



Background and Talking Points

for the Arctic Refuge SEIS hearings

Details

Here is the public hearing schedule for the Arctic Refuge SEIS comment period:

- 10/2 at 5pm AKDT/9pm EDT (Fairbanks)
- 10/6 at 9am AKDT/1pm EDT (virtual)
- 10/11 at 5pm AKDT/9pm EDT (virtual)
- 10/17 at 1pm AKDT/5pm EDT (virtual)

[Please register for the hearings here.](#) When you register, make sure to indicate that you would like to provide comments.

You can also submit written comments online [here](#).

Background

- Following the Biden administration's announcement in September that they had canceled all remaining oil and gas leases on the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, the administration is now accepting public comments on a draft "Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS)" for the Arctic Refuge leasing program. That means they're reviewing the leasing program created by the Trump administration and updating the rules for leasing in the Arctic Refuge so that future lease sales abide by laws that provide protections for our nation's land, air, and waters.
- The existence of the leasing program is required by a bill, the Tax Act, that was passed by Congress and signed by President Trump in 2017. The law requires that two lease sales be held. One was held in 2021 and the second must be held by the end of 2024 unless Congress acts. Since we do not expect Congress to repeal the law, we must ensure that the new leasing program has as little impact on the wildlife and nearby communities as possible.
- These public hearings are an important way for impacted local communities and the American public to weigh in on the potential impacts of oil and gas development in the Arctic Refuge and encourage the administration to adopt the strongest protections possible before the second lease sale.



Importance of the Coastal Plain

- The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, located in the [northeast corner of Alaska](#), supports the greatest variety of plant and animal life in the entire circumpolar north. It is home to the Porcupine Caribou Herd, imperiled polar bears, spawning streams for Dolly Varden, Arctic Char and other valued fish species, wolves, muskoxen, Dall sheep, arctic foxes and nearly 200 species of migratory birds that migrate to six continents and all 50 states.
 - The Refuge's biological heart, the Coastal Plain, is the calving ground for the Porcupine Caribou Herd. The Gwich'in Nation have depended on this herd for their subsistence and culture for thousands of years and call the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge *lizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit*, which means "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins." So protecting the caribou is a matter of basic human rights.
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Talking points

- We thank the Biden administration for canceling leases as an important step towards protecting the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge. We also urge decision-makers at every level to fully consider the impacts that any oil and gas development would have on the rights of Indigenous Peoples, vital habitat that endangered species rely on, and our global climate future.
- Although the draft SEIS has made some improvements to protect the Arctic Refuge, it is not enough. More needs to be done to protect this sacred landscape and ensure compliance with the law.
- The coastal plain is a sacred place to the Gwich'in Nation, and the SEIS does not acknowledge the cultural harms caused to the Gwich'in people by the oil and gas leasing program.
- Because the 2017 Tax Act did not override any of the laws that protect the Coastal Plain, it is imperative that the SEIS take into consideration ALL aspects of potential impacts to lands, water, wildlife, communities, and climate from a leasing program in this sacred area. It must also adopt measures to protect those values of the Arctic Refuge, both now and into the future.



Talking points cont.

- Because the 2017 Tax Act did not override any of the laws that protect the Coastal Plain, it is imperative that the SEIS take into consideration ALL aspects of potential impacts to lands, water, wildlife, communities, and climate from a leasing program in this sacred area. It must also adopt measures to protect those values of the Arctic Refuge, both now and into the future.
- The alternatives set forth in the Draft SEIS do not grant strong enough protections to the Porcupine caribou herd, which the Gwich'in Nation relies on for cultural survival and food security.
- We urge the Biden administration to fully consider public comments and adopt strong measures to prevent impacts on subsistence for local communities, fragmenting of the calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou herd, and adverse effects on threatened polar bears from oil and gas activities.

Additional resources

- DOI Press Release: [Biden-Harris Administration Takes Major Steps to Protect Arctic Lands and Wildlife in Alaska | U.S. Department of the Interior \(doi.gov\)](#)
- NYT Article: [Biden Administration to Bar Drilling on Millions of Acres in Alaska](#)
- GSC Statement: [Gwich'in Steering Committee Statement on AIDEA Lease Cancellation](#)
- ADN Op-ed: [Fighting for public lands and Alaska's future](#)
- More detailed technical talking points: [Take Action: Arctic Comment Periods](#)
- Additional information on the environmental, wildlife, and community impacts from drilling in the Arctic Refuge can be found on the [Arctic Refuge Defense Coalition's website](#)

Thank you for taking action to protect
the Arctic Refuge!