



## *3500 years of stewardship in the Copper River Delta...*

P.O. Box 460, Cordova, AK 99574 phone: 907.424.5890 fax:907.424.5891 [www.redzone.org](http://www.redzone.org) [eyak@redzone.org](mailto:eyak@redzone.org)

**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**  
**March 8, 2005**

**CONTACT:**  
**Dune Lankard 907 952 5265 (c)**  
**Jennifer Gibbins 907 424 5890 (o)**  
[eyak@redzone.org](mailto:eyak@redzone.org)

**Connected by two ends of the Trans-Alaska pipeline, Eyak People remain united in solidarity with the Gwich'in Nation to stop oil drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.**

*Message to Congress: You cannot compensate someone for taking what is sacred to them. You must protect the inherent rights of Indigenous people over corporate and political interests.*

Statement by Dune Lankard  
Eyak Native and Fisherman, Prince William Sound, Alaska

Cordova, Alaska (March 8, 2005) – We will hold you accountable. This is a human rights issue. Congress has a trust responsibility and moral obligation to protect traditional Native lands and culture from an industry that has repeatedly failed to live up to its own promises of environmental and human safety.

At this southern end of the pipeline, sixteen years after the Exxon Valdez oil spill, Exxon still refuses to settle with the commercial fishermen, Natives and the spillzone communities of Prince William Sound for environmental and economic devastation resulting from the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill. So, I ask the politicians that went to Alaska last week, have you done your homework? Are you aware that new science indicates that oil is 1000x more toxic than previously understood or than current law reflects?

I ask you, how we can trust or believe a Republican state Senate that only last week blocked any mention of the Gwich'in people in a resolution on drilling in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge?

Is the Bush administration listening? The Gwich'in people call this area the "Sacred Place Where Life Begins" -- *sacred*. You cannot compensate someone for taking or destroying what is sacred to them. The culture and lands of Indigenous people should be respected and valued as something more than collateral.

Not only do you propose to drill in an area that is sacred, but it is critical habitat for the Gwich'in's primary food source. This cannot be overemphasized: their primary food source. I ask Americans across the country, who depend on their local grocery store as their primary food source, what would you do, how would you live if tomorrow the shelves were empty, never to be refilled? The Arctic Refuge is where the Porcupine Caribou herd calves and nurse their young, and it is a safe haven for the caribou from predators. Caribou are the cornerstone to an intact living way of life for the Gwich'in people, just like the wild salmon runs are crucial to our people's survival. Listen to the Gwich'in people, both in Alaska and Canada; they are united against this destructive and wasteful oil development proposal in their ancestral homelands.

It was proven throughout history that industry and government makes promises they know they cannot keep. They don't know how to clean up oil spills in the water, or on beaches, and even less about how to clean up oil on ice. It is not possible to compensate someone for taking what is sacred to them. In Prince William Sound, where economic losses have real numbers, Exxon has no intention of compensating us unless forced to do so. Why isn't our government and Alaska delegation demanding that Exxon to settle up with over 30,000 plaintiffs in the Exxon spillzone?"

At this end of the pipeline, the residents of Prince William Sound are still waiting for Exxon to deliver on promises it made 16 years ago when they said, "they would make our lives whole again." Pay up on the 1994 judgment, which now totals approximately \$6.5 billion including interest, for the oil disaster that dumped over 30 millions gallons of crude oil into once pristine waters of Prince William Sound. Right now, this very minute, oil pools up just three inches below the surface on spillzone beaches and is leaching into our food chain. The herring fishery has never returned, resulting in an estimated economic loss of \$50 million annually to Cordova alone. Marriages have ended, families have moved away and countless spill workers are dealing with chronic and even fatal health issues. Our ecosystem and our people are still suffering. Yet the largest most profitable corporation in the world, Exxon, and the state and federal government deny this. And the industry says again, "trust us with the Arctic Refuge." The government and energy companies have sacrificed and allowed the destruction of our homelands for too long. It is time to protect the human rights of Alaska's Indigenous people– once and for all.