



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Date: January 8, 2025

Contact: voiceofthearctic@marathonstrategies.com

A statement from Nagruk Harcharek, President of [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.

“Today, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) [announced](#) that the Bureau of Land Management received no bids in the congressionally-mandated oil and gas lease sale in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge's (ANWR) Coastal Plain. DOI's comments are deeply insulting to our region given that they undermine the will of Kaktovik, the only community within ANWR's 19-million-acre expanse.

“This is the byproduct of years of inconsistent policy moves by the Biden administration with regard to Indigenous North Slope Iñupiaq lands, intended to stymie economic development in the region. The Biden administration's approach to ANWR has been defined by its efforts to exclude Indigenous voices from Kaktovik, the only community within ANWR, from the policymaking process while elevating outside groups and voices who have no connection to our lands and people. Our community has a right to shape our shared economic future, and we will continue to fight against the Biden administration's attempts to make us environmental refugees in our homelands.

“North Slope communities want to advance Iñupiaq self-determination through durable, collaborative policy making. These communities were dissatisfied with the Biden administration's decision to initiate and finalize an unnecessary supplemental environmental impact statement (SEIS) that did not reflect the majority consensus of local and regional elected officials, while also minimizing development opportunities contrary to the spirit of the law.

“The SEIS and subsequent inadequate ROD exemplifies the federal government's deeply flawed policy approach to this issue. Industry uncertainty during the ANWR lease sales process is a deliberate goal in the federal government's approach to our lands, and it is shameful that the Biden administration would seek to use our economic security as a political football.

“The Biden administration's consistent denial of the North Slope Iñupiat's right to self-determination and its willful negligence of our communities' future will be a defining feature of its approach to Indigenous policy, and its repeated decisions to not

meaningfully engage with the people whom its policies will most affect is disgraceful. This last-gasp salvo by a departing administration is no way to create durable policy affecting Indigenous lands, and we urge the Trump-Vance administration to take a different, more inclusive approach when it assumes office in less than two weeks from today, hopefully resulting in more durable policy for the North Slope, the State of Alaska and the nation.”

###