



**\*FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE\***

Date: November 6, 2024

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## **ANWR Coastal Plain Lease Sale Advances, But Biden Land Policy Continues to Ignore Alaska's North Slope Iñupiat**

*BLM and USFWS's Final ANWR SEIS, crafted without input from North Slope Iñupiat communities, effectively erases the people of Kaktovik, the only Indigenous community located within ANWR*

*The Biden administration's decisions continue to deny the existence of the North Slope Iñupiat and our right to self-determination and come against the will of voters in the 2024 election*

**Anchorage, AK** – Today, the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) [released](#) the final supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) and announced the second lease sale for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) Coastal Plain. As part of the SEIS, BLM and USFWS continue to ignore the North Slope Inupiat in favor of groups that do not reside in the region. Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE), along with the people and elected leadership of Kaktovik, the only community within all of ANWR, are unified in opposition to this hasty policy move by the Biden administration.

“It seems that once again the people of the North Slope are being told that our voices and lived experience are insufficient, and that federal laws passed by Congress mean little in the eyes of the Biden administration’s Department of the Interior (DOI),” said [North Slope Borough Mayor Josiah Patkotak](#). “The federal government’s latest actions are shameful and will have serious consequences for Kaktovik and the North Slope. With this latest development, DOI has soundly rejected the opportunity to partner in our effort to aptly balance development and preservation in our region. This administration has moved beyond ignoring our appeals to now seeking to remove us from the picture entirely.”

While VOICE and its members support the advancement of a congressionally mandated lease sale in the Coastal Plain, the federal government’s decision to release the final SEIS for ANWR comes less than 24 hours after a strong majority of voters from across the United States firmly rejected the Biden-Harris administration’s policy agenda in the 2024 election. A desperate measure, which will not lead to durable public policy, BLM and USFWS’s actions today are disrespectful of the national public and North Slope Alaska Native communities, like Kaktovik, who overwhelmingly reject the federal government’s unilateral policy decisions in the region.

“The Biden administration’s decision willfully erases Kaktovik’s existence and makes us refugees on our homelands,” said **Kaktovik Iñupiat Corporation President Charles Lampe**. “We communicated these facts directly to Secretary Deb Haaland just five months ago. It is insulting and reprehensible that the federal government has chosen to erase us after forcibly

relocating Kaktovik three times over the past 70 years. It seems the federal Indian policy of termination is not dead.”

“If we do not exist, who am I elected by? What community do I serve? If the Iñupiat of Kaktovik don’t exist, who am I,” said **City of Kaktovik Mayor Nathan Gordon, Jr.** “By denying the existence of our ancestral land, my constituents, my family, my friends, my community members, and my culture, this administration is choosing to erase us. All while the Biden administration claims to be the most tribally friendly administration in the history of the U.S. We will not be fooled by their rhetoric and propaganda.”

Local elected officials have made every effort to convey the significant negative impacts of the SEIS to the White House and DOI. After 10 months of stonewalling tactics and following the federal government’s decision to advance its deeply flawed NPR-A rule, Secretary Deb Haaland finally met with North Slope leaders in June to discuss the impact of her department’s actions on the region. The department’s decision to advance its ANWR SEIS, as well as its troubling subordination of North Slope Iñupiat Indigenous land claims, shows the federal government still is not listening and remains more concerned with advancing their policy agenda than acknowledging the existence of the Indigenous people of Kaktovik. This is not just ignorance; it is intentional erasure.

“We have regressed decades in federal Indian policy, reverting back to the eras of assimilation, termination, and relocation,” said **Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat President Nagruk Harcharek.** “Land claims were settled by our early leaders in 1971, with boundaries drawn after deep consultation among Alaskan Native people and rigorous proof of ancestral use. Though our early leaders stood united in voting ‘NO’ on ANCSA, we have since moved mountains for our people. Over 50 years later, those carefully drawn lines are now under threat, with new claims being allowed by Secretary Haaland and the Department of the Interior. They have no right to erase an entire community’s existence – or to ignore strong national consensus rejecting the Biden administration’s approach to policymaking on the North Slope. Our history proves we face adversity with unyielding strength, and these actions will be fought to the very end. Our fight for self-determination will never stop.”

Kaktovik residents and the rest of the North Slope leadership learned about DOI’s September 2023 decision to cancel leases and the supposed need for an SEIS through reports in the media. No courtesy call or email from the “most tribally friendly administration in U.S. history.” The previous environmental impact statement included community input, whereas the September announcement and subsequent SEIS were created without input from Kaktovik, the only community within ANWR and the only community to be directly affected by the SEIS.

“The federal government cannot erase us from our homelands simply because we disagree with its position, and it cannot continue the false claims that it values Indigenous voices in the policymaking process when it does not acknowledge that we exist,” said **Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope Tribal Secretary and Director of Natural Resources Doreen Leavitt.** “This development is a desperate Hail-Mary from a soundly defeated Biden administration that is more intent on advancing its policy agenda and ram through flawed policies than working with Alaska

Native communities to create balanced, lasting policies that advance our self-determination.”

The U.S. House of Representative’s recent vote to pass the bipartisan HR 6285, the “Alaska’s Right to Produce Act,” demonstrates that Congress is alert to the injustices imposed on Indigenous communities by the federal government’s unilateral actions. It also underscores widespread support for North Slope Iñupiat self-determination in their ancestral homelands.

“There is a majority consensus of elected leadership across the North Slope, including Kaktovik, that responsible resource development is essential to maintaining our economic security and way of life,” said [Arctic Slope Regional Corporation](#) **President and CEO Rex A. Rock Sr.** “We remain united against any attack on our self-determination.”

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#### **About Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE)**

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. In 2017, VOICE’s board passed a resolution in support of opening the 1002 Area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (ANWR) to oil and gas exploration and development.