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Recission of 2024 NPR-A Rule Provides Opportunities for North Slope Iñupiat Communities and Culture to Thrive in the Long Term

Anchorage, AK – Today, the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) published a draft rule restoring the North Slope Iñupiat’s self-determination within our National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska (NPR-A) Indigenous homelands. The draft rule, which was announced yesterday at a National Energy Dominance Council Session by a federal delegation in Utqiagvik, which included Secretary of the Interior Doug Burgum, Secretary of Energy Chris Wright, and U.S. Environmental Protection Agency Administrator Lee Zeldin, will reverse the previous administration’s unilateral actions in the NPR-A and create opportunities for Iñupiaq communities and culture to thrive in the long term.

“Today’s decision by the BLM is another important milestone in our effort to advance our Iñupiaq self-determination on our North Slope homelands,” said **Nagruk Harcharek, President of Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat (VOICE)**. “It underscores what VOICE has always known and argued in court on behalf of our 21 member organizations: that the Biden administration’s 2023 rule affecting our NPR-A lands is deeply flawed and poses significant risks to our communities, economy, and culture. We applaud this development and look forward to collaborative engagement with the federal government and Congress about durable policies that support North Slope Iñupiat self-determination.”

DOI’s NPR-A Rule recission stands in stark contrast to the previous federal government’s approach to North Slope Iñupiat Indigenous lands. In September 2023, the Biden administration blindsided North Slope Iñupiat communities when it announced a proposed rule to “protect” 13 million acres of Indigenous lands and waters located within the NPR-A. This rule was crafted unilaterally by the former administration without consulting Indigenous leaders and communities who would be most impacted by the rule, with many learning of the announcement through the press. In June 2024, VOICE filed a lawsuit on behalf of its members challenging the Biden administration’s rule and highlighting its significant risks to Indigenous communities and Iñupiaq culture.

“The BLM’s decision to issue a revised draft rule is an important victory for the Village of Atkasuk, which resides wholly within the NPR-A and has stewarded its lands and waters for thousands of years,” said **Native Village of Atkasuk President Mary Bordeaux**. “This reverses the Biden administration’s unilateral policies, which would significantly impact our community, and sets the stage for greater consultation with the North Slope Iñupiat to develop more durable, comprehensive policies affecting our lands and people.”

Over 95% of the North Slope’s tax revenue is derived from taxation on resource development infrastructure. These funds support essential services, like schools, health clinics, modern water and sewer systems, and world-class wildlife management and research supporting Indigenous subsistence traditions. The proliferation of these services is directly connected to significant increases in average lifespan for the North Slope Iñupiat from just 34 years in 1969 to 77 years today – the largest increase of its kind in the United States over that period.

“Our communities rely on the NPR-A, both for traditional subsistence resources and for valuable tax revenues generated by economic development opportunities on our Indigenous homelands,” said **Mayor of Utqiagvik Asisaun Toovak**. “Given the importance of Iñupiat lands to our cultural traditions and vital, modern community infrastructure that is ubiquitous in the Lower 48, but has only recently arrived on the North Slope, it is imperative that policies affecting our homelands be created in consultation with our elected leaders.”

DOI’s draft rule will restore the North Slope Iñupiat’s rights within our NPR-A homelands. Under the Biden administration’s rule, roughly 56% of the NPR-A was restricted for development activities. The federal government’s decision to issue a rescission of this rule will ensure greater opportunity for development projects with the engagement and inclusion of the North Slope Iñupiat, which, along with the NPR-A Impact Mitigation Fund, play an essential role in the region’s economy.

“This new draft rule is a welcome change for Olgoonik Corporation and for future generations who want to continue living and thriving on our ancestral lands around Wainwright,” said **Hugh Patkotak, Sr., President and CEO of Olgoonik Corporation**. “This version brings us back to the previous rule and the 2020 IAP, an approach we understood and helped to shape through collaboration with BLM Alaska. We’ve consistently said that decisions impacting our land and way of life must include us – this time, it feels like our voices are finally being heard.”

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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), and VOICE formally filed a lawsuit against the Biden administration’s NPR-A rule in 2024.