

Opinion

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Gwitchin say 'no' to ANWR development

When the buffalo herds were decimated 100 years ago across the Great Plains, we were not there. We were not there to make a choice about this.

There were a few powerful individuals and companies who influenced a nation. Within a very short period of time not only were the buffalo gone, but a whole way of life was forever lost. The reason was simple enough: we needed a railroad from coast to coast.

Now, in 1988 you have an opportunity to make a choice.

It is a genuine choice about a vast untouched wilderness known as the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

The choice is: should the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge be designated wilderness or should it be opened to oil and gas exploration and development?

The refuge is home to nesting migratory birds (over 150 species have been sighted), lemming, fox, marmot, wolves, bears, and to the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

It is the only place in America where the ecosystem is completely intact and interacting as the Creator designed it to be.

We are concerned about the fate of the nesting and non-nesting migratory birds not only in Alaska, but all along their flyways. They are our treasure.

Guest Opinion

By
Adeline
Radoff



If oil and gas exploration and development take place the industrial wastes and pollutants plus the water, land and gravel displacement will forever alter and possibly destroy a well-balanced ecological system.

There are over 165,000 caribou in the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Their only calving grounds are on the Arctic Coastal Plain. Right in the heart of the proposed oil and gas development area.

The caribou is a regal, sensitive creature who is easily spooked and disturbed especially during and after calving.

We want to save the Porcupine Caribou Herd because it has sustained us as a distinct cultural group for generations.

When Alaska was bought by the Americans the border between America and Canada divided the

Gwitchin Tribe. The Gwitchin live in northeastern Alaska and northwestern Canada to Fort McPherson. The possibility of losing our life's food has united us after a long separation. We are united in our opposition to oil and gas exploration on the Arctic Coastal Plain and in our support of a wilderness designation for the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

We, as Gwitchin, know that the life of the caribou is our life. We are interdependent.

We, as Neetsali Gwitchin, know that Vashrail K'oo (or Arctic Village) is here because of the migratory routes of the caribou.

We are asking the American people to help us by exercising their right to choose. You have a right to choose and to act upon that choice by writing to your representatives in Congress. Please do this.

If you're 8 years old and can write, please write. If you're 75 years old and saw the woods behind your house turned into high-rise condominiums and city blocks, please write to your congressman and this will help us.

You will be heard.

It's true, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge is far away and remote, but its clean waters and sweet tundra are a truly magnificent sight.

There are over 165 species of birds and mammals on the refuge. Salmon spawning rivers and miles and miles of barren tundra dotted with numerous lakes and ponds. Freshwater fish, white fish, northern pike, lake trout, burbot and grayling. Insect, plant and microbial life-forms abound in this setting.

We as Native Americans have enjoyed the bounty of this land. We are at one with this creation. We are a part of the wilderness.

When Yosemite was declared a national monument by Congress most of us weren't even born. To the ordinary American of the time it was so far away and so remote that it was inaccessible. Yet Yosemite was established as a national monument through the dedicated work, efforts, and vision of a small community of individuals.

The same is true today with the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

At first it was the environmentalist who wanted the wilderness designation. We didn't know anything about it. When finally we were informed of the impending plans to open up this area to oil and gas exploration and development we became alarmed and threatened. Coming from an oral tradition and not knowing how we could influence these decisions, we as the Gwitchin

Tribe gathered in June of this year. We talked and talked and ate and danced and danced. At the conclusion of our week-long gathering we decided to say no. Individually and collectively we came away from Vashrail K'oo saying we will do everything possible to preserve our wilderness intact and especially the Porcupine Caribou Herd.

Yosemite is no longer inaccessible. It is visited each year by thousands of Americans and foreigners alike. It is literally in our midst.

We need the Arctic refuge now and for future generations as a wilderness to ensure the natural survival of many species of animals, birds, and insects.

We need the Porcupine Caribou Herd. The life of the caribou is our life.

We are asking that you take this opportunity to make a choice. The type of choice that your ancestors did not have an opportunity to make.

Help us save a wilderness for all of our children. Write to your representatives in Congress.

Just think, the buffalo have never been forgotten.

Adeline Radoff, whose Gwitchin name is Shahun Gandall, is a spokesperson for the Neetsali Gwitchin of Arctic Village.