

Protect the Sacred Place Where Life Begins



Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaai Goodlit





GSC file photo

The Gwich'in Nation of Northeast Alaska and Northwest Canada have a unified longstanding position to seek permanent protection of **"Iizhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit" The Sacred Place Where Life Begins**, the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The coastal plain is the primary birthplace and nursery for the Porcupine Caribou Herd where 40-50,000 calves are born. The herd is 123,000 strong. Our Gwich'in villages are strategically located along the migratory paths of the caribou, and the area where we live is virtually within the same range as the caribou.

The Gwich'in rely on the Porcupine Caribou Herd to meet our essential physical, cultural, social, economic and spiritual needs. The caribou has provided for our clothing, tools, weapons, shelter, medicines and nutritional needs. The Gwich'in Nation is comprised of approximately 8,000 people who live in fifteen isolated communities. Reliance on traditional and customary use (now termed "subsistence") of the Porcupine Caribou Herd is a matter of survival. Beyond the importance of our basic needs, the caribou is also central to our traditional spirituality. Our songs and dances tell of the relationship that we have to the caribou. The caribou is a part of us.

In our Creation story, it has been told that the Gwich'in came from the caribou when there was a separation of humans from the animals. We have been told that there was an agreement between the caribou and the Gwich'in. From that time on...

"The Gwich'in would retain a part of the caribou heart and the caribou would retain a part of the Gwich'in heart..."

What befalls the caribou befalls the Gwich'in. We have an obligation to our future generations to uphold the integrity of our spiritual beliefs as well as our ancestral way of life that has been handed down one generation to the next.

We have a modern hunting culture with traditional ties to the animals and the land. Our villages have modern schools, post offices, administrative council offices, health care facilities, laundromats, and some Gwich'in villages even have solar powered facilities. At first glance, one may not see the deeply held traditional values guiding life in the villages.

The Gwich'in have the inherent right to continue our own way of life; and this right is recognized and affirmed by civilized nations in the international covenants on human rights. Article 1 of both the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights read in part:

"...In no case may a people be deprived of their own means of subsistence."

This fabric of our subsistence culture and livelihood exists in a deeper manifestation which time spent with us reveals.

Our relationship with the caribou mirrors that of the Plains Indians to the buffalo, and we fear that the Porcupine Caribou Herd will go the way of the buffalo. We cannot allow this to happen- **our future is dependent on the future of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.**

Gwich'in Nation Takes a Stand

In 1988, the increasing threat of proposed oil and gas development on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge led our elders to call upon the Chiefs to hold a traditional gathering (Gwich'in Niintsyaa) to discuss this threat and make a decision for the future of our Nation. The Gwich'in Niintsyaa, held in Arctic Village, was the first reunification of the Gwich'in Nation in over a century. We addressed this issue in our traditional way and agreed unanimously to speak with one voice in opposition to oil and gas development in the birthplace and nursery grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd. To accomplish this task, our communities established the Gwich'in Steering Committee and mandated the organization to represent the interests of the Gwich'in Nation in the Arctic Refuge debate. The elders urged the Gwich'in Steering Committee to adopt this political position, further directing us to educate people in "a good

way". The elders also appointed two representatives from each region to serve on the **Gwich'in Steering Committee Board of Directors: Jonathon Solomon, Fort Yukon; Sarah James, Arctic Village; Ernest Erick, Venetie; Kay Wallis, Fort Yukon; Johnny Charlie, Fort McPherson; Gladys Netro, Old Crow; Norma Kassi, Old Crow and Alestine Andre, Arctic Red River.** Johnny Charlie has passed away and Alestine Andre resigned to attend school. In 2003, **Elaine Alexie of Fort McPherson** began serving on the board.

Over the past fifteen years, the staff, board, and volunteers of the Gwich'in Steering Committee have succeeded in working on a grassroots level to educate the public and decision-makers of the many reasons why this sacred area must be protected. We feel strongly that much of our achievements are a direct result of the continuing wisdom and guidance provided to us by our elders.

