

Public comments on the Willow Draft Environmental Impact Statement

What's happening?

In August 2021, an Alaska federal court invalidated ConocoPhillips' permit to develop the Willow oil and gas project because the Bureau of Land Management's (BLM) Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) didn't consider the impacts of the plan sufficiently. The Willow plan calls for an operations pad, up to five drill pads with up to fifty wells on each pad, an extensive permanent gravel road system that will connect back to Alpine and the Greater Moose's Tooth drilling pads, hundreds of miles of water-intensive ice roads, 1-2 airstrips, hundreds of miles of pipelines, a gravel mine, and a new Central Processing Facility. To address the problems identified by the court and other concerns, the BLM released a draft supplemental EIS for the Willow project on July 15th that they have said will include an analysis of foreign greenhouse gas emissions and analysis of additional alternatives for the project's design. Following its release — July 15, 2022 — there will be a 45-day comment period ending August 29, 2022. Additionally, there will be virtual and in-person communities meetings scheduled for:

- Monday, August 22, 2022: In person public meeting in Utqiagvik at the Inupiat Heritage Center. Open house will begin at 6 pm, followed by a presentation at 6:30 pm.
- Wednesday, August 24, 2022: Virtual meeting at 2 pm. Register in advance: <https://bit.ly/3QFZbKU>

What is the purpose of the EIS and public comment period?



The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is designed to ensure that the public (including Alaska Native Tribes, organizations, corporations, individuals and affected communities) has informed access and **input** into federal agency decisions that could affect them or the environment. An EIS is supposed to be a comprehensive document analyzing the impacts of a federal decision — e.g. the impacts of the Willow project — and ways to reduce those impacts. The government is also required to engage in formal government-to-government consultation.

The purpose of the EIS process is for the BLM to consider and disclose the impacts of the Willow project before deciding whether to permit the new development plan, what alternative or project design should be adopted, and what types of mitigation measures should be required. BLM must consider public input in making its decision.

Why do we need your voice?

The government is required to consider the information that commenters provide. This information could help the government better understand the impacts of the Willow Development and help improve the decisions BLM makes about Willow. The most impactful input often comes from local community members. The government is also required by law to respond to comments. The process can encourage the government to better explain the reasoning for its decisions and to come up with measures to reduce the impacts of a project.

Does my view about whether the project should be permitted matter?

Yes! Your voice is important. A strong showing of interest and concern by people in and outside the region can influence the administration's decision and the ultimate outcome. Other projects which once seemed inevitable did not go forward based on public pressure and legal challenges, like Shell offshore drilling and the Keystone pipeline. It is important to hear from a variety of perspectives and particularly from people who live in the area who would be impacted by Willow.

What should I comment on?

People who live in the region have direct experience and knowledge of the impacts of oil and gas activity, including its effects on subsistence, the animals, tundra, water, and air, and on the mental and physical wellbeing of the community. It is important to hear from community members but also from the wider audience we are trying to involve. Some examples of input people can provide:

- ConocoPhillips should not be allowed to develop this project. It would add over 287 million metric tons of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere—equivalent to the annual carbon emissions of 76 coal plants. In Arctic Alaska, where the Willow project would be built, the climate has already warmed four times faster than in other parts of the world, leading to catastrophic wildfires, melting sea ice, and rising sea levels causing coastal communities to relocate inland to higher ground.
- Willow will affect the Teshekpuk Lake Caribou Herd and/or the ability for people to hunt for caribou and other subsistence harvesting activities.
- BLM needs to mitigate impacts to public health, climate, subsistence, and wildlife.
- What other impacts should the government consider when analyzing Willow?

