



May 23, 2018

Ryan Zinke, Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior, exec_exsec@ios.doi.gov

David Bernhardt, Deputy Secretary, U.S. Department of the Interior, deputy_secretary@ios.doi.gov

Joseph Balash, Assistant Secretary, Land & Minerals Management, U.S. Department of the Interior, joseph_balash@ios.doi.gov

Stephen Wackowski, Senior Advisor for Alaska Affairs, U.S. Department of the Interior, stephen_wackowski@ios.doi.gov

Karen Mouritsen, Alaska State Director, U.S. Bureau of Land Management, kmourits@blm.gov

By Electronic Mail

Re: Timeline for Arctic Refuge Leasing EIS

Dear Secretary Zinke, Deputy Secretary Bernhardt, Assistant Secretary Balash, Senior Advisor Wackowski, and State Director Mouritsen,

I am writing to express my serious concerns with the process the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) is contemplating for completing an environmental impact statement (EIS) for an oil and gas leasing program for the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. The Refuge is the most sensitive and ecologically and culturally significant undeveloped landscape in North America. An adequate public process pursuant to the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to assess the numerous significant social, cultural, economic, and ecological impacts associated with developing an unprecedented leasing program for the coastal plain must be extensive and will necessarily take a substantial amount of time to complete. It will also require the initial collection of a significant amount of scientific information to inform the analysis.

Yet, consistent with an August 2017 [secretarial order](#) aimed at “streamlining” the Interior Department’s NEPA compliance through imposition of arbitrary time and page limits for completing EISs, Deputy Secretary Bernhardt has publicly stated his intention to complete the coastal plain leasing EIS within one year.¹ Senator Murkowski also articulated the “strong commitment [of the Interior Department] to work with [her] to get these leases out before the end of the term.”² On April 27, 2018, the Deputy Secretary issued [additional direction](#) for implementing the 2017 streamlining order, requiring all agency teams

¹ Margaret Kriz Hobson, “Road map for ANWR drilling gets clearer,” *E&E News*, Mar. 12, 2018 (Bernhardt statement at Alaska Support Industry Alliance meeting).

² *Id.* (Murkowski statement at Anchorage business meeting).

preparing EISs within the Department to submit to him, within 30 days, a project schedule for completing the NEPA process within one year and confirmation that the EIS will be no longer than 150 pages. BLM's "tentative schedule" shared last week at a Resource Advisory Council meeting in Fairbanks confirms that the agency is contemplating a one-year timeframe for completing the leasing EIS.

As the former U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Regional Director for Alaska who has overseen dozens of agency decision-making processes, I can say with certainty that an adequate public process and analysis under NEPA for leasing the coastal plain simply cannot be completed within one year and be limited to 150 pages of environmental analysis. Good planning takes time. This is especially so in Alaska, where the sheer scale and ecological and cultural importance of the landscape and resources are particularly vast and complex. It is also a matter of environmental justice, where meaningful engagement of remote communities and Alaska Native tribes necessarily takes time. In this context, one size decidedly does not fit all. Imposing the timelines and page limits contemplated by the Deputy Secretary to the coastal plain leasing EIS will mean that significant impacts go unanalyzed. Tribal consultation and coordination will likely get short-shrift, important scientific data will not be compiled or considered, and the public's ability to provide meaningful input on alternative courses of action will be compromised. Ultimately, the agency's ability to consider all relevant information, adequately respond to public input, and issue a decision that satisfies all treaty, statutory, and regulatory mandates will be significantly compromised.

By contrast, I was involved with and am aware of several recent EIS-level decision-making processes of significant scope in Alaska that took sufficient time to perform a rigorous NEPA analysis with extensive tribal and public engagement. For instance, the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska Integrated Activity Plan was completed in approximately 3 years. This plan was not litigated, I believe, because the Department took the necessary time to get it right, including by holding more than a dozen public meetings, conducting significant tribal consultation, and involving many local, state, and federal agencies.

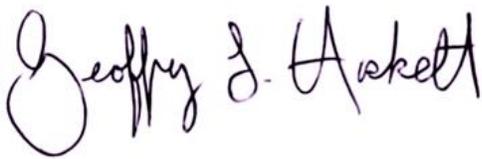
Procedural integrity, not political expediency, must drive the timeline of this unprecedented effort. BLM must identify missing and outdated information, process the best available science, evaluate potential impacts, formulate stringent protective measures, conduct intensive and meaningful government-to-government consultation, and engage the public – this simply doesn't happen quickly. A rushed NEPA process for the coastal plain leasing EIS would be a callous affront to the Gwich'in people, for whom the coastal plain is the "Sacred Place Where Life Begins." It would pose existential threats to wildlife, including the over 200,000-member Porcupine Caribou herd that migrates hundreds of miles each year to their coastal plain calving grounds, and the threatened polar bear that dens and gives birth in designated critical habitat on the coastal plain. It would jeopardize the incredible 200 species of migratory birds that fly to the coastal plain each year from remote corners of the globe, and violate the agency's responsibility to the millions of Americans who cherish the Refuge as North America's last great wilderness.

A rushed approach also undermines fundamental values of government decision-making that are enshrined in NEPA, our country's basic environmental charter. NEPA has been a proven bulwark against hasty or wasteful federal decisions by fostering government transparency and informed decisions. It has

ensured that federal decisions are at their core democratic by guaranteeing meaningful public involvement. And it has achieved its stated goal of improving the quality of the human environment by ensuring that decisions rely on sound science to reduce and mitigate harmful environmental impacts. Those promises cannot be met under the pressure of compressed and arbitrary time and page limits.

As you complete the required project timeline for the coastal plain leasing EIS, I ask that you keep these realities in mind and provide a waiver of the Department's one-year/150-page limitations for EISs, which are wholly inadequate for this process. Until the scoping process is complete and BLM has had adequate time to review public comments and determine the scope of the draft EIS, it will not be possible for the agency to produce a defensible project timeline or estimates for the length of the EIS. Even then, the BLM will necessarily need to remain flexible as it engages tribes and the public in this highly significant NEPA process and conducts a robust environmental analysis. In sum, it is critical that BLM allow adequate time and commit the necessary resources to perform a rigorous and transparent study of all the significant environmental, cultural, and socio-economic impacts associated with a leasing program for the coastal plain, and to robustly engage the Gwich'in in a manner that suits their unique sovereign needs and interests.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Geoffrey J. Haskett". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Geoffrey Haskett
President, National Wildlife Refuge Association

Cc: Greg Siekaniec, Regional Director, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, greg_siekaniec@fws.gov

Nicole Hayes, Project Coordinator, Bureau of Land Management, mnhayes@blm.gov