

Big Oil Willow Project in Alaska. ConocoPhillips Fossil Fuel Extraction. Devastating Impacts on Wildlife and the Environment

Federal Judge Allows Massive Willow Oil Project Construction to Proceed in Western Arctic

By [Center For Biological Diversity](#)

Global Research, April 19, 2023

[Center for Biological Diversity](#) 3 April 2023

Region: [USA](#)

Theme: [Environment](#), [Oil and Energy](#)

All Global Research articles can be read in 51 languages by activating the Translate Website button below the author's name.

To receive Global Research's Daily Newsletter (selected articles), [click here](#).

Click the share button above to email/forward this article to your friends and colleagues. Follow us on [Instagram](#) and [Twitter](#) and subscribe to our [Telegram Channel](#). Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

A federal judge today ruled in favor of oil giant ConocoPhillips by [denying a motion](#) for preliminary injunction brought by environmental groups as part of a [lawsuit](#) challenging the Willow project in Alaska's Western Arctic. The ruling allows construction activities planned for the remaining three weeks of the construction season, including constructing roads and a gravel mine as a first step toward developing a massive oil-extraction operation.

The road construction and gravel mining plans are slated for high-density caribou winter habitat, which will disturb the herd and affect hunters in the area. The request was part of a [lawsuit](#) filed last month by Earthjustice on behalf of Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of the Earth, and Greenpeace USA, and by the Center for Biological Diversity and Natural Resources Defense Council.

In the lawsuit, the environmental groups said the Interior Department's March 13 approval of the Willow project was unlawful because it failed to consider reasonable alternatives, such as limiting the project's harm to the climate and the most environmentally sensitive areas in the Western Arctic. The Interior Department also failed to adequately consider the greenhouse gas emissions from future fossil fuel extraction that the project would make possible.

This project is the beginning of widespread fossil fuel extraction that ConocoPhillips has planned for the region, which could contain up to 3 billion barrels of oil in addition to the 600 million barrels in the Willow project area. Willow alone is expected to produce 260 million metric tons of greenhouse gas emissions over 30 years.

The groups issued the following statements in response to today's ruling:

"It's heartbreaking that ConocoPhillips has been allowed to break ground on Willow before the court has fully assessed whether the project is lawful," said Kristen Monsell, a senior attorney at the Center for Biological Diversity. "But this case isn't over, and we'll keep fighting to protect struggling Arctic wildlife and our climate from this disastrous project. We're hopeful we'll get the Willow project's approval thrown out once again."

"Although the White House and Department of Interior were not persuaded to stop Willow despite the advocacy of more than 5 million individuals, we are now using the power of the law to restore some balance. While this particular round of the legal challenge did not produce the outcome we had hoped for, our court battle continues," said Erik Grafe, deputy managing attorney in Earthjustice's Alaska Regional Office. "We will do everything within our power to protect the climate, wildlife, and people from this dangerous carbon bomb. Climate scientists have warned that we have less than seven years to get it right on climate change, and we cannot afford to lock in three decades of oil drilling that will only serve to open the door to more fossil-fuel extraction."

"Today's decision is a disappointment, but we remain undeterred," said Nicole Whittington-Evans, Defenders of Wildlife's Alaska Program director. "We remain committed to protecting the western Arctic and look forward to the court's full consideration of the Willow project, including its impacts to polar bears threatened with extinction and massive carbon emissions that will worsen the climate crisis for decades to come."

"We are disappointed that the court decided to allow development of this dangerous carbon bomb while our litigation plays out," said Hallie Templeton, legal director for Friends of the Earth. "However, the fight has just begun. We are confident in our claims that the administration failed to fully assess the range of environmental, social and economic damages that Willow will have. From harming local caribou herds and subsistence communities to fueling the climate crisis, the federal government must revisit its decision to greenlight this disastrous project."



Teshkepkuk Caribou, Northeast National Petroleum Reserve in Alaska. Photo by Bob Wick (BLM) [Image is available for media use.](#)

“Allowing ConocoPhillips to bulldoze forward with construction of the largest oil and gas project on public lands before the lawsuits are settled is needlessly destructive,” said Natalie Mebane, climate campaign director at Greenpeace USA. “As the largest historical emitter of greenhouse gas emissions, the U.S. cannot afford Willow or any new oil and gas projects if we’re going to avoid the worst impacts of the climate crisis. New projects will take years if not decades to complete. They do nothing to meet current energy needs. It will only deepen our dependence on expensive fossil fuels while destroying our climate, harming our health, and polluting communities.”

“Willow is a climate bomb that would lock in decades more dependence on fossil fuels, at the very time we need to shift to cleaner energy options,” said Ann Alexander, a senior attorney at Natural Resources Defense Council. “It would do irreparable harm to irreplaceable resources. It has no place in our energy future. Its approval was unlawful. We look forward to making that case before the Court.”

*

Note to readers: Please click the share button above. Follow us on Instagram and Twitter and subscribe to our Telegram Channel. Feel free to repost and share widely Global Research articles.

Featured image: Caribou graze on the coastal plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge in Alaska. (Photo: USFWS/Flickr cc)

The original source of this article is [Center for Biological Diversity](#)

Copyright © [Center For Biological Diversity](#), [Center for Biological Diversity](#), 2023

[Comment on Global Research Articles on our Facebook page](#)

[Become a Member of Global Research](#)

Articles by: [Center For
Biological Diversity](#)

Disclaimer: The contents of this article are of sole responsibility of the author(s). The Centre for Research on Globalization will not be responsible for any inaccurate or incorrect statement in this article. The Centre of Research on Globalization grants permission to cross-post Global Research articles on community internet sites as long the source and copyright are acknowledged together with a hyperlink to the original Global Research article. For publication of Global Research articles in print or other forms including commercial internet sites, contact: publications@globalresearch.ca

www.globalresearch.ca contains copyrighted material the use of which has not always been specifically authorized by the copyright owner. We are making such material available to our readers under the provisions of "fair use" in an effort to advance a better understanding of political, economic and social issues. The material on this site is distributed without profit to those who have expressed a prior interest in receiving it for research and educational purposes. If you wish to use copyrighted material for purposes other than "fair use" you must request permission from the copyright owner.

For media inquiries: publications@globalresearch.ca