

# UNEP

United Nations Environment Programme

STOP THE WILLOW OIL PROJECT



**Committee:** UNEP

**Topic:** Addressing the Willow Project's Impact on the Environment

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Hello delegates, welcome to the UNEP Committee of the SPISMUN 2024. We are pleased to have you on this significant journey with us and welcome you. We expect delegates to research, work as a committee, propose, and look forward to solutions that would help you learn and grow in your daily life. We wish you all luck and success and can't wait to meet you, we hope you have an excellent conference and experience.

Please feel free to ask any questions or commentaries. We hope you have an excellent experience and we are anxious to meet you all delegates!

If you have any questions, feel free to contact us at:

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Sincerely, Regina López.

## **I. COMMITTEE BACKGROUND**

The United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) was created in 1972 it was the highest level decision for the environment problems counting with 193 member states. The objectives of UNEA are to build a worldwide environmental law and set priorities for global environmental strategies and international law. The Environmental Programme represents an innovative era where the environment occupies the top worldwide concern and is placed with essential topics like peace, poverty, health, and security. They respond to address emergencies or environmental challenges. It also sets directions for the future environment and future strategies.

## **II. HISTORY OF THE TOPIC**

The willow project was started by ConocoPhillips, the original purpose of this project was to construct and operate five drill pads but in the Department of the Interior's approval statement, it came out with a 40% reduction to the initial



size for denying two of the five extraction sites, so they decide to make a total of 250 oil wells, with that they will extract 600 millions of barrels of oil in the Alaska National Petroleum Reserve for 30 years in what is considered one of the richest biodiversity hotspots and one of the least explored areas of the United States, looking forward to improve its economy by having more economic entrance through oil, and reduce the United States dependence on foreign oil.

This project will have an approximate cost of 8 billion dollars. They will start to recover investment by 2030 being one of the biggest projects

that have been done and also being approved by the current United States president Joe Biden. The willow project since it was announced started to be a controversial project because of the environmental impact this project can cause.

### **III. CURRENT ISSUES**

The Willow project would mainly have an impact on the USA but other countries would also be affected:

**United States** - In a fully developed country like the USA taking in mind that the Willow project in their own country so would have more consequences, like willow cultivation for bioenergy might compete with traditional agriculture or forested areas. Clearing land for willow plantations could lead to deforestation or loss of biodiversity in certain regions as well as pollution and climate change.

**India** - In areas of India experiencing water scarcity, widespread cultivation of willow could impose additional pressure on local water reservoirs. Should willow cultivation demand substantial water resources and the region already faces challenges with water availability for agricultural needs and community use, this initiative may worsen the situation, intensifying water scarcity for both human populations and ecological systems.

**South Sudan** - In South Sudan, a country with an underdeveloped status, there could exist constraints in environmental regulations and infrastructure. If extensive willow cultivation occurs without sustainable management practices, it may result in land



degradation, adversely impacting the livelihoods of local communities dependent on the land for subsistence farming and grazing. Additionally, deficient waste management systems might cause improper disposal of byproducts or waste generated during the cultivation process, potentially affecting the quality of nearby water bodies and soil.

## General Problems

**Pollution:** The United States is the second country in the world that carries pollution, with this project it would have a remarkable increase. It will generate an amount of 9.2 million metric tons of carbon pollutants released annually, which would be approximately 260 million metric tons of CO<sub>2</sub> emissions in the next 30 years.

- *Water:* The water pollution caused by the Willow project would lead to significant damage, primarily by encroaching upon 1.21 million hectares of the Atlantic Ocean. Environmental groups argue that this would disrupt the migratory patterns of marine animals due to pollution, thereby affecting the marine ecosystems. Additionally, the project's impact would extend to polluting the waters.
- *Soil:* The Willow project would have an impact on the soil, which would be a very negative thing for the local plants, animals, and how people use the land. All that building stuff they're gonna do might mess with how good the soil is for plants and wildlife, messing up whole ecosystems. Plus, if they use chemicals, it could make things even worse, hurting people living nearby and wrecking plants and animals. Taking away the plants could make the soil fall apart more



easily, messing up farming and how stable everything is. This bad stuff hurts nature and the money side of things shows we gotta stop it before it gets worse.

- *Air:* Air pollution has a detrimental impact on human health, leading to respiratory problems, cardiovascular diseases, lung cancer, and strokes, among other issues. Additionally, it significantly affects the environment by causing harm to ecosystems, vegetation, bodies of water, and wildlife. Moreover, it contributes to climate change and has adverse economic implications.