Gwich'in Niintsyaa

Resolution to Prohibit Development in the Calving and Post-Calving Grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd

WHEREAS:

For thousands of years our ancestors, the Gwich'in Athabascan Indians of northeast Alaska and northwest Canada, have relied on caribou for subsistence, and continue today to subsist on the Porcupine Caribou Herd which is essential to meet the nutritional, cultural and spiritual needs of our people; and

WHEREAS:

The Gwich'in have the inherent right to continue our own way of life; and that this right is recognized and affirmed by civilized nations in the international covenants on human rights. Article 1 of both the International Covenant of Civil and Political Rights, and the International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights read in part: "...In no case may a people be deprived of their own means of subsistence." and



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WHEREAS:

The health and productivity of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, and their availability to Gwich'in communities, and the very future of our people are endangered by proposed oil and gas exploration and development in the calving and post-calving grounds in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge-Coastal Plain; and

WHEREAS:

The entire Gwich'in Nation was called together by our chiefs in Arctic Village June 5-10 to carefully address this issue and to seek the advice of our elders; and

WHEREAS:

The Gwich'in people of every community from Arctic Village, Venetie, Fort Yukon, Beaver, Chalkyitsik, Birch Creek, Stevens Village, Circle, and Eagle Village in Alaska; from Old Crow, Fort McPherson, Arctic Red River, Aklavik, and Inuvik in Canada have reached consensus in our traditional way, and now speak with a single voice.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED:

That the United States Congress and President recognize the rights of our Gwich'in people to continue to live our way of life by prohibiting development in the calving and post-calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd;

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED:

That the 1002 area of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge be made Wilderness to achieve this end.

Passed unanimously this 10th day of June 1988 by the Chiefs and people of the Gwich'in Nation in Arctic Village, Alaska.

A Spiritual and Moral Violation of a Sacred Place

"This issue is so important to the Church because it is both an environmental issue and a human rights issue. Oil exploration threatens both the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge and the Gwich'in People. We cannot accept development at the expense of the Refuge and the Gwich'in. In this regard, this Porcupine Caribou Herd is to our generation what the Buffalo was to an earlier generation: Will greed triumph over our deepest values as a people? Will we trade our values and 100 years of moral development for a few days of profit? Our heritage or faith, freedom, and fairness demand more. We must stand with the Gwich'in against oil development."

--Bishop Mark McDonald, Episcopal Diocese of Alaska



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The Gwich'in rightfully claim a spiritual connection to **Iizhik Gwatsan Gwandaii Goodlit** which translates to "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins." This place was set aside by the Creator as a place that brings forth life, and this place deserves to be respected as a sacred place. To the Gwich'in, when the animals give birth, it is considered a sacred time, and because of this no one ought to intrude during that time. Indigenous Peoples have traditional laws that respect birthplaces, spawning

areas, nesting areas and denning areas as special places that must not be disturbed. Our culture has beliefs in the ancient ties of kinship and spiritual bonds between ourselves and animals. We honor and uphold the wisdom of our ancient spiritual values and laws. To the Gwich'in Nation, the Arctic Refuge represents a spiritual umbilical cord for the animals that rely upon it for birthing and nursing their young.

Izhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit-The Sacred Place Where Life Begins

IEN pledges to help stop any oil drilling that would desecrate sacred lands and threaten the survival of the Porcupine Caribou Herd and the Gwich'in."

--Tom Goldtooth, Indigenous Environmental Network

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge contains the greatest diversity of animal life of any conservation area in the circumpolar region. The coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge, where oil drilling has been proposed, is home to the largest concentrations of wildlife in the refuge.

The Porcupine Caribou Herd, North America's largest international herd, migrates 1,400 miles across Alaska and Canada annually. **In late April, the herd travels to the coastal plain where they typically give birth to between 40-50,000 calves.** The gathering of these animals during calving and post-calving is one of the most spectacular wildlife spectacles on earth.

Izhik Gwats'an Gwandaii Goodlit. In addition to being the primary birthplace and nursery for the Porcupine Caribou Herd, the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge is a nesting area for 135 species of migratory birds, a denning area for polar bears, and a year-round home to the prehistoric musk oxen.

