

April 24, 2020

Racheal Jones
Willow EIS Project Manager
Bureau of Land Management

Via email: rajones@blm.gov, BLM_AK_Willow_Comments@blm.gov

Dear Ms. Jones,

I am a lifelong resident of Nuiqsut, and I write to echo the requests of so many others that the BLM hearings on Willow be suspended immediately. **These hearings should NOT be happening right now.** It is unconscionable to hold the public comment period in the middle of a global health crisis that is especially dangerous to the very communities that will be most affected by Willow. We are all focused 110 percent on the health of our families and communities and should not have to think about a massive project like Willow right now.

The format of the meetings is also inappropriate. Holding public meetings through Zoom does not foster public participation for remote areas in Alaska where technology, including internet, is unreliable and often inaccessible to many people, especially our Elders. Even BLM has had technical difficulties and its own staff has gotten cut off. Worse, BLM is using the technology to censor commenters by muting them.

I was very frustrated and saddened when I participated in the Nuiqsut public meeting yesterday. I and other commenters asked BLM to suspend the comment period. We told BLM that because of the pandemic and stay-at-home orders we have not been able to talk to people in our community about the Willow project. We told BLM that many people who wanted to comment could not because they did not have the proper technology. I myself was muted after my initial comment, and they would not unmute me. In another meeting I attended, a commenter was muted because BLM did not like his passionate language.

These meetings are not only illegitimate; they are adding a heavy burden of stress and anxiety in a time when Alaska communities like Nuiqsut are already emotionally and practically overburdened trying to prevent the pandemic from destroying our community.

BLM must suspend this illegitimate comment period. It is harming me and my community.

Sincerely,

Martha Itta
Nuiqsut, Alaska

Cc: ann_robertson@murkowski.senate.gov