

PROFILE OF RESISTANCE

BERNADETTE DEMIENTIEFF

executive director

“Take the time to learn to connect. Don’t listen to hear but listen to learn and remember climate change don’t care what color you are; if you are rich or poor.”

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Background Information

Bernadette Demientieff was born into the Gwichyaa Gwich'in, an indigenous group native to the area, and raised in Fort Yukon, Alaska.ⁱ Her family has resided in the area for many generations.ⁱⁱ