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[EXTERNAL] Seismic testing comment

1 message

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To: blm_ak_coastal_plain_seismic_ea@blm.gov

I am appalled to hear that seismic testing in the most wild and pure public land in America- our Arctic Wildlife Refuge- is being fast-tracked by Trump's BLM. There is no way, within the next few weeks, that researchers could do the work needed to assure no harm be done to the values for which the Refuge has been created. To suggest so is insultingly ridiculous. No one believes it. (As an example of the farce the BLM is creating—a June 18, 2018 Oil and Gas Journal cited Balash talking about the Refuge “antelope” herd. I see that has since been corrected online [though with no public admission of the glaring mistake] to “caribou.” This “slip”—an insult to the Peoples of this nation--betrays the depth of the BLM's ignorance and uncaring).

The values upon which the Refuge was created--and, lawfully, must still be honored--are the primary standard by which any human activities in the Refuge must be judged. The original purpose of the Refuge (ANCILA 1980) is to protect “nationally significant natural, scenic, historic, archeological, geological, scientific, wilderness, cultural, recreational, and wildlife values.” These are for the “benefit, use, education and inspiration” of present and future generations. The Refuge is “to provide the opportunity for rural residents engaged in a subsistence way of life to continue to do so.” This applies to the Gwich'in People who depend upon the Porcupine Caribou Herd who depend upon the coastal plain as their birthing ground—lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit, or “the sacred place where life begins.” Oil and gas activities—including seismic testing—in the Refuge may proceed, accordingly, only with evidence-based assurance of no adverse affects on the regenerative health of this unique lifescape. This value of Refuge health, interpenetrating with climate habitability, is properly primary. It is also popular with both a majority of Alaskans and those outside.

The research of geophysicist Dr. Matt Nolan, and of ecologist Dr. Sue Natali, for example, give solid evidence that 3-d seismic testing will have long term consequences, including deep, lasting depressions in the ground causing changes in water flows and warming the ground, ground that is already warming from climate change. What would be the consequences of these changes on the Porcupine Caribou herd and other interdependent species of the Refuge, and, on the interdependence with Alaska Native life ways? These and so many other questions—for example, what consequences the booms would have on the lifescape and its members--must be thoroughly addressed (“The energy source for the seismic wave is Vibrosies which would exert 64,000 pounds of peak force on the ground”!) Only if it were determined, via rigorous research, that no harm would come to the self-renewing capacity of the Refuge, only IF that were almost certainly true, could seismic testing be lawfully allowed.

But, even then, any effort and expense of seismic testing would be ill spent, any lease purchases would also be a huge waste--given that no new drilling can take place if we are to avoid climate catastrophe beyond anything humankind and many other species have ever encountered.

Drilling must not take place in the Refuge because it would undermine the intent of its creation, a public trust, in the first place.

No drilling can take place in the Refuge if democracy is honored. According to a 2018 Yale University study, a large majority of every day Alaskans—63%—and of U.S. voters—65%—oppose drilling in the Refuge. The whole Gwich'in Nation—whose culture, spirit, and nutrition are dependent upon the Porcupine Caribou Herd that is dependent upon the Refuge coastal plain—is opposed.

Refuge drilling makes no economic sense either.

It would be wrong to drill in the Refuge in every way, so seismic testing makes no sense in every way. This is on top of the ridiculous claims of the present application for seismic testing and the reckless attitude of the BLM in even considering it. The US Fish and Wildlife Service, in fact, has already warned against taking it seriously.

It is also dishonest for the BLM or anyone else to claim that Alaska Native Corporations speak for the values of Alaska Native Peoples. They do not. They speak first for profit. I love the Refuge. The Refuge is priceless.