The Gwich'in have never said we are opposed to all development. But we have lived here for thousands of years and we learned there are some places and times where the animals must not be disturbed. The most important of these areas is the caribou birthplace and nursery grounds. Pregnant cows and cows with calves are just too sensitive to be disturbed. Our elders have known this for generations. Therefore, the Gwich'in resolved to press the U.S. Congress to prohibit oil exploration and development in the calving and post-calving grounds of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, and that the public lands in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (1002 area) be made Wilderness to achieve this goal. This diverse ecosystem is essential to the perpetuation of life. Let us not dishonor this area for short-term economic gain.

Arctic Refuge Chronology

- **1960** - President Eisenhower established the Arctic National Wildlife Range, which included the coastal plain lands.
- **1980** - The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) was enacted and doubled the size of the Range to 19 million acres to include most of the Porcupine Caribou Herd U.S winter range, and renamed it the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge designating all of the original range except the 1.5 million acre coastal plain area as wilderness.

Congress mandated further studies of wildlife and wilderness, and oil potential in what became known as the 1002 area for the section of law requiring them but Congress explicitly prohibited oil and gas leasing and development in the coastal plain at that time.

The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge was established under ANILCA to conserve fish and wildlife populations and their habitats; including the Porcupine Caribou Herd to fulfill international treaty obligations, and to provide for subsistence uses. Proposed oil development is contrary to the fundamental purposes of why the Arctic Refuge was created.

Over the past 30 years, the most consistently and heavily used calving area for the Porcupine Caribou Herd has been in the coastal plain of the refuge.

Concentrated calving has occurred in the coastal plain "1002 area" in 27 of 31 years, according to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. Nearly every year, all females and calves in the herd use this area after calving to rejuvenate for the migration back to the wintering grounds in Canada. Most years, the majority of males join them on the coastal plain.



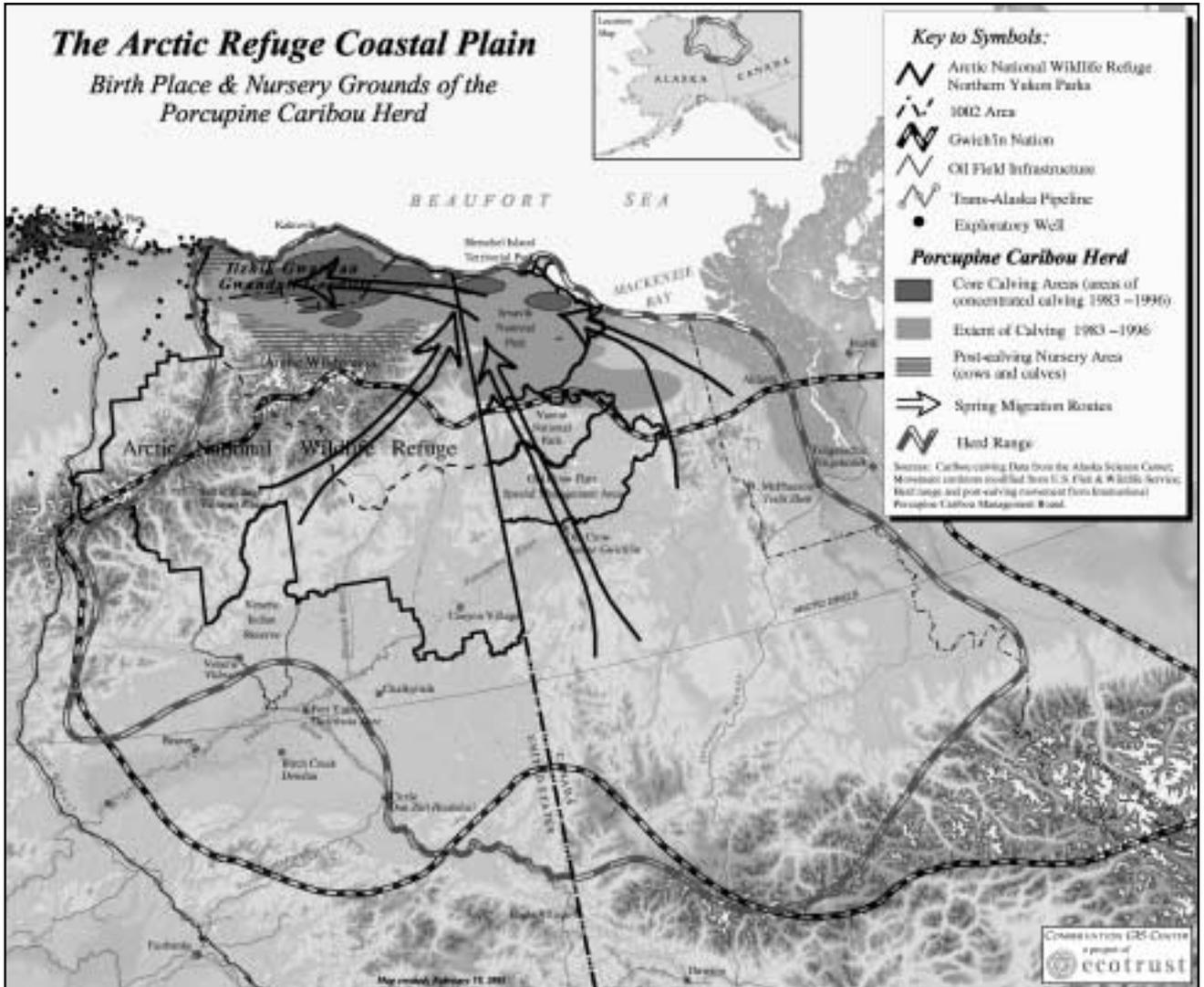
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“They do not want this—they are fighting for their most fundamental right to exist as an indigenous people who are an integral part of the landscape, of the unique ecology of this region. We cannot condemn the Gwich’in as a people; we must respect their right to survival. We cannot ignore their rights the way we did in the last century. We cannot sacrifice them for the greed of a few oil companies or for a few months’ supply of oil.”

