be offered up for lease.

Vuntut Gwitchin Government will use this as another opportunity to raise our voice that drilling in the Arctic Refuge is not sustainable and threatens the human rights of the Gwich'in. We will be calling on our community, our allies and our friends to do the same and intend to post details on our website and social media channels when available.

While there is speculation that a lease sale would not proceed before the 2020 U.S. presidential election, there is still a chance that it may proceed any time now and we are ready to respond accordingly.

## **Legislation**

Our champions in the U.S. House of Representatives and Senate have progressed various pieces of legislation in favour of protection of the Arctic Refuge including but not limited to [H.R. 1146 Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection Act](#) (introduced to repeal the drilling language in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act) and [S. 2461 Arctic Refuge Protection Act](#) (introduced to designate the Coastal Plain as wilderness).

While we recognize that the passage of any legislation that restores protections of the Arctic Refuge will be difficult given current opposition from the Senate and White House, we will not give up. The advocacy work we do in Washington D.C. continues to be critical as we secure champions that can advocate with and for us, and prepare for any changes that may come with the upcoming U.S. presidential election on November 3, 2020.

Democrats have pledged to work towards permanent protection of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge the next time they control the White House and Congress. Former Vice President Joe Biden, the likely Democratic presidential nominee, has publicly opposed drilling in the Arctic Refuge and has acknowledged in his [Climate Plan](#) that his plan to significantly reduce emissions includes permanent protection of the Arctic Refuge.

## Corporate

There has been a lot of work focused on targeting companies who may be interested in participating in a lease sale of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge and those who might finance these companies.

### *Financial Outlook*

The provision authorizing drilling in the Arctic Refuge was slipped in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act as a partial offset to the tax cuts made. Revenue from drilling in the Arctic Refuge were projected, by proponents, to bring in \$1 billion for the federal treasury. In order to reach these projections, every acre of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic Refuge to be sold for more than \$1,000 per acre. In comparison, Alaska North Slope bids have averaged at just over \$30 per acre since 2000 and [bids received](#) during a lease sale in the neighbouring National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska in December 2019 averaged \$11 per acre.

These values were before the recent crash in oil prices.

In various hearings held this year, Members of Congress have spoken out about the unrealistic financial projections used by Arctic Refuge drilling proponents. You can see their remarks here: [Representative Huffman with DOI Assistant Secretary Susan Combs](#); [Representative Huffman with BLM Deputy Director, Operations Michael Nedd](#); [Senator Cantwell with DOI Secretary Bernhardt](#); and [Representative McCollum with DOI Secretary Bernhardt](#).

### *Investors*

In 2018, investors representing more than \$2.5 trillion in assets publicly opposed “any efforts to develop oil and gas in the remote and pristine Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.” In an [open letter](#), investors highlight the climate, financial and reputational risks associated with such development. Work continues to secure support from additional investors.

### *Banks*

Several global banks have updated their policies to rule out financing for oil and gas exploration or development in the Arctic and the Arctic Refuge, including major U.S. banks [Citi](#), [Goldman Sachs](#), [JPMorgan Chase & CO](#), [Morgan Stanley](#) and [Wells Fargo](#). Many of these updates followed meetings and correspondence with the Gwich’in Steering Committee and partners. Bank of America is the only major U.S. bank that is yet to refuse financing for Arctic Refuge development.

Vuntut Gwitchin Government is working to ensure that Canadian banks follow the lead of their U.S. peers.

In December 2019, Vuntut Gwitchin Government and Gwich’in Tribal Council travelled to Toronto to meet with the five largest Canadian banks to urge them to withhold financing any and all oil and gas development related activities in the Arctic Refuge. This work received a lot of powerful media attention across the country and Councillor Charlie was [featured](#) on As It Happens, CBC’s flagship evening radio program.

## Gwich’in renew calls for Canadian banks to not finance drilling in ANWR

“They do have a clear understanding of the impacts and the risks so it’s now up to them to take action”

JACKIE HONG / May. 1, 2020 12:30 p.m. / LOCAL NEWS / NEWS

Full article available [here](#).

We continue to regularly correspond with representatives from each of these banks and provide updates as it relates to the U.S. administration’s progression towards a lease sale, the continued unfavourable financial and

social outlook of such a lease sale and the actions of their U.S. peers. Through these meetings and continued correspondence, Canadian banks have been provided a clear understanding of the immense human and environmental impacts and financial risks associated with oil and gas exploration or development in the Arctic Refuge. We remain hopeful that Canadian banks will take action and stand with us. You can see our Joint Media Release with Gwich'in Tribal Council regarding this [here](#) on our website.

**Oil and Gas Companies**

We are also continuing to monitor companies that we think are most likely to bid if a lease sale were to occur in the Arctic Refuge and participate in activities that show these companies that this is no place for drilling.

Oil and gas companies have been turning away from opportunities in Alaska and reducing their operations. In 2019, British Petroleum [announced](#) that it was selling the entirety of its Alaska operations to Hilcorp. In mid-March 2020, Conoco Phillips and Oil Search [announced](#) they would scale back their spending in Alaska by \$270 million in response to the crash in oil prices.

