



ANCSA REGIONAL
ASSOCIATION

February 26, 2021

The Honorable Deb Haaland
Secretary Nominee
Department of the Interior
1849 C Street, N.W.
Washington, DC 20240

Mr. David Hayes
Special Assistant to the President for Climate Policy
The White House
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.
Washington, DC 20500

*Issued electronically via email to: Eric Werwa, Chief of Staff to Rep. Haaland
eric.werwa@mail.house.gov & david.j.hayes@who.eop.gov*

Dear Ms. Haaland and Mr. Hayes:

The Biden Administration has declared a moratorium on new leasing of federal lands. While referred to as a “pause”, the action nevertheless creates uncertainty for investment, which leads to unaffordable delays and job loss on current projects. As Native landowners of Alaska Native Corporation lands that are often proximate to federal lands, this decision has severely harmed our region, our communities, and our people.

When questioned about the effects of this decision, members of the Administration as well as the Interior Secretary nominee have stated that the decision does not affect public lands that are already under lease. However, it is not enough for the Administration to say that leases will be honored after they are issued, because projects must still undergo extensive permit application processes that include significant data submissions, public comment and government consultation periods, and agency adjudications before development can take place. It does no good to honor a lease if the lease does not lead to responsible and timely development.

In addition, the Biden Administration has said that it is simultaneously reviewing current resource projects that have already been through extensive NEPA permitting processes and received a favorable Record of Decision, including the Willow Project in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska.

As you are aware, the Willow Project has been through a rigorous and extensive NEPA EIS process including public forums and comment periods and has received both a Record of Decision and necessary approval from the North Slope Borough. We believe it is critical to the Alaska Native residents on the North Slope and should proceed to development stage.

Oil and gas development projects on the North Slope in Alaska are crucial to the ongoing health of the North Slope communities. They provide benefits and revenue critical to supporting well-being of residents and the physical infrastructure of the towns themselves, including funds to improve schools, housing and health care, and to provide basic necessities like running water and sanitation. Thanks to improvements to community infrastructure from resource project revenue, the quality of life for North Slope residents has improved dramatically in the past few decades. In fact, medical journal-published research shows that life expectancy of North Slope residents has increased as community infrastructure has improved. Yet, many North Slope communities still do not have some of basic necessities that other communities in the United States take for granted. In short, the largely Alaska Native Inupiat communities of the North Slope depend upon continued responsible oil and gas exploration and development for their continued survival.

Resource development and traditional lifestyles are not mutually exclusive. In fact, it is the very existence of viable village communities that allows North Slope and Alaska Native residents to enjoy a healthy subsistence lifestyle. After hunting as they have for centuries in a vast and clean environment, the people need a home and a community to which they can return.

Oil and gas companies operating on the North Slope have proven to be good neighbors. They have worked to minimize their environmental footprint and impacts to subsistence, provided jobs on the North Slope, and worked with our communities on improving access to education.

As the older, previously developed North Slope oil fields decline, it is vitally important that new fields like the Willow Project are developed responsibly in order to provide essential property taxes for the North Slope Borough. These taxes pay for healthcare services, runway maintenance, power plants, local schools, and everything else that makes a community work, while also paying the salaries of local government administrators who work with explorers and developers to carry out the strong, environmentally minded permitting and zoning that has worked on the North Slope for generations.

Through statutory federal revenue sharing in the National Petroleum Reserve-Alaska, the Willow Project will provide billions of dollars over its expected field life to communities most affected by oil and gas production in the NPR-A, which means more resources to improve living conditions, schools and basic infrastructure for North Slope communities.

The Willow Project is unique in that, although it is on federal lands, the benefits of resource development flowing to the North Slope Alaska Native peoples are similar to the type of benefits that would be received if the lands were Indian Lands – namely, revenues from lease bonus payments, rentals, royalties and property taxes, and local/municipal oversight.

As an association representing the twelve land-based Alaska Native regional corporations, it is the mission of the ANCSA Regional Association (ARA) to advocate for timely and efficient solutions that remove obstacles to the equitable economic development of our Alaska Native communities, including those of Alaska's North Slope.

Therefore, ARA asks the Secretary of the Department of Interior, if appointed, to honor her pledge to work with constituent leadership on such issues by having the Department of Interior fully defend its Record of Decision for the Willow Project, and if that Record of Decision is remanded to the Bureau of Land Management for further work, to work in good faith to expeditiously address any issues raised by the courts so the Willow Project is not further delayed.

Sincerely,



Kim Reitmeier
Executive Director, ANCSA Regional Association

Copied electronically to: The Honorable Congressman Don Young
 The Honorable Senator Lisa Murkowski
 The Honorable Senator Dan Sullivan
 Laura Daniel Davis, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Land &
 Minerals Management