

February 16, 2024

The Honorable Thomas McKay
Alaska State House of Representatives
State Capitol
Juneau, AK 99801

Chairman McKay,

The Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS), the North Slope Borough, and Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC) write in strong support of House Joint Resolution 20, *“Urging withdrawal of proposed Bureau of Land Management regulations affecting the National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska; and urging meaningful engagement with tribes, local governments, and the affected communities.”*

There is a unique structure of representation and delivery of services for Alaska Native people. The federal government’s deliberate decision to depart from its historical approach to aboriginal land claims led to the enactment of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). Which in turn led directly and indirectly to the creation of a multitude of Alaska Native organizations to effectively serve the indigenous people of our state.

The ICAS, the Borough, and ASRC are three of over 25 organizations in the North Slope region who serve and represent the eight communities of Atkasuk, Anaktuvuk Pass, Kaktovik, Nuiqsut, Point Hope, Point Lay, Utqiagvik, and Wainwright. Our three organizations routinely collaborate to serve, provide for, and enrich the lives of those we represent, the North Slope Inupiat. As the regional federally recognized tribe, the borough government, and the Alaska Native regional corporation that represent the North Slope Inupiat, our roles are distinct, and we work closely together to protect the cultural and economic interests of our overlapping constituencies.

Established in 1971, ICAS is a federally recognized regional tribal government for the North Slope and represents over 13,000 Inupiat tribal members. The mission of ICAS is to exercise its sovereign rights and powers for the benefit of tribal members, to conserve and retain tribal lands and resources, to establish and carry out justice systems under Inupiat tribal law and custom, and to increase the services provided to tribal members now and for future generations.

ASRC is owned by and represents the business interests of our over 14,000 Inupiaq shareholders, many of whom reside in the eight communities on the North Slope. Mandated by Congress to both operate as a for-profit corporation and provide for the economic, social and cultural welfare of the North Slope Inupiat, ASRC is committed both to providing sound financial returns to our shareholders, in the form of jobs and dividends,

and to preserving our Iñupiaq way of life, culture, and traditions, including the ability to maintain a subsistence lifestyle to provide for our communities. ASRC regularly invests in initiatives that promote and support education, the preservation of our language, healthy communities, and sustainable local economies.

The North Slope Borough is a home rule government located above the Arctic Circle that represents the roughly 10,000 residents in the eight communities of the region. The Borough's jurisdiction includes the entire National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska (NPR-A) and the villages within it—Nuiqsut, Atkasuk, Utqiagvik and Wainwright. In 1972, the Iñupiat formed the Borough to benefit from oil and gas development on their ancestral homelands. Taxes levied on oil and gas infrastructure have enabled the Borough to invest in public infrastructure and utilities, support education, and provide police, fire, emergency, and other services.

The National Petroleum Reserve – Alaska (NPR-A) encompasses roughly twenty-three million acres within the boundaries of the North Slope and exists as a resource to meet the energy needs of the United States of America. Development projects within the NPR-A not only support our North Slope entities' ability to provide essential services to the residents and communities of our region, but also supports our country in meeting the energy needs of Americans across the nation.

On September 6th, 2023, the Department of the Interior (DOI) Bureau of Land Management (BLM) announced a Proposed Rule for the Management and Protection of the NPR-A. As outlined in House Joint Resolution 20, the BLM proposed rule violates Alaska Native self-determination and imposes significant consequences to our people, our communities, and our culture. In announcing this rule, BLM additionally failed to honor legal obligations to consult with the North Slope Iñupiat on policy proposals affecting their lands and people.

Our region has gone above and beyond to help facilitate honest and open dialogue with DOI and BLM regarding the future of the NPR-A and all our ancestral lands. Immediately after the rule's announcement, ICAS, ASRC, the North Slope Borough, and the VOICE of the Arctic Iñupiat released statements sharing our region's concern and frustration with BLM's lack of consultation and meaningful engagement.

Our local and regional leaders have, on their own time and at their own expense, travelled to Washington D.C. repeatedly to meet with Administration officials, demand answers, and understand the processes by which BLM followed that led the Proposed Rule, and more specifically, whether consultation practices under E.O. 13175 and public meeting notice policies were adhered to. Our requests were continually and consistently met with insincere and ambiguous responses from multiple Administration officials and did not give our leadership any clarity to the questions we sought to have answered.

What little public comment BLM has allowed since this announcement was rushed and scheduled during subsistence activities and local elections, with no honest prior notice or meaningful extensions. Further, it has flown in the face of multiple requests from North

Slope elected leadership to hold meetings with the most opportunity for local involvement and input.

This Administration has made it a stated priority to support robust tribal economies, build infrastructure in Indian Country, consult tribes, and respect their sovereignty. This rule and DOI's actions since its announcement actively contradict this Administration's priorities.

Thus, we strongly support HJR 20, and join the Legislature in opposing this proposed rule and insisting that meaningful engagement and consultation with the elected leadership of the North Slope Iñupiat take place before any action is taken regarding the future of the NPR-A.

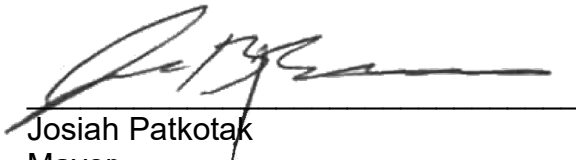
Sincerely,

Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope



Morrie Lemen
Executive Director

NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH



Josiah Patkotak
Mayor

ARCTIC SLOPE REGIONAL CORPORATION



Rex A. Rock Sr.
President and CEO

Cc:

U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski
U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan
U.S. Representative Mary Sattler-Peltola
U.S. Representative Pete Stauber
Alaska Governor Mike Dunleavy