**Education and Awareness**

There were several events that we helped support and participated in earlier this year to educate on the Gwich'in way of life and advocate for the continuation of this way of life through the protection of the Arctic Refuge. These included Lorraine Netro speaking at the Conservation Alliance Breakfast at the Outdoor Retailer feature event "A Refuge at Risk" in Denver, Colorado and Jeffrey Peter speaking at the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival event "Protecting the Arctic Refuge" in Vancouver, B.C. Both of these events brought in hundreds of people. In addition, Councillor Charlie participated in an Earth Day Live event which was broadcast globally and is available [here](#).

We have continued to use social media as a tool for reaching a broader audience. We have continued to grow our number of followers and our interactions have remained stable (additional information on pg. 5). If you have any photos or stories that demonstrate the importance of the Porcupine caribou to Gwich'in culture and tradition that you would like us to share through our Social Media accounts please don't hesitate to reach out. I would love the opportunity to share more of your stories and perspectives.

We will be continuing to explore ways to increase our reach through these platforms and encourage you all to follow us on Twitter and Instagram: @ACaribouPeople.



**Photo 2** Lorraine Netro presented at the Conservation Alliance Breakfast in Denver Colorado. Mahsi' choo Lorraine!!

Platform	Launch (Summer 2019)	Winter 2019/2020	Spring 2020
<b>Instagram</b>	Followers: 180+ Engagements: 50+	Followers: 350+ Engagements: 100+	Followers: 570+ Engagements: 100+
<b>Twitter</b>	Followers: 70+ Impressions: 2,500 + Engagements: 90+	Followers: 150+ Impressions: 3,000 + Engagements: 90+	Followers: 240+ Impressions: 3,000 + Engagements: 200+

Given current gathering and travel restrictions, we will be identifying opportunities to participate in virtual events and activities to continue our advocacy and education work. I will also be exploring opportunities to develop training for community members interested in participating in advocacy and education efforts. As part of this, I am putting together an Arctic Refuge protection timeline and some associated materials and I welcome any input and photos you may have to contribute to this.

We will also be looking to host community activities and events around milestones including some potential activities for when the Biennial Gwich'in Gathering was scheduled to be this summer. Please note that these will be virtual events if necessary.



**Photo 3** Jeffrey Peter presented at the Vancouver International Mountain Film Festival in Vancouver, B.C. Mahsi' choo Jeffrey!!

### **International Porcupine Caribou Board**

In February, Vuntut Gwitchin Government participated in the International Porcupine Caribou Board's (IPCB) annual meeting held in Whitehorse. This was an important opportunity to discuss the roles and responsibilities of the IPCB and bring forward our concerns about the proposed Coastal Plain oil and gas leasing program. In this meeting, we brought forward the following key items:

- The Board should be making recommendations/ providing advice on the Coastal Plain oil and gas program;
- The Board should be advocating for meaningful consultation with user groups on the Coastal Plain oil and gas program; and
- The Board should be collecting traditional and Western scientific data to further understand implications and should be including user groups in this data collection.

### **Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign**

We continue to participate in the [Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign](#) (ARDC), a coalition of organizations committed to protecting the Arctic Refuge.

To see some of the great work that the Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign has completed in 2019, I encourage you to check out the below videos which highlight some of the coalition's accomplishments:

- [Corporate and Field Activism](#)
- [Congressional Wins](#)
- [Engaging New Audiences](#)

## Videos and Other Materials

I also wanted to collect some of the short films, videos and other materials that we have shared over the past year and share them here so that you can access them in one place:

- [Where Life Begins](#) a short film featuring Erika Tizya-Tramm produced by The Wilderness Society and directed by Katie Schuler.
- [We Are Abel](#) a short film featuring Jeffrey Peter and produced by The Wilderness Society.
- Earth Day Live feature on “[Big banks, the Gwich'in Nation, & the fight to protect the Arctic Refuge](#)” featuring Councillor Cheryl Charlie and Gwich'in Steering Committee Executive Director Bernadette Demientieff.
- Highlight video of the [Arctic Refuge Experience](#); an exhibit which ran in Brooklyn, San Francisco and Washington D.C. The Arctic Refuge Experience was created by the Wilderness Society, the Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign, and the Gwich'in Steering Committee, and involved a mix of film, 4D technology and immersive sensations, that allowed members of the public to experience a year in the Arctic Refuge.
- Threshold [Season Three: The Refuge](#): Podcast that explores what's at stake with the plan to drill in the Arctic Refuge. Episode 4 “Do it in a good way” spends time in Arctic Village.
- [2019-2020 Human Rights Report](#) by the U.S. Human Rights Network an organization committed to holding the U.S. accountable to its human rights obligations that has been advocating around the United Nations [Universal Periodic Review](#) of the U.S' human rights record. This report features Gwich'in Steering Committee Executive Director Bernadette Demientieff (pg. 20 and 21).

## Outlook

It will continue to be busy in the Caribou Coordination department and we will endeavour to keep the community informed of any major developments. We will continue our advocacy and participation in regulatory processes while increasing our number of allies and expanding our public reach. We will be carefully monitoring news and activities out of Alaska and Washington D.C. and identifying the most strategic actions we can take towards securing permanent protection of the Arctic Refuge.

I know this Caribou Days weekend is different, but I hope you can still enjoy this time with your loved ones and celebrate the return of the caribou.

If you have any questions or suggestions for the Caribou Coordination Department, please do not hesitate to reach out.

Mahsi' choo  
Liz Staples  
[estaples@vgfn.net](mailto:estaples@vgfn.net)



**Photo 4** ARDC projected these images on the Department of the Interior building in D.C. to shine a light on the plan to drill the Arctic Refuge (December, 2019).