

**Hearing on H.R. 1146**  
**“Arctic Cultural and Coastal Plain Protection**  
**Act”**

**Oral Testimony of Matthew Rexford**  
Native Village of Kaktovik  
Tribal Administrator

Before the  
United States House Committee on Natural Resources  
Subcommittee on Energy and Mineral Resources

**March 26, 2019**



My name is Matthew Rexford. Thank you Chairman Lowenthal and members of the subcommittee for the opportunity to speak to you about HR 1146.

I am Tribal Administrator of the Native Village of Kaktovik, a federally recognized tribe. I am here to tell you that I exist! We exist! The 200 plus residents of Kaktovik, my uncle Fenton here today, we all exist!

Collectively, we are the Kaktovikmiut, residents of the only village within the so-called 1002 Area, and the only community within the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. HR 1146 is a continuation of the pattern of injustice we have experienced since the formation of ANWR under ANILCA, in that it erases our 11,000 years of existence on our land.

You speak about human rights. Certainly, our human rights need to be acknowledged in any legislation that would undo the self-determination and opportunities my uncle, current and past leaders in Kaktovik have worked to secure. You say you are concerned about Arctic culture. You've ignored **our** culture! You completely disregarded us.

The North Slope has the highest per capita harvest of subsistence food in Alaska. These resources are ours and we will protect them. Our local and state government already protects our cultural sites and keeps a robust inventory of traditional land use sites, cultural sites, and burial grounds that have been, and continue to be, protected from any development.

This bill gives the false perception these lands are "wilderness," when they **are not** and never have been. We follow in the footsteps of our ancestors

who have traversed these lands for thousands of years. The entire coastal plain of this Refuge has been continuously inhabited and used by the Iñupiaq. The Western definition of Wilderness, to us, implies desolation, a land without people.

You are concerned about the caribou. Here is what the Kaktovikmiut know to be true: The Porcupine Caribou Herd's migration changes every year. In the last 10-15 years, we have seen their migration change to the far southeastern portion of the coastal plain and into Canada. Scientific data collected by federal and state scientists supports our Traditional Knowledge. According to data presented in the Arctic Refuge CCP, the entire coastal plain makes up a mere 17% of the entire Porcupine calving area.

You are concerned about polar bears. So are we. When polar bears were listed as threatened, the U.S. was mandated to study the health of the bear population, the Service conducted an unprecedented and highly invasive study. Their study took place at sensitive times of the year, when bears were emerging from their dens and when they were denning. We observed bears with collars so tight their fur had rubbed off and their necks gangrened. I believe the continued invasive studies of the Service, through their contractors – the authorized bear harassers – caused more harm to the polar bears than anything else they face.

You seem to be concerned about climate change. We are on the front lines of it. We experience longer ice-free seasons, melting permafrost, and more coastal erosion, among other things. We bear this burden though we

contribute minimally to climate change. This 9,000-mile round trip will be my largest carbon emission this year.

Potential development could increase emissions by an average of 44 thousand metric tons per year. For perspective, the 53 Representatives from California produce over 200,000 metric tons of CO2 travelling between D.C. and California every year, orders of magnitude greater.

Kaktovik is asking for a chance to see what gifts God has bestowed upon our land. The same chance that the Gwich'in people asked for two decades ago.

It's easy for you to take ANWR off the table, but remember it's our table.

It checks many boxes for your constituents. It certainly checks the public perception box that environmental corporations and the outdoor industry have spent billions of dollars to create and perpetuate. None of which makes it in to our community.

In the Arctic, science is political. We know these lands and wildlife better than any scientist, agency, guide, eco-tourist, or lawmaker. If you have concerns, ask the experts – **US**. We already had this conversation – 50 years ago when discoveries were made in Prudhoe. We were told the caribou would be decimated, our lands ruined, our subsistence and culture wiped out. None of that happened.

The Central Arctic Herd, which calves near Prudhoe, had a 14-fold increase from when development began to their peak in 2008. We Iñupiat

have a dual economic system – a cash economy and a robust subsistence economy – which are interwoven and interdependent, through which our culture adapts and perpetuates itself.

We will **NOT** become conservation refugees. We do **NOT** approve of your efforts to turn our homeland into one giant national park to benefit the environmental corporations at **our** expense. This literally guarantees us a fate of no economy, no jobs, reduced subsistence, and no hope for the future of our people.

We, as Iñupiat people, have every right to pursue economic, social, and cultural self-determination. The laws of the U.S. should support Indigenous populations, not interfere with these basic human rights.

I submit this testimony for the record and a letter from the Voice of the Arctic Iñupiat.

**[END]**

Rationale for 200,000 metric tons:

It is 2,442 miles as the crow flies from Washington DC to San Francisco. According to the Emission Inventory Guidebook, a Boeing 737 aircraft produces 11 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> for a 575 mile flight; about a quarter of the total distance to California. One Representative from California traveling one way produces almost 50 tons of CO<sub>2</sub>. The Congressional Management Foundation states that the typical House member returns to their district 40 or more times a year. 100 tons of CO<sub>2</sub> round trip X 40 trips per year X 53 California Representatives = about 212,000 metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> per year.

Caribou Data:

Found in Central Arctic Herd News Winter 2016-2017

Population less than 5,000 in the 1970's, 70,000 caribou in 2008