— The late Senator Paul Wellstone, 1991



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ANCSA Corporations

"It is sad that Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act [for-profit] corporations are sometimes Alaska Native people's worst enemy- they clearcut, stripmine and drill our ancestral lands that are needed to preserve our irreplaceable subsistence, sovereignty and spiritual way of life." - -Dune Lankard; Eyak Preservation Council

The discovery of oil at Prudhoe Bay in 1968 established an alignment of the oil companies and the federal government to promote their combined interests. This alliance provoked an urgency to settle the land claims in Alaska in order to provide a right-of-way for the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Consequently, the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA) was enacted and our Native lands became "corporate assets" of newly created for-profit native regional and village corporations. Two Gwich'in villages, Arctic Village and Venetie, were among the very few Alaska Native villages that opted out of ANCSA, choosing instead to keep title to their lands. ANCSA conveyed ancestral lands to corporations, instead of the existing tribal governments, because tribal governments were perceived as an impediment to assimilation. The reality of the situation that Alaska Natives endure is that Native corporate failure may lead to the loss of Native title to ancestral lands.

The disagreement in the position of the Gwich'in Nation and the Inupiat Native corporations regarding oil development in the coastal plain is directly linked to the difference in our principal objectives. By artificially dividing Alaskan Native groups and establishing these for-profit corporations, ANCSA not only changed the dynamics of how Alaskan Natives relate to the land, but also how they relate to one another. Some ANCSA regional corporations became compelled to grant multinational companies access to their corporate lands in order to stay afloat. Whereas generating profit continues to be a principle objective for ANCSA regional corporations, Alaskan Tribes are primarily concerned with providing for the overall health and well being of their people as well as maintaining an abiding bond to the land. The fundamental divergence in the nature of these objectives continues to be visible when examining the differing positions of these two groups in regards to proposed development in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.



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Oil Development Harmful

"A traditional Native culture and way of life that depends on the caribou is at stake. These are human rights which should not be sacrificed for oil development."

-- John Echohawk, Native American Rights Fund

The Department of Interior's 1987 Coastal Plain Resource Assessment clearly documented major impacts to wildlife from proposed oil development including:

- Displacement and reduction of wildlife populations including muskox and the Porcupine Caribou Herd
- Permanent loss of habitat
- Increased noise and disturbance factors
- Major effects on subsistence

In 2002, a study entitled, "Arctic Refuge Coastal Plain Terrestrial Wildlife Research Summaries. Biological Report," by U.S. Geological Survey biologists reconfirmed what most scientists and scientific organizations have been stating for years:

- The coastal plain (1002 area) of the Arctic Refuge provides important wildlife habitat, and industrial development of this area poses significant risks to caribou and other species
- The oil facilities at Prudhoe Bay have displaced female caribou from their previously preferred calving habitat, and that a similar displacement is likely to result if oil development is authorized in the Arctic Refuge

In 2003, The National Academy of Sciences report, "Cumulative Environmental Effects of Oil and Gas Activities on Alaska's North Slope," details the impacts of over thirty years of oil and gas development in Alaska.

