



\*\*\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\*\*\*

Date: April 11, 2024

Contact: [John@marathonstrategies.com](mailto:John@marathonstrategies.com)

**A statement from Nagruk Harcharek, President of the [Voice of Arctic Iñupiat](#) (“VOICE”).** VOICE is a nonprofit organization established in 2015 by the region’s collective elected Iñupiaq leadership and is dedicated to preserving and advancing North Slope Inupiaq cultural and economic self-determination. Its members include local governments, Alaska Native Corporations, federally recognized tribes, and tribal non-profits across the North Slope of Alaska. VOICE’s Board of Directors previously passed a resolution in opposition to the federal government’s Proposed Rule affecting the NPR-A, the ancestral homelands of the North Slope Iñupiat.

“If [media reports](#) are correct, the federal government has once again chosen to overlook the legitimate concerns of elected Indigenous leaders from Alaska’s North Slope. This is a continuation of the onslaught of being blindsided by the federal government about unilateral decisions affecting our homelands. As reported, the White House is touting the advancement of the Department of the Interior (DOI)’s September 6, 2023 decision to restrict development on over 50% of the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A), yet another blow to our right to self-determination in our ancestral homelands, which we have stewarded for over 10,000 years. Not a single organization or elected leader on the North Slope, which fully encompasses the NPR-A, supports this proposed rule. In fact, everyone has asked DOI to rescind the rule.

“Economic development projects, which have taken place with the engagement and inclusion of the North Slope Iñupiat for over 50 years, are essential to the survival of our communities and culture. Today, over 95% of the North Slope’s tax base comes from the taxation of resource development infrastructure. This funding goes towards essential services like schools, health clinics, modern water and sewer systems, and world-class wildlife management and research supporting our subsistence resources. These basic services, which are commonplace throughout the Lower 48, have only arrived on the North Slope within the last generation and are directly connected to significant increases in average life expectancy over the past 50 years in our region. And what is more valuable than the gift of life, time with your family, time with your loved ones?

“DOI’s decision to unilaterally restrict development in the NPR-A is categorically unjust. It will make it more difficult for our communities to provide and maintain these services for future generations and incorporate new services, such as telecommunications and utility corridors, not to mention access to our traditional hunting grounds. Their actions will also foreclose on future development opportunities and long-term economic security for North Slope Iñupiat communities, which was recently recognized by a [bipartisan resolution](#) passed unanimously by the Alaska State Legislature.

“The BLM’s economic analysis supporting the Proposed Rule fails to capture the significant impact of the decision on local communities. North Slope elected leaders repeatedly and consistently highlighted this flawed economic analysis and its implications for our communities to the administration over the course of nearly a dozen meetings, concerns which have been summarily ignored because they do not comport with the federal government’s preferred policies.

“This announcement is a blow to the North Slope Iñupiat, yet it is not surprising. We received no prior warning ahead of DOI’s original announcement and our subsequent requests for greater community engagement to discuss process and procedure for the Proposed Rule have been casually disregarded by the federal government. Secretary Deb Haaland herself has ignored at least eight meeting requests from North Slope Iñupiat elected leaders despite this administration’s [promise](#) to engage with Indigenous communities and their legal obligations to consult with local governments on issues affecting our people and homelands.

“We will continue to advocate for our right to self-determination and to be consulted on all matters that impact our lands and people.”

###