



GREAT PLAINS TRIBAL CHAIRMAN'S ASSOCIATION



Global
Indigenous
Council

**Joint Statement of the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council,
the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association,
and the Global Indigenous Council.**

**Support for the Gwich'in Nation in defense of their sacred homeland -
the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.**

"As Tribal Nations, our people have always been the collateral damage in America's addiction to extractive industries. The destruction of our lands and traditional lifeways were and continue to be acts of cultural genocide. The Gwich'in are the latest victims in Trump's revival of Manifest Destiny.

We must stand with the Gwich'in. We must defend the sacred for our future generations,
for if we don't, what will become of the earth?"

- A. Gay Kingman, Executive Director, The Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association.

"American energy dominance will be declared a strategic, economic and foreign policy goal of the United States," was a pledge Secretary of Interior Ryan Zinke made to fossil-fuel corporate heads and operatives before taking office. In this lone respect, Zinke has been as good as his word. A campaign finance beneficiary of extractive industry, Zinke has staffed the Department of Interior (DOI) with former fossil-fuel corporate lobbyists, industry executives, and climate change deniers as he has enacted the Trump Administration's documented mandate to suppress scientific data, purge records, and dismantle environmental justice mandates to benefit extractive industry. In two-years, Zinke has overseen the largest reduction in public lands protection in history, stripping tribal sacred and historic sites such as Bears Ears National Monument of protections, to open those lands to fossil-fuel development. What price "American energy dominance"? The Gwich'in people are about to find out as their place of Creation, "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins," known as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, is on the cusp of being opened to drilling due to a most insidious legislative maneuver that enabled passage of the Trump Administration's questionably designated "Tax Cuts and Jobs Act."

Trump's signature legislation required the vote of Senator Lisa Murkowski, so the McConnell-led GOP majority enabled Alaska's senior senator to attach a rider to the budget reconciliation package that produced the bill, which fulfilled Murkowski's decades-long ambition of opening the Arctic Refuge. Murkowski, Chairman of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, was detailed with sourcing \$1-billion to offset Trump's tax cut to the wealthy, and so predictably pushed the measure to open the Refuge through the committee. Like Interior Secretary Zinke, Murkowski claims that drilling in the Arctic Refuge will benefit Alaska Native Corporations, when, in fact, no Native lands rest within the so-called 1002 Area. The Arctic Slope Regional Corporation and Kaktovik Inupiat Corporation have rights outside the 1002 Area in the Refuge, so the "divide and conquer" playbook so effectively manipulated by Zinke will continue be on full display.

Tribal Nations have always been the collateral damage in America's addiction to extractive industries. The wanton destruction of our lands and traditional lifeways were and continue to be acts of cultural genocide, and the Gwich'in now face the reality of being the latest victims. The Refuge's 1.5-million-acre coastal plain that stretches between the Arctic Ocean and the Brooks Range is where the Porcupine caribou herd migrates to give birth in one of the last remaining sacred cycles of life on this continent that proceeds uninterrupted. The Gwich'in are "The Caribou People." The caribou is to the Gwich'in what the buffalo was to the tribes represented by the Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council and the Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association: before the mass slaughter that took them to the brink of extinction, the buffalo was our staff of life, our physical and spiritual nourishment in balance. We know what it is to be robbed of that sacred heart so fundamental to your culture. Today, we fight to retain and regain it. For the Trump Administration and the GOP's fossil-fuel donors, this isn't "The Sacred Place Where Life Begins," it is just another sacrifice zone demarcated by profit and loss projections. With the passage of Trump's tax bill to benefit the rich, the rider to open the Refuge to oil drilling signaled that the Gwich'in way of life that has endured for millennia was about to be engulfed by a reinvigorated colonial legacy.

In September 2018, Zinke, who remains mired in multiple ethics investigations, including one referred to the DOJ, instructed Interior to rescind longstanding environmental justice procedures which directly impact Tribal Nations. Produced following President Clinton's Executive Order on Environmental Justice, the two memos from 1995 and 1997 required DOI to evaluate environmental consequences on the health and well-being of vulnerable communities impacted by federal actions, and specifically DOI's responsibility to protect tribal trust resources and sacred sites on federal lands. Zinke's decision further undermines the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) and the National Historic Preservation Act (NHPA) to benefit extractive industry at the expense of tribal heritage and culture.

As we recently stressed in testimony to the Senate Environment and Public Works Committee, cultural preservation is not up for negotiation. To date, both the House and the Senate have ignored Tribal Nations' appeals to intercede and stop NHPA and NEPA violations by the USFS and BLM in Greater Yellowstone that literally threaten to obliterate 10,000-years of tribal history in the region. These agencies are required under NHPA to undertake a Section 106 review; they must undergo a review process for all federally funded and permitted projects that will impact sites eligible for listing under NHPA. Zinke's dissolution of Interior's environmental justice mandates highlights why these critical issues have not been addressed and sets a precedent for what is about to befall the Gwich'in the Arctic Refuge.

Even before President Trump stated, "I don't believe it" in response to November 2018's National Climate Assessment (NCA) which summarizes the impacts of climate change on this continent now and in the future, Professor Jeffrey Sachs of Columbia University was among those who echoed the Global Indigenous Council's position that Trump is guilty of crimes against humanity for ignoring the ongoing and deteriorating impacts of climate change. By disavowing the NCA, Trump, followed by Zinke, has dismissed the findings of more than 300 experts guided by a 60-member Federal Advisory Committee who produced the report. The Union of Concerned Scientist's December 2018 report, *Science Under Siege at the Department of Interior*, details Zinke's systematic deconstruction of scientific criteria in Interior's decision-making process to benefit his fossil-fuel "dominance" agenda. Consistent with Zinke's MO, Interior attempted to bury a new USGS report on greenhouse gas emissions on federal lands that found carbon dioxide emissions from fossil-fuels extracted on those lands under Zinke's purview already account for 24% of all US greenhouse gas emissions. Before it was gagged, the government's Earth to Sky agency partnership of NASA, the National Park Service (NPS), and the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) predicted that it is not if, but when, permafrost will thaw in the Arctic Refuge as temperatures continue to warm.