**Climate change:** This particular project poses a significant threat in terms of exacerbating climate change. Should it exceed the critical 1.5-degree temperature increase threshold, we are poised to witness severe repercussions. These consequences include the onset of extreme heatwaves, rising sea levels, and an escalation in daily mortality rates. This potential scenario could indeed be catastrophic for the forthcoming century. Notably, this project accounts for over 75% of carbon emissions contributing to the alarming global temperature rise. Consequently, this substantial emission output is significantly disrupting our climate equilibrium.

**Ecosystems and animals:** The Alaska National Petroleum Reserve houses endangered polar bears and is vital for the migration routes of animals like



musk oxen, caribou, and numerous bird species. Notably, two caribou herds—the Western Arctic and Teshekpuk Lake herds—depend on this area, supporting indigenous communities in northern and western Alaska with crucial

resources for hunting and fishing.

**Arctic Region:** The Arctic region it's one of the most delicate and vulnerable ecosystems so it's essential to control the world's biodiversity. The construction of gas and oil infrastructure in this necessary region will destroy the habitat of several species and disturb natural processes, all of which pose serious hazards to the environment's delicate equilibrium.

Ignoring all existing environmental problems and being open to generating even more issues, this project promises to produce oil in a cleaner manner than countries like Saudi Arabia or Venezuela. It uses the excuse of creating more job opportunities, but in reality, it threatens to destroy the largest reserves of freshwater and one of the biggest ecosystems for polar bears, an endangered species. The project's operations will emit polluting gasses, decimate the seabed, and cause an enormous global environmental crisis, impacting the Earth's cycle by melting ice zones, and glaciers, and raising temperatures. It will significantly exacerbate global warming, reaching a point where it won't just affect the United States but could potentially endanger the entire world.

The project's proponents argue for its economic benefits, but the devastating environmental consequences it will bring cannot be overlooked. Despite the claims of job creation, the cost to nature and wildlife will be immeasurable. Not only will it harm polar bears and marine life, but it will also disrupt delicate ecosystems that support a myriad of species.



Moreover, the long-term effects of this venture on climate change are deeply concerning. By contributing to the warming of the planet and

further accelerating the melting of ice, this project jeopardizes the stability of the Earth's environment. The resulting rise in sea levels and alteration of weather patterns will have far-reaching repercussions, extending beyond national borders and impacting the global community at large.

#### **IV. UN ACTION AND RESOLUTION**

The United Nations hasn't approved any actions regarding the Willow project. However, the Natural Resources Defense Council has been attempting to take the project to court due to environmental health concerns. Despite their efforts, they haven't been able to achieve much, primarily because the project had already commenced and was approved by the government. Additionally, various environmental organizations have begun seeking alternatives to prevent the significant damages that will result from the Willow project. Over a million letters have been sent to the White House, and more than three million signatures have been gathered on [change.org](https://www.change.org) to cancel this project. Nevertheless, the project persists, disregarding all the environmental issues it would cause.



## **V. Essential Questions**

1. What is the Willow project and how is it gonna work?
2. What effects will the Willow project have on a worldwide basis?
3. What economic effects does the project have?
4. How detrimental will the project be in contrast to its economic output?
5. Is there a way to reduce the environmental impact of the project?
6. What countries are the most affected by the project?
7. Where will the project be developed?
8. Is the project aligned with United Nations environmental guidelines?
9. What business is behind the project and what records does it have related to the environment?
10. Is the project necessary?

## **VI. CONCLUSION**

The Willow Project, proposed for oil extraction in Alaska's National Petroleum Reserve, has sparked global concern due to its potential severe environmental impact. Despite promises of economic benefits and reduced foreign oil dependence, the venture faces intense scrutiny for its detrimental effects on ecosystems, climate equilibrium, and indigenous communities. The project's implications span from soil degradation, water pollution, and disruption of wildlife habitats to substantial carbon emissions, exacerbating air pollution and contributing significantly to climate change. Despite opposition from environmental groups and public appeals, the project persists, raising fundamental questions about balancing economic development with environmental preservation. The absence of significant UN actions highlights the challenge in halting or mitigating its adverse effects, emphasizing the need for stringent

international cooperation and conscientious decision-making to safeguard our planet's ecosystems and climate stability. Failure to address these concerns could result in irreversible damage to the environment and jeopardize the well-being of current and future generations worldwide.



## VII. REFERENCES

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