



**For Immediate Release**

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**STATEMENT: Kawerak, Association of Village Council Presidents, and Bering Sea Elders Group Appreciate Protections for Their Waters from Oil and Gas Leasing**

**January 6, 2025**—*In response to President Biden using his authority under section 12(a) of the Outer Continental Shelf Lands Act (OCSLA) to permanently withdraw areas in the Northern Bering Sea from oil and gas leasing, Kawerak, Association of Village Council Presidents, and Bering Sea Elders Group issued the following statement:*

As Alaska Native Tribal Organizations that serve and advocate for over 70 Tribes and collaborate with communities in Western Alaska and the Bering Sea, we offer our deepest appreciation and gratitude to President Biden for protecting our waters from offshore oil and gas leasing.

The Northern Bering Sea area has been home to our ancestors for thousands of years, and it will be home to our descendants for thousands of years to come. In this remote and threatened part of the world, we strive to live in balance with each other and our environment and the fish, birds, and marine mammals that sustain us. Climate change and growing industrial activities threaten our traditional lands and waters and the resources we have stewarded for generations.

President Biden's action today responds to our longstanding request. Tribes in our regions have opposed offshore oil and gas activities since commercial leasing was first proposed in the early 1980s. For decades we have sought permanent protections from leasing and we are grateful that President Biden has fulfilled our request.

We hope that this action puts to rest any controversy about oil and gas operations in our waters and we look forward to working with our Tribes, state and federal government agencies, and others to advance inclusive and sustainable management in our region.

*"Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) would like to express our sincere gratitude to President Biden's commitment to protecting our food security and marine environment by limiting oil and gas leasing in vulnerable areas. AVCP has opposed offshore oil and gas drilling in the Northern Bering Sea since the early 1980s.*

*President Biden's decision reflects a strong dedication to safeguarding natural resources that are vital to both our economy and ecosystems. His leadership in prioritizing sustainable practices ensures a healthier resilient future for us all. We thank President Biden for his efforts in fostering a balanced approach to energy development and environmental conservation."* **said Vivian Korthuis, AVCP Chief Executive Officer**



*“We thank President Biden for issuing these withdraws and honoring over 40 years of Tribal advocacy to protect our food security and marine environment from oil and gas leasing. Kawerak region Tribes have opposed offshore oil and gas drilling in the Northern Bering Sea since the early 1980s. Tribes are the original stewards of the Northern Bering Sea. We depend on a healthy ocean, and we appreciate President Biden for partnering in this stewardship to protect our waters.”* **said Mary David, Executive Vice President, Kawerak, Inc.**

*“The Bering Sea Elders Group extends our sincere gratitude to President Biden and his commitment to protecting the Northern Bering Sea. Our traditional waters of the Bering Sea are interconnected, and protecting these waters helps ensure our food sovereignty, our cultural, economic, physical and traditional existence, and our very survival.*

*BSEG has long opposed offshore oil and gas drilling in the region. We have stewarded these waters for generations and intend to do so for generations to come. We thank President Biden for his leadership and partnership in protecting these waters and our collective future.”* **said Jaylene Wheeler, BSEG Executive Director**

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*The Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) is a non-profit Tribal consortium dedicated to supporting the interests of our 56 member Tribes of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. AVCP’s mission is to work together with Tribes to enhance sovereignty, self-sufficiency, and our way of life.*

*Kawerak is the Alaska Native non-profit regional Tribal consortium for the 20 federally recognized Tribes of the Bering Strait region of Alaska. Kawerak’s mission is to advance the capacity of our people and Tribes for the benefit of the region.*

*The Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) is a Tribal organization of 38 member Tribes from the Kuskokwim Bay to the Bering Strait. BSEG’s mission is to speak and work together as one voice to protect and respect our traditional ways of life, the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children’s future.*