Pre-Zinke, Interior's USFWS reported on the current impacts of climate change on the Refuge. The agency found that temperatures have increased by 5 to 7°F, snow covered areas have decreased by 10%, sea ice has thinned,

coastal erosion is advancing, and permafrost has warmed from 3 to 5°F and is projected to rise by 9°F. Without intervention, in the next eighty-years the glaciers in the Brooks Range will disappear, as might species critical not only to the ecosystem, but to Gwich'in and Alaska Native cultures. Muskox are declining in the Refuge, and polar bears are increasingly been found emaciated, starved to death, and drowned in waters where sea ice has melted. Trump and Zinke's "American energy dominance" will continue to undermine US national security, particularly in the Arctic, if their present course remains. Melting sea ice opens new, potential shipping passages for powers hostile to US interests, and the US military will be among the climate refugees from rising sea levels as numerous military bases are coastal installations.

The Arctic Refuge may seem to be a distant place and the Gwich'in an unfamiliar tribe to most Americans, who may consider the fate of both to have negligible impact upon their lives. Tragedy always hits others. Until, that is, it hits you – as the citizens of Louisiana, Puerto Rico, Texas and California can attest in the wake of catastrophic climate-related events. "Like the miner's canary, the Indian marks the shift from fresh air to poisonous gas in our political atmosphere; and our treatment of Indians, even more than our treatment of other minorities, marks the rise and fall of our democratic faith," wrote Felix S. Cohen, a towering figure in federal-Indian law. Six-decades later, it would behoove the American people to take note. The Gwich'in maybe the miner's canary in the Refuge, but if extractive industry development proceeds, it won't only be the Gwich'in who are impacted by the environmental degradation. Even if, like Zinke and Trump, one chooses to ignore science, two words should be enough to oppose oil drilling in the Arctic Refuge: Exxon Valdez.

With extractive industry development comes the imposition of "man camps." With every "man camp" there's the potential for an increase in sexual violence against Indigenous women in not only neighboring communities, but city hubs that serve the transient workforce. The Urban Indian Health Institute's November 2018 report, *Murdered and Missing Indigenous Women and Girls*, identifies Alaska as the state with the third-highest incidence of MMIWG cases, and identifies multiple victims in both Fairbanks and Anchorage. Senator Lisa Murkowski called the statistics "pretty shocking," and bemoaned, "Canada has contributed tens of millions. We've invested about zero," in reference to the US government's lack of commitment to the crisis. "We have a great deal of work to do. We need to be doing more," Murkowski added. Opening the Arctic Refuge to extractive industry and raising more "man camps" will only do one thing "more" – according to existing data, it will create more MMIWG victims. In line with a Congressional Budget Office (CBO) projection, Senator Murkowski alleges that Refuge oil leases will generate \$2-billion over the next decade, but ignores the CBO estimate that in all, the Refuge might generate \$5-billion in oil, a conclusion it reached a decade ago when oil prices were much higher. In contrast to Trump and Murkowski, the Center for American Progress finds that if the Refuge is opened, the US Treasury will only gain \$37.5 million in the same period, which won't put a dent in the \$1.4-trillion deficit the CBO projects Trump's tax bill will impose over the next decade. What price the lives of Alaska Native women and girls? What price the Gwich'in people's way of life? What price your way of life which is not immune from accelerated climate change catastrophes?

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The Rocky Mountain Tribal Leaders Council (RMTLC) serves tribal nations located in Wyoming, Montana, Idaho, and Alberta, specifically the Northern Arapaho, Eastern Shoshone, Blackfeet Nation, the Chippewa-Cree, the Confederated Salish & Kootenai Tribes, the Crow Tribe, the Fort Belknap Indian Community, the Fort Peck Tribal Executive Board, the Little Shell Tribe of Chippewa Indians, the Northern Cheyenne Nation, the Shoshone-Bannock Tribes of Idaho, and the Piikani Nation of the Blackfoot Confederacy.

The Great Plains Tribal Chairman's Association (GPTCA) is composed of the 16 Tribal Chairmen, Presidents, and Chairpersons of the federally recognized sovereign Indian Tribes within the Great Plains Region of the Bureau of Indian Affairs (the states of North Dakota, South Dakota and Nebraska), which includes the Cheyenne River Sioux Tribe, Crow Creek Sioux Tribe, Lower Brule Sioux Tribe, Oglala Sioux Tribe, Rosebud Sioux Tribe, Yankton Sioux Tribe, Sisseton-Wahpeton Oyate, Flandreau Santee Sioux Tribe, Standing Rock Sioux Tribe, Santee Sioux Tribe, Spirit Lake Sioux Tribe, the Ponca Nation of Nebraska, the Omaha Tribe, the Winnebago Tribe of Nebraska, Turtle Mountain Chippewa, and the Three Affiliated Tribes (Mandan, Hidatsa & Arikara).

The Global Indigenous Council is an international advocacy organization representing tribal nations and indigenous rights across the hemispheres, which is reflected in its leadership structure that includes tribal representation from the Americas to Australasia.

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