



# NATIVE MOVEMENT

Building Healthy & Sustainable Communities

[www.nativemovement.org](http://www.nativemovement.org)

February 9, 2023

Department of the Interior  
1849 C Street, N.W.  
Washington DC 20240

Dear Secretary Haaland,

On behalf of our Alaska Native board, advisory board, and our greater Alaskan team: thank you and the Biden Administration for the paramount protections of the Tongass National Forest and the waters of Bristol Bay. These decisions are critical to protecting Alaskan ecosystems and the Alaskan residents who rely on them. While these protections are substantial, there is still more that must be done, for Alaska and for our nation. We urge you and President Biden to continue critical decision making by protecting Arctic communities and addressing the global climate crisis – please stop the permitting process on ConocoPhillips’ proposed Willow Master Development Plan by mandating “no action.”

The proposed Willow Project threatens to exponentially harm families and communities on the Arctic Slope of Alaska, and it would exacerbate global climate destruction at a critical time. We urge you to listen to the voices of the people who will be most impacted by the Willow Project. This harmful Project would be located next to the Iñupiaq (Alaska Native) community of Nuiqsut, a community already inundated with oil and gas pollutants and a history of community concerns being disregarded by company and regulatory authorities.

Both the City of Nuiqsut and the Native Village of Nuiqsit have continuously and clearly voiced opposition to the Willow Project. [In their joint letter](#), they cite numerous concerns they have with the project, including: the horrendous lack of adequate consultation, the significant impact on the health of Nuiqsut residents, and the imminent detrimental loss of access to food/subsistence resources.

Both local governments underscore the potential loss of subsistence resources resulting in a \$30,000 increase in living costs per household as residents would be forced to supplement subsistence foods with expensive and less nutritional store-bought foods. This economic impact on the community is not addressed in the project’s final Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (SEIS) *despite* the U.S. EPA’s recommendation to do so.

Furthermore, companies operating near Nuiqsut have demonstrated detrimental and negligent emergency response and safety protocols. In 2022, a ConocoPhillips operation resulted in a “prolonged gas leak” that caused the company to evacuate non-residential employees while continuing to tell the community there was no harm. In 2012, Repsol operations resulted in a gas and fume blowout that enveloped the community of Nuiqsut for weeks and resulted in massive community health and prenatal health issues. In nearly every case of oil and gas explosions, blowouts, or emergencies, the community of Nuiqsut has been inadequately informed of the severity of the situation. Even more outrageous is the fact that the

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community of Nuiqsut has been denied accurate air quality information in a timely manner. This history of watching as the oil companies evacuate their employees while community leadership is left to wonder whether or not they should also evacuate should be reason enough to end any new oil and gas development in this already harmed area.

In addition to local opposition to this project, the long-term and far reaching climate impacts of this development would be disastrous. This new drilling site would expand oil and gas extraction in the Arctic by 30 more years, causing an increase in global warming gas emissions. The Biden Administration's promise to meaningfully address global warming has been an inspiration; however, 30 more years of oil extraction is the antithesis of that promise.

The climate crisis is exacerbated in the Arctic and we cannot afford new oil and gas development globally. Science has long known that the Arctic has been warming more rapidly than other regions, and in the past decade the rate of warming has [accelerated to 4 times faster than the global average](#). It is projected that in the next 5 years alone, the average temperatures in the Arctic will rise to levels that will result in permafrost melting, which will put all infrastructure built on permafrost at risk for failure. The only people who stand to benefit from this development with no consequences are the oil and gas developers – not the people of Nuiqsut, not the residents of Alaska's Arctic slope, not even Alaskans.

This is a human rights issue, not only for the local Indigenous community of Nuiqsut but for us all as citizens of this earth, we cannot afford this level of risk. We urge you to keep your promise to address the climate crisis. We urge you to continue to honor and respect Indigenous land stewards and those who rely on the safety and well-being of what the earth provides.

Native Movement is an Alaska-based not-for-profit organization that works collectively with numerous other organizations, tribes, and community members across the state to build a just and equitable transition to an economy that is ecologically sustainable and just for all Alaskans. We urge you NOT to approve the permit for ConocoPhillips' Willow Master Development Plan.

Sincerely,

Enei Begaye  
Executive Director  
Native Movement

Cc:

US President Joe Biden

US House Representative Peltola

US Senator Murkowski US Senator Sullivan

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