January 5, 2021

Dear President-Elect Biden and Members of Congress:

As faith leaders at the national, state and local level, we are deeply saddened that in its final days the Trump Administration is rushing forward with a lease sale that will not only violate Indigenous rights but decimate sacred land and threaten God’s creation.

We are called not only to care for all of God’s children and to protect God’s creation but to be outspoken leaders for God’s creation. We urge both Congress and the Biden Administration to act with haste and prioritize protection of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, a part of God’s creation that stands alone in its wilderness, ecological integrity, and beauty, from the imminent threat of oil and gas exploration and drilling.

Oil drilling in the Arctic Refuge would significantly compromise the spiritual wellbeing and livelihoods of an indigenous community and compound the devastating and unevenly distributed climate impacts already being felt in the Arctic Refuge and in communities of color across the U.S. To combat these injustices, we should be moving towards efficient energy that produces low levels of pollution, not supporting the extraction of more fossil fuels.

The Gwich’in people, many of whom are Episcopalian, are dependent on the health of the landscape and the Porcupine caribou, which provides them a majority of their food source, to maintain their culture and way of life. The Gwich’in refer to this sacred place, the birthing grounds for the Porcupine Caribou Herd, as “Izhik Gwats’an Gwandaii Goodlit” or “The Sacred Place Where Life Begins.” The faith community's decades long commitment to protecting the Arctic Refuge is inspired by our dedication to defending all of God’s creation, including the fundamental rights of the Gwich’in people.

We have a spiritual duty to protect the Arctic Refuge for both conservation and Indigenous rights. The rush to auction off the Arctic Refuge to the oil industry has resulted in a deeply flawed process and environmental analysis with no meaningful protections for wildlife, Alaska Native cultural values and ways of life, or the area’s iconic wilderness character.

Once oil exploration and drilling begins, this sacred landscape and the communities that rely upon it for survival will be harmed forever. We must demonstrate our commitment to protecting all of God’s creation and living out our call for justice for God’s people by calling a halt on plans to drill and conduct oil exploration in the Arctic Refuge. We have a moral obligation to promote justice, stewardship, and intergenerational responsibility.

Sincerely,

Tammy Alexander
Director of National Advocacy and Program
Mennonite Central Committee U.S.

Shantha Ready Alonso
Executive Director
Creation Justice Ministries
LeeAnne Beres  
Executive Director  
Earth Ministry

Rebecca Linder Blachly  
Director, Office of Government Relations  
The Episcopal Church

Rev. Ken Brooker Langston  
Director  
Disciples Justice Action Network

Rabbi Deborah Ruth Bronstein  
Rabbi Emerita  
Congregation Har HaShem  
Boulder, CO

Bishop Thomas Brown  
Bishop of the Episcopal Diocese of Maine

Andy Burt  
Maine Council of Churches

Marianne Comfort  
Justice Coordinator for Earth, anti-racism and women  
Sisters of Mercy of the Americas Justice Team

Rev. Carol Devine  
Minister, Green Chalice (Disciples)

Rabbi Lynne Goldsmith  
Adventure Judaism  
Boulder, CO

Rabbi Fred Greene  
Congregation Har HaShem  
Boulder, CO

Jane Field  
Executive Director  
Maine Council of Churches

Rev. Susan Henry-Crowe  
General Secretary  
The United Methodist Church—General Board of Church and Society
Liz Lee
Executive for Economic and Environmental Justice
United Methodist Women

Rabbi Andrea London
Beth Emet The Free Synagogue
Evanston, IL

Madison Mayhew, MSW
Justice and Peace Policy Fellow
Justice and Witness Ministries | United Church of Christ

Rabbi Amy L. Memis-Foler
Beth Emet The Free Synagogue
Evanston, IL

Rev. Ted Penton, SJ
Secretary of Justice and Ecology
Jesuit Conference of Canada and the United States

Rabbi Jonah Dov Pesner
Director
Religious Action Center of Reform Judaism

Diane Randall
General Secretary
Friends Committee on National Legislation

The Rev. Mary Kate Rejouis
Rector and Campus Chaplain
St. Aidan’s Episcopal Church
Boulder, CO

Rabbi Jennie Rosenn
Founder & CEO
Dayenu: A Jewish Call to Climate Action

Nigel Savage
President and CEO
Hazon

Stephen Schenck
Executive Director
Franciscan Action Network
Ann Scholz, SSND
Associate Director for Social Mission
Leadership Conference of Women Religious

Martin Shupack
Director of Advocacy
Church World Service

Sister Mary Ann Smith, MM
Social Justice Coordinator, Eastern Region USA
Maryknoll Sisters of St. Dominic

Sandy Sorensen
Director, Washington DC office
United Church of Christ, Justice and Witness Ministries

Rabbi Daniel Swartz
Spiritual Leader, Temple Hesed
Executive Director
Coalition on the Environment and Jewish Life

Rev. Dennis E. Testerman
Stewardship of Creation Enabler, Presbytery of Charlotte
Moderator, Presbyterians for Earth Care

Rabbi Elyse Wechterman
Executive Director
Reconstructionist Rabbinical Association

Melody Zhang
Climate Justice Campaign Coordinator
Sojourners

Rabbi Efrat Zarren-Zohar
Temple Solel
Hollywood, FL

Josh Zinner
CEO
Interfaith Center on Corporate Responsibility