The report found that there are significant adverse cultural, social, and environmental impacts from oil and gas development and, most importantly impacts on animals, vegetation, and Native people who live in the region and depend on its resources.

- As a result of conflicts with industrial activity during calving and an interaction of disturbance with the stress of summer insect harassment, reproductive success of Central Arctic Herd female caribou in contact with oil development from 1988 through 2001 was lower than for undisturbed females, contributing to an overall reduction in herd productivity.
- Alterations to the North Slope physical environment had aesthetic, cultural, and spiritual effects on human populations.
- The committee heard repeatedly from North Slope Inupiat residents that the imposition of a huge industrial complex on the Arctic landscape was offensive to the people and an affront to the spirit of the land.
- North Slope residents also reported that traditional subsistence hunting areas have been reduced, the behavior and migratory patterns of key subsistence species have changed, and that there is increased incidence of cancer and diabetes and disruptions of traditional social systems.
- That few who live in the North Slope Borough are directly employed by the oil and gas industry has been noted for almost two decades (Kruse et al. 1983 and is supported by findings of both the NSB survey (NSB 1999) and the Alaska Department of Labor and Workforce Development 2001).

- *In addition, Inupiat at Prudhoe Bay find they are a small minority in a primarily white workforce that can sometimes express hostility towards Alaska Natives. The jobs available to the Inupiat often are seen by them as menial or as token jobs.*

There is no such technology available that would provide for the optimum safety of the Porcupine Caribou Herd if oil development were to occur in the Refuge. Even with the latest practices, oil production occurs year-round, relying on permanent gravel roads and airports with thousands of flights during construction and operations.

The calving and nursery grounds of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is too fragile to allow access to the polluting oil industry. Since 1996, the Prudhoe Bay oil fields and Trans-Alaska Pipeline have caused an average of 400 spills annually on the North Slope - most commonly diesel, crude oil and hydraulic oil.



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International Agreement between the Government of the United States of America and the Government of Canada on the Conservation of the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

-July 17, 1987

...Recognizing that the Porcupine Caribou Herd regularly migrates across the international boundary between Canada and the United States of America and that caribou in their large free-roaming herds comprise a unique and irreplaceable natural resource of great value which each generation should maintain and make use of so as to conserve them for future generations...

...Recognizing the importance of conserving the habitat of the Porcupine Caribou Herd, including such areas as calving and post calving, migration, wintering and insect relief habitat... The objectives of the Parties are:

To conserve the Porcupine Caribou Herd and its habitat through international co-operation and coordination so that the risk of irreversible damage or long-term adverse affects as a result of use of caribou or their habitat is minimized...



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Permanent Protection: The Battle Continues

"What the drill-it-all politicians don't realize is that the Gwich'in are part of the Arctic ecosystem. When they drill in the heart of the caribou's calving grounds, they are drilling in the heart of these people. That is why this is a human rights, as well as an environmental, issue." -- Peter Van Tuyn, Trustees for Alaska.

Potential US Oil Supply	=	6 months
Development Time	=	10 years
Destruction Amount	=	Generations

Until the Arctic Refuge is permanently protected, pro-development forces will try to gain access to the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge. This issue will continue to be a legislative priority in Congress for Alaska's congressional delegation. The Arctic Refuge debate continues to be one of the most controversial issues before Congress. The oil companies (ChevronTexaco, ExxonMobil, BP, and ConocoPhillips), the Department of Interior, Arctic Power, and their allies in Congress must respect public opinion which is in overwhelmingly support of permanently protecting the coastal plain of the Arctic Refuge.

National opinion polls consistently show the majority of Americans oppose opening the Arctic Refuge to oil drilling. The public believes that the ultimate destruction of the Gwich'in culture and way of life for economic gain is unacceptable.

