

**Caribou Coordination Newsletter
January 2021**

As many of you will have heard, on January 6, 2021, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) opened bids received for leases of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. I wanted to take this opportunity to provide a summary of what has happened since my last newsletter (dated September 2020 and available [here](#) on the VGFN website), what we learned on January 6, and what is expected for the coming months within the Caribou Coordination Department.

Lease Sale

On January 6, 2021, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management opened bids received for leases of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Complete high bids were received for over 500,000 acres of the over 1 million acres of Coastal Plain offered in the lease sale. Complete high bids totalled just over \$14 million. High bids were placed by Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA), Knik Arm Services LLC and Regenerate Alaska Inc. Incomplete bids were received by another unknown entity.



What does this mean?

The media has used words such as “bust”, “flop”, “failure” to describe the lease sale. And it was a failure.

Bids received averaged at \$26 per acre, just \$1/ acre over the specified minimum and totaled less than 1 % of the \$1.8 billion in revenue projected by the 2017 *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* which mandated the sale to pay for tax cuts made. Major oil companies stayed away and the biggest bidder wasn't even an oil company but a corporation of the State of Alaska itself (AIDEA).

But most importantly it was a failure because it happened. It happened even though all those involved knew what it meant to the Gwich'in and knew all of the risks involved.

Figure 1 Graphic created by CPAWS Yukon depicting results of the lease sale of the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge held on January 6, 2021.

Following the lease sale, the Parties of the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement released a joint statement that “Work to Protect the Porcupine caribou will continue”. The Parties committed to continue to work collaboratively to oppose oil and gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The statement is available on the Government of Yukon’s website [here](#).

“It was disheartening to hear the bids that had come in from those interested in destroying our sacred lands after decades of advocacy by my Elders, after decades of sharing our knowledge and voicing our concerns and after all of the work each of our Governments have done to protect critical habitat of the Porcupine caribou herd.

The Gwich’in are connected to the caribou and our fates are intertwined. The fates of these lands are not yet sealed and we will continue our work until the critical calving grounds of the Porcupine caribou herd are permanently protected.”

Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm

Canada’s Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada also released a statement in which the Minister confirms that Canada continues to oppose development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The statement “Minister Wilkinson expresses concerns over sale of leases for oil-and-gas development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge” is available on the Government of Canada’s website [here](#).

What have we been up to?

It was a very busy Fall.

We participated in a number of rushed public comment periods specific to the lease sale and to seismic exploration activities proposed for this Winter. We had some great successes in our work with banks and have continued to grow our news media and social media presence.

Seismic Exploration - Seismic exploration of the Coastal Plain has been proposed to start on January 21, 2021. Actual start will depend on if and when the required permits are received and if and when the required snow depths are achieved to permit travel across the tundra as a snow depth of 9 inches is required in attempts to protect the fragile landscape.

With the help and guidance of Lorraine Netro, we hosted a community drop in and letter signing event to share information on seismic exploration activities proposed for the Coastal Plain for this winter and to collect feedback from the community. We collected more than 50 letters from the community over the very short time frame provided. This included a number of letters from students at Chief Zzeh Gittlit School. These letters were included in our submissions to the U.S. Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, who are the responsible for providing permits for the proposed seismic exploration activities. Our response to one of the three public comment periods specific to Seismic exploration held this Fall is available on the Porcupine Caribou Management Board’s website [here](#).



Figure 2 On November 3, 2020, we held a community drop in event in Old Crow to share information and collect feedback on proposed seismic exploration. Mahsi' choo Lorraine Netro for hosting.

Over 6 million Tik Tok users, primarily youth, joined in these comments periods by letting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Services know that they were against development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Alex Haraus, a TikTok user who started sharing information of what is going on and how to help to his followers, helped in submitting over 6 millions letters to U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and shared a video of him doing so on his Tik Tok [here](#). Representatives with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service have said they are excited about the comments as it is important to hear from the public.

Lease Sale – Over the course of the Fall, the U.S. Bureau of Land Management rushed through the lease sale phases in order to be able to host the lease sale before the current Administration leaves office. We put out Joint Statements with the Gwich'in Tribal Council at the start of the lease sale process (available on our VGFN website [here](#)) and for the announcement of the lease sale date (available on our VGFN website [here](#))

We also participated in a comment period specific to the lease sale itself. Despite knowing that the Bureau of Land Management would proceed with a lease sale regardless of our comments, it is important that our comments form part of the public record. Our response is available on the Porcupine Caribou Management Board's website [here](#).



Figure 3 On December 17, one year after we first met with Canada's big banks in Toronto, we completed a thank you walk to each of the banks Whitehorse branches to celebrate their decisions to reject financing drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Corporate - In December, we were able to announce that all five of Canada's largest banks stand untied with the Gwich'in Nation, having updated their policies prohibit financing of oil and gas exploration and development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. We put out a Joint Statement with Gwich'in Tribal Council which is available on our VGFN website [here](#).

Our work with Canadian Banks occurred parallel to similar work being done by the Gwich'in Steering Committee and allied groups in the U.S. which led to all six major banks in the U.S. ruling out financing of drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

All of the major banks in Canada and the U.S. have said no to drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (and dozens of other banks globally). This is a huge accomplishment and underscores the message that drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is too risky.

News Media – Over the last few months there have been thousands of news segments and articles across Canada, the U.S. and globally that have been seen or read by millions of people around the world. We continue to play a key role in ensuring the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Gwich'in Nation make headlines.

