

# Blue Goose Alliance Bulletin

#65 – April 11, 2010

## Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge Final EIS

### Decision on Doyon Land Exchange

What follows is an op-ed from the Fairbanks Daily News-Miner written by a Gwich'in chief about the decision in the FWS final EIS regarding the Doyon Land Exchange at Yukon Flats NWR. It means that the Regional Director made the correct decision, and the Natives in all the villages within the refuge know that it will be better for their lives and what is important to them in the long run.

The BGA participated with a coalition of organizations that fought against the ill-considered land exchange that would have facilitated oil and gas exploration and possible development within the refuge. Water resources would have been severely threatened; fish and wildlife habitats degraded; roads, pipelines, communication lines, gravel pads and equipment yards would have required enormous amounts of gravel and used enormous quantities of water; resulting use of the roads would have further degraded habitats and wildlife populations; etc., etc. The coalition went directly to the village level with the message and information that the exchange would cause major destruction, and magnify the effects of the climate changes already being experienced in the Flats. That message resonated, as you can see from the op-ed below.

This is a major victory for the BGA in fighting for the integrity of the NWRs within the System, and thereby for achievement of the System's purpose as expressed in its Organic Act.

### Fairbanks Daily News-Miner

March 21, 2010

#### “Choose subsistence before oil”

by Michael Peter, Fort Yukon

Community Perspective

We commend the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service for listening to public and tribal concerns by preferring the "No Land Exchange" alternative in its final Environmental Impact Statement, released last week, on the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge Proposed Land Exchange.

We are glad they took our concerns seriously because we are trying to protect our way of life and traditions. Our tribe opposes the land trade with Doyon Ltd., which would facilitate oil and gas exploration and development in the Yukon Flats. Clean waterways like Beaver Creek and the Yukon River are what sustain us. It is not worth the risk of oil spills and harm to the water, land and animals, which would negatively impact our health and well-being since the Yukon Flats Wildlife Refuge is the primary subsistence use area that Gwich'in depend on for hunting, fishing and our way of life.

Global climate change is at our front door, already changing our land. There must be better alternatives to sustain our communities with renewable energy resources. Gwich'in hunters, elders and gatherers observe effects of global warming. Observations include increased forest fires and drying lakes. Salmon migrations and health are changing, and fewer birds are singing. There is rapid variability in weather. Oil development would add more greenhouse gas pollution and perpetuate negative impacts of global warming in the Yukon Flats.

The Fish and Wildlife Service preference for no land exchange in the final EIS is a good first step towards a better partnership between our tribe and refuge management. The vast majority of more than 100,000 public comments submitted to the agency had opposed the controversial land swap and subsequent oil development. This included the majority of testimony provided in public hearings from many tribal governments.

Our tribal members in Fort Yukon and dozens of Alaska Native communities depend on the rich watershed of the Yukon Flats basin and river area for salmon. Oil and gas development can severely affect everyone who depends on the Yukon River for water, subsistence and commercial ventures, especially many generations to come.

The Fish and Wildlife Service acknowledged many of our concerns, including lack of hydrological information in the flats. Oil and gas development would result in habitat fragmentation affecting bears, moose, wolves and wolverine and would affect fisheries and river habitats, including the Beaver Creek National Wild and Scenic River. The final EIS said there would be additive effects to the refuge from oil and gas development combined with global climate change: "The proposed land exchange could magnify projected changes to refuge resources from climate change," and "water withdrawals, increased access and infrastructure associated with oil and gas development could exacerbate climate change effects on refuge resources."

Will Doyon Ltd. adhere to concerns of the Gwich'in, too? In Doyon's mission it states, "To strengthen our Native way of life and protect and enhance our land and resources." Trading and selling our land for oil and gas development will destroy what Doyon's mission statement - formed by the shareholders, to guide Doyon in their business ventures - says it wants to protect. Proposed oil and gas development, which Doyon now promotes within corporation lands, also is creating harm to the unity of the Gwich'in. This plan and the implications of it create division not only in our communities but even families. Is this the intent of Doyon? How is this beneficial to Gwich'in, if we become fractured and divided? We've been very vocal in our opposition - yet Doyon moves forward trying to convince our people by making promises of economic benefits,

which in the end will be only short-term. The only beneficiaries of this development will be the multinational oil companies, as Gwich'in bear the brunt of all the negative impacts. This is not right.

Doyon should promote economic development that upholds and respects our way of life, which would be respectful of Gwich'in people in the communities. To address our economic needs in our villages, we could have clean renewable energy, instead of Doyon's back-door approach of unsustainable development in our traditional homelands.

If you look at oil and gas development, the roads and pipelines into the Yukon Flats would only destroy our traditional way of life and the renewable resources that support that way of life. Once the oil is gone, we will be left with a big mess and polluted ecosystem. Our subsistence resources will be undermined; what then? Doyon can find other economic opportunities without destroying the land that is fundamental to our traditions, culture and subsistence way of life. Let's look seriously at renewable energy options.

Michael Peter is first chief of the Gwichyaa Zhee Gwich'in Tribal Government in Fort Yukon.

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EVERY DAY!**