The Arctic Refuge represents America's Arctic coastal ecosystem. Only 5 percent is protected by law from the oil industry, whereas 95 percent of the North Slope is open to oil exploration or development.

Recent studies by the U.S. Geological Survey show that the potential oil in the Refuge would only supply U.S. demand for six months, and the oil would not be available on the market for at least ten years.

As our elders and chiefs of the Gwich'in Nation resolved in 1988, the public lands of the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge must receive permanent protection status as designated wilderness through an Act of Congress. The President of the United States and the U.S. Congress ought to encourage, promote, and honor the rights of the Gwich'in to live our way of life

and pass this way of life on to our future generations. We should not be forced to sacrifice our way of life for six months of oil, ten years from now.

Sustainable Development /Alternatives:

"Now is the time to set a new and positive direction for American energy policy, one that will lead our nation in a transition from an energy system that harms human health, causes global warming, degrades land and marine ecosystems, and pollutes the earth to an energy system that provides clean, renewable, and reliable energy that does not threaten human health or the environment. That future is within our grasp. Not to reach for it would be a gross abdication of our moral responsibility."

—Dr. Bob Edgar; General Secretary National Council of Churches; and Sharon Bloomer; Chair of the Coalition on Environment and Jewish Life

Instead of promoting continued dependence on fossil fuel sources, **the U.S. should become a world leader in the promotion of sustainable energy initiatives.** The enhancement of economically viable alternative energy development would wean us from the non-renewable and polluting fossil fuels. New technology exists and is being developed in the areas of wind, solar and hydrogen energy sources. This can be the new energy era of the millennium.

According to EPA scientists, if new cars, minivans and SUVs got just 3 miles more per gallon, it would save more oil within 10 years than would ever be produced in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Making more fuel-efficient automobiles is the most effective thing the U.S. can do right now to decrease dependence on foreign oil and thus increase national security.

Tribes support the Gwich'in

"We support the Gwich'in to seek permanent protection of this sacred Arctic Refuge, which is vital to their livelihood. Regardless of how much oil may be in the refuge, it is morally wrong to expect the Gwich'in to sacrifice their way of life to meet this country's energy needs. What will be lost and what is at stake is too high a price to pay."

--Alaska Inter-Tribal Council 2002



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The Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Alaska Inter-Tribal Council representing 187 tribes in Alaska, International Indian Treaty Council, Indigenous Environmental Network, Native American Rights Fund, National Congress of American Indians and numerous individual tribes support and defend the rights of the Gwich'in to live our ancestral way of life.

"The cultural survival of the Gwich'in people is threatened by multinational oil companies and pro-industry officials in the highest ranks of the United States government, forces that would callously place the survival of the Porcupine Caribou Herd at risk by gambling that oil exploration and development on the Herd's calving grounds in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge of Alaska would not have the devastating effects on the herd that many biologists and people with indigenous knowledge of the Caribou believe such actions would; NCAI does hereby oppose efforts of multinational oil companies and certain high ranking federal officials to open the public lands of the Arctic Refuge 1002 Area to oil exploration and development in complete disregard of the risks such action would create for the cultural survival of the Gwich'in People of Alaska and Canada and calls upon the government of the United States to reject any and all proposals that might create such risks."

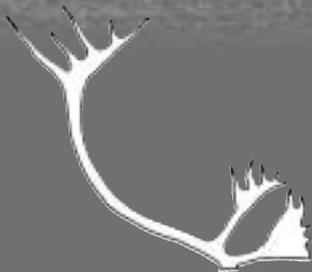
--National Congress of American Indians 2002

We have a sacred obligation to uphold the integrity of the way of life and lands that our ancestors bestowed upon us. The Gwich'in success is based on building unity and bridging support. We need your strength, hope and vision, just as you need our strength, hope and vision. Please support us to protect the last intact Arctic ecosystem in America, the livelihood of our future generations and the Gwich'in culture and way of life.

Hai' Shalak Naii (Thank You, All My Relations...)

"It is our belief that the future of the Gwich'in and the future of the Caribou are the same. We cannot stand by and let them sell our children's heritage to the oil companies."

*Jonathon Solomon,
Chairman, Gwich'in Steering Committee*



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