I have included just a few of the notable local news coverage from the past few months below:

- [Arctic drilling: Chief Dana Tizya-Tramm on campaign to protect ANWR](#), CBC Northbeat, January 7, 2021
- [Advocates in Whitehorse thank banks for not funding oil exploration in arctic wildlife refuge](#), CBC News, December 18, 2020
- [Chief of Gwich'in First Nation in the Yukon hoping President-Elect Biden will reverse gas and oil exploration in Arctic Wildlife Refuge](#), APTN, December 5, 2020
- [The fight by First Nations to save an Arctic refuge from drilling is running out of time](#), CBC Radio's The House, November 28, 2020
- [Scotiabank becomes fifth major Canadian bank to refuse to fund oil drilling in Arctic Refuge](#), The Narwhal, December 14, 2020



Impressions 116,979
times people saw this Tweet on Twitter

Total engagements 2,188
times people interacted with this Tweet

[View all engagements](#)

Figure 4 Social Media is important tool for sharing information and encouraging action to a broader audience. This tweet from December had a much greater reach than our typical tweets, being seen over 110,000 times!! We are continuing to explore how to use these tools most effectively.

Social Media - We have continued to use social media as a tool for reaching a broader audience, sharing information on Gwich'in culture and way of life and what is currently happening as it relates to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. These social media avenues have proven to be an effective means for encouraging actions of solidarity from the public. We are always exploring new methods to increase our reach and our effectiveness. While our number of followers have continued to increase our interactions have remained fairly stable.

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

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.

Platform	Launch (Summer 2019)	Spring 2020	Winter 2021
Instagram	Followers: 180+ Engagements: 50+	Followers: 570+ Engagements: 100+	Followers: 1,100+ Engagements: 100+
Twitter	Followers: 70+ Impressions: 2,500+ Engagements: 90+	Followers: 240 + Impressions: 3,000+ Engagements: 200+	Followers: 580+ Impressions: 3,000+ Engagements: 200+

Legal – In August, 2020, the Gwich'in Steering Committee, representing the Gwich'in Nation of Alaska and Canada, and allied groups took the U.S. Secretary of Interior, Department of the Interior, Bureau of Land Management and Fish and Wildlife Service to court for finalizing an illegal leasing program for the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. This [case](#), and three others, are ongoing.

In advance of the lease sale date, [a motion](#) was filed by the Gwich'in Steering Committee and allied groups for a temporary restraining order and preliminary injunction to stop the issuance of leases and the authorization of seismic exploration while this case is before the courts. The night before the opening of bids received for leases, we learned that this motion, and two others, were denied by the court.

"Today's ruling is disappointing but does nothing to change the strength of our lawsuit or our resolve. We will fight to protect the lands that nourish the Porcupine caribou herd and our people, no matter how long it takes or where it takes us. This administration steamrolled through a disrespectful, harmful, illegal leasing plan, and we plan to stop it. While that didn't happen today, that day will come."

Bernadette Demientieff, Executive Director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee

While we were disappointed in this news, it does nothing to alter the legitimacy of our case in front of the courts now in which a ruling in our favour will invalidate the leases of the Coastal Plain that have been issued.

What comes next?

This week, President-elect Joe Biden will be sworn into office and Democrats will have control of the White House, the House, and the Senate as well. Restoring protections to the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was included in the 2020 Democratic Platform and we expect the new Administration to take the first steps towards achieving that very quickly after President-elect Biden is sworn in. Further, Representative Deb Haaland has been identified as the nominee for Secretary for the Departments of the Interior. Representative Haaland has supported the Gwich'in and the protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and will be a strong champion in this position.

Even with a U.S. Administration who is supportive of protection the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, there will still be a lot of work involved to ensure exploration and development never occurs. 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 are expecting 2021 to be very busy from a legislative front as we work to repeal the language in the 2017 *Tax Cuts and Jobs Act* and work towards protections of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge through law. We will continue our advocacy efforts with a focus on increasing our number of allies in Congress and in the corporate world and expanding our public reach through continued news media, use of social media, participation in virtual events and engagements etc. We will continue to work

PHONE PRIME MINISTER TRUDEAU!
Join us as we call on the Prime Minister to protect lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit.

Photo: Peter Mather

Call (613) 992 4211
Leave a message with the Office of the Prime Minister

On December 6th and 7th call Prime Minister Trudeau to demand his immediate action to support the Gwich'in Nation as we seek protection of our sacred lands and the Porcupine caribou herd.

"Our sacred lands are in extreme and immediate danger and Canada needs to send a clear message that restoring protections in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is a priority. The Gwich'in have been stewards of these lands for millennia and on December 6th, 2020, the 60th Anniversary of the recognition of these lands as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, we ask you to join us to ensure there will be a 61st." - Lorraine Netro

Let us know by tagging us! @Vuntut @ACaribouPeople

Figure 5 The Government of Canada has expressed opposition to development of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge through strong statements from the Minister of Environment and Climate Change Canada and through active participation in regulatory processes. We continue to call on the Prime Minister to send a clear message that restoring protections is a priority. Mahsi' choo to Lorraine Netro for helping to coordinate this Call To Action.

with the Parties of the Porcupine Caribou Management Agreement in Canada and the organizations of the Arctic Refuge Defense Campaign in the U.S. As always, 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 National Wildlife Refuge.

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

Mahsi' choo
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The fate of the caribou and the fate of the Gwich'in are one in the same.
What befalls the caribou befalls the Gwich'in.