



Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat Files Suit Against the Federal Government to Challenge NPR-A Rulemaking Process

Today, on behalf of its 23 members and their North Slope constituents, Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE) filed a suit to challenge the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) final rule for the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A). This rule, which was crafted without meaningful engagement with those who live on the North Slope and therefore will be most affected, will significantly hinder economic development in the region and presents serious risks to Indigenous communities and Iñupiaq culture.

"Our complaint speaks for the North Slope Iñupiat's voices whom the federal government has chosen to silence, stonewall, and scorn since it blindsided us with its unilateral mandates in September 2023," said **VOICE President Nagruk Harcharek**. "It is unfortunate that we have been forced to turn to the courts for resolution on this seriously flawed rule and the process that produced it. If the administration would have meaningfully engaged with the North Slope Iñupiat, we would likely not be in this position today."

The NPR-A is part of ancestral Iñupiaq homelands and is located entirely within the North Slope Borough (NSB), a home-rule government created to ensure our communities would have a say and benefit from responsible development in the region. The NSB has the authority to tax infrastructure on the North Slope, which provides more than 95% of our tax revenues and funds essential public services like modern water and sewer systems, schools, health clinics, and wildlife management to preserve our subsistence resources for future generations.

The proliferation of these basic services has delivered quantifiably positive outcomes for our people. In 1969, our average life expectancy was just 34 years. Today, we can expect to live to an average age of 77. This increase is the largest of its kind over this period in the United States.

BLM also disingenuously claims that its final rule represents the will of the North Slope Iñupiat despite unanimous criticism of the rule from our communities. The rulemaking process was rife with cancelled meetings, unreturned phone calls, and disrespect toward our people, exemplified by BLM's decision to release its rule and the accompanying public comment period in the midst of our whole-of-community fall subsistence season. At every step, members of our North Slope Iñupiat Tribes, Village Corporations, Regional Corporations, and their elected leaders have been unanimous in their opposition to the rule.

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VOICE is a nonprofit organization established in 2015 by the region's collective elected Iñupiat leadership and is dedicated to preserving and advancing North Slope Iñupiat 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 issued a resolution in opposition to the federal government's Proposed Rule affecting the North Slope Iñupiat's ancestral homelands in the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A).