



VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT

Government of Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

MEDIA RELEASE

VUNTUT GWITCHIN GOVERNMENT OPPOSES THREATS TO EXPLORE AND DRILL THE COASTAL PLAIN OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

(Old Crow, Yukon, Canada – September 29, 2017) Vuntut Gwitchin Government is actively pursuing all options to fight the attempts of members of U.S. Congress and the Trump Administration to allow Oil and Gas exploration and development activities in the sacred Calving Grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd situated within the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The latest threats in the decades long Gwich'in struggle to protect the Calving Grounds from Oil and Gas exploration and development comes with the news last week of a leaked memo from the U.S. Department of Interior which instructs the Fish and Wildlife service to amend regulations currently prohibiting seismic testing in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This unprecedented move intended to update the estimates of Oil and Gas underneath the Calving Grounds flies in the face of statutory law and nearly 40 years of administrative policy prohibiting such seismic testing.

Last week's news was followed today with the release of the Republican-controlled Senate Budget Committee's draft Budget Resolution. The non-legally binding draft Budget Resolution instructs the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee to come up with \$1 billion in savings over 10 years in order to fund Republican tax reform plans. This is the first of several steps in an undemocratic backdoor attempt to push through controversial amendments to the *Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act* that would repeal the provisions currently prohibiting Oil and Gas exploration and development in the Calving Grounds.

These manoeuvres threaten to disturb the Porcupine Caribou Herd, its sensitive habitat, and the food, cultural and spiritual security of the Gwich'in Nation. Vuntut Gwitchin Government continues to carry forward the mandate of our Elders to protect the Calving Grounds from industrial exploitation.

It is expected that any amendments to regulations to allow seismic testing would require a full-blown environmental assessment which could take 18 months or longer to conduct. With respect to the Budget process and amending the *Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act*, many steps and hurdles must still be overcome by the House and Senate before a final vote could take place. Vuntut Gwitchin Government is working with our Alaskan Gwich'in relatives, treaty partners, and allies to identify all available avenues to intervene in these processes and ensure Gwich'in voices are heard by Congress and the Trump Administration.

Quote:

"Our life as Gwich'in has always been deeply intertwined with the life of the Porcupine Caribou. A threat to the health of the Herd is a threat to our community and our way of life. These renewed threats are an International Human Rights issue, and we will be calling on our treaty partners and allies to continue to stand with us to protect and conserve the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its Calving Grounds. These misguided plans from the Trump Administration and Congress put our ancient relationship with the Porcupine Caribou at risk for what amounts to a few months of American oil consumption. This cannot be justified and must be stopped." – Chief Bruce Charlie, Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation

Background Facts:

The Porcupine Caribou Herd is of high cultural and spiritual importance, and an essential subsistence food source, for the Gwich'in Nation whose territory spans northeast Alaska, Yukon and Northwest

Territories and consists of 14 Gwich'in villages and approximately 9000 citizens, including the village of Old Crow and the citizens of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation.

The Porcupine Caribou Herd population is recently estimated at approximately 197,000; up from an estimated 169,000 in 2010. The Herd the largest migratory herd in Yukon, Northwest Territories and Nunavut. All other North American barren ground caribou herds have become endangered and vulnerable due to the impacts from industrial activities and climate change.

For nearly 40 years the Calving Grounds have been protected from Oil and Gas exploration and development by the *Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act*. However, the Calving Grounds have been in a constant state of limbo as an act of U.S. Congress is required to either permanently protect it or open it up to exploitation.

Since given the mandate from our Elders gathered in Arctic Village in 1988, the Gwich'in Nation has successfully resisted multiple attempts by the U.S. Congress to open the Coastal Plain. The Trump Administration and Alaskan congressional delegation have renewed and bolstered these historic attempts.

In the current Congressional session the House and Senate Budget Committees have introduced draft Budget Resolutions that include instructions to their respective Natural Resources Committees to find billions of dollars in revenues in order to fund major tax reforms. This is an attempt to use what is known as the budget reconciliation process to shield controversial amendments to the *Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act* from Democratic filibuster and to reduce the number of Senate votes required from 60 to 51. This was unsuccessfully attempted in 2005 under the Bush Administration.

With oil supplies at historic highs and gas prices at long-term lows, there is no need to use the budget process for more drilling, especially in sacred places like the Calving Grounds. Estimated revenues from drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge are highly speculative, dependent on unprecedented Oil and Gas lease sales, and ultimately fall well short of the trillions of dollars of revenues required to fund proposed tax reforms.

Recent polling shows that the majority of Americans are "strongly opposed" to drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. According to [recent public opinion research](#) commissioned by the Center on American Progress, 2/3 of Americans oppose drilling with a majority (52%) "strongly opposed."

Canada and the United States are parties to the *International Porcupine Caribou Agreement* (July 17, 1987) which obligates the parties to coordinate conservation of the migratory Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Canada has domestic constitutional obligations with respect to the rights of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and protection and conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd as provided for pursuant to (but not limited to) the *Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation Final Agreement* (1993).

Both Canada and the United States have international obligations with respect to the rights of the Vuntut Gwitchin First Nation and protection and conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd pursuant to (but not limited to) the *International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights* (1966), *International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights* (1966), *International Porcupine Caribou Agreement* (July 17, 1987) and *United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples* (2007).

Media Inquiries:

For media inquiries please contact:

Rebecca Shrubbs

rshrubbs@vgfn.net

(867) 966-3261 (ext. 258)