



Gwich'in Steering Committee

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"In no case may a people be deprived of their own means of subsistence."
International Covenants on Human Rights

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Insurance companies pressured to not support oil drilling in Arctic National Wildlife Refuge

Gwich'in-led effort to protect the Sacred Calving Grounds supported by 77 organizations

FAIRBANKS, ALASKA (November 19, 2020) – The Gwich'in Steering Committee and a coalition of Indigenous and conservation organizations and investors today [released a letter](#) to international insurance companies asking that they pledge to not insure or invest in oil and gas development projects—or companies engaged in such projects—in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in northeastern Alaska. The coalition is composed of 77 organizations representing nearly 9 million members and more than \$47 billion in assets under management.

Organizations working to prevent drilling in the refuge have warned corporations that pursuing oil and gas in the Arctic Refuge is fraught with risk. They informed insurers, “The environmental, social and governance factors linked with oil and gas development exposes your company to unnecessary reputational, legal and financial risk. Drilling in the Arctic Refuge is an unpopular proposition in the United States. [Two-thirds of American voters](#) oppose drilling in the Arctic Refuge which is consistent with the long-held, popular, and bi-partisan support for permanent protection of the Arctic Refuge.”

The letter further stated, “We urge you to listen to the voices of the Gwich'in and other Indigenous peoples who depend on the Arctic Refuge and its resources to sustain their communities, culture, and way of life. The Gwich'in have a spiritual and cultural connection with the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the herd relies on the coastal plain as their birthing and calving grounds. The Gwich'in refer to the area as '*l'izhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit*' or '*the Sacred Place Where Life Begins*.'”

“The Trump Administration’s plan to auction off our sacred lands in the Arctic Refuge for oil drilling disrespects our human rights, ignores public opinion and denies the crisis of climate change,” said **Bernadette Demientieff, executive director of the Gwich'in Steering Committee**. “The banking industry already sent a loud, clear message to oil companies. Now it’s up to insurers to say no to drilling in the Arctic Refuge. It’s too much of a risk, especially with Alaska melting three times the rate as the rest of the world. Drilling will hurt our communities and threaten our very existence. Our way of life is not up for negotiation. We respectfully ask the insurance companies to respect the rights of Indigenous Peoples of Alaska and to join the 73% of Americans who stand with the Gwich'in to protect the Arctic Refuge.”

Despite public opposition to drilling in the Arctic Refuge, the Trump Administration completely ignored concerns and did not adequately consult with Alaska Native Tribes. The Administration opened more than 1.5 million-acre of the coastal plain to oil and gas leasing with a controversial provision in the 2017 Tax Cuts and Jobs Act and is now rushing forward with a plan to hold a lease sale on the eve of the 60th anniversary of the Arctic Refuge's founding.

The coalition shared that in 2018, insurer [AXA](#) became the first insurance company to establish an Arctic Refuge policy after assessing the business risk. [More than two dozen global banks](#), including five major American banks, have also taken positions against investing in oil and gas development in the region. But this Administration continues to disrespect and dismiss the Indigenous People of this country. The Gwich'in Steering Committee and allies will continue to pressure insurance companies, including Liberty Mutual, and oil companies to ensure the sacred calving grounds are protected. They hope insurers will listen and respect their human rights and go on the public record stating they will not insure oil exploration or development in the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd (Arctic Refuge).