

## The Willow Project's Impact on America

Wild rivers cascade over stone, lush green trees hide the beasts that roam below, the chorus of birds praising a pristine haven, and the deafening sound of drilling straight into Earth's heart. This is the future scene of Alaska – one of our nation's last untouched landscapes. The Willow Project, proposed by the oil company ConocoPhillips, is a plan to drill for oil on Alaska's North Slope. The Willow Project had been underway for around 30 years and was first approved by the Trump administration in 2020. March 13, 2023, ConocoPhillips finally got permission from the Biden administration to commence the Willow Project. The Project will chug out over 180,000 barrels a day once up and running – but not without a steep price: 9.2 million metric tons of carbon dioxide produced per year. As the Willow Project garners attention, America and its government face a turbulent conflict that is far from being resolved.

Carbon Dioxide is the largest contributor to global warming. During the process of oil drilling, millions of tons of carbon dioxide escape into our atmosphere. Over 30 years, the oil drills will create a total of 238 million metric tons of carbon dioxide, the Bureau of Land Management estimates. The absurdly high carbon emissions not only damages Alaska but Earth as a whole. The effects will persist for generations. "This is a huge climate threat and inconsistent with this administration's (Biden administration) promises to take on the climate crisis," says Jeremy Lieb. Lieb is an Alaska-based senior attorney for Earthjustice – an environmental activist group. Many other organizations have also acknowledged the dire effects of carbon emissions. "The carbon pollution it will spew into the air will have devastating effects on our communities, wildlife, and the climate," says Sierra Club president Ben Jealous.

Alaska Natives living near the site are concerned about how the Willow Project will affect them. "While out-of-state executives take in record profits, residents are left to contend with the detrimental impacts of being surrounded by massive drilling operations," says Sonny Ahk, a young Inupiat activist. As one of the closest villages, the Inupiat will witness firsthand the turmoil caused by drilling and human activity. The pure Alaskan environment they grew up in will be permanently destroyed. Countless animals will be jeopardized too. Caribou, for instance, would have their migration patterns disrupted.

While the Willow Project will harm the environment, the large-scale project will bring opportunity to a job-barren Alaska. Ryan Lance, the CEO of ConocoPhillips, has said ConocoPhillips will create Union jobs and provide jobs to Natives. "This was the right decision for Alaska and our nation," Lance says. The Willow Project will create around 2800 jobs – 300 of which are permanent. This will bring income into many homes to relieve Alaska's fragile economy. The Coalition of Alaska Natives group on the North Slope says the money and revenue will go to things such as education and healthcare. All these actions will improve the lives of locals. "Willow presents an opportunity to continue that investment in the communities," Nargruk Harcharek, president of the advocacy group Voice of the Arctic Inupiat said.

Earthjustice is soon expected to file a complaint on the "carbon bomb" project (as dubbed by Greenpeace). Earthjustice claims that the Biden administration's authority to protect surface resources on Alaska's public lands includes reducing carbon emissions. Biden vowed in his campaign to end new oil and gas drilling on public lands and water; a promise he is not consistent with. They hope to persuade Biden into issuing an injunction against the Willow Project. Such an act will halt any progress for at least a few years.

The U.S. Government's Interior Department announced new protection for the Arctic as an olive branch to environmentalists. The government will block 2.8 million acres in Alaska from oil and gas development and proposed protection for another 13 million acres. Many environmentalists are not yet satiated. Willow Project activism has taken to TikTok to spread the word. As a result, over one million letters have been sent to the Biden administration. 2.8 million signatures have been collected on Change.org. It is evident that in the coming weeks, America will decide which is superior: our economy, or our globe.

Sources:

\*Date accessed for all of them pretty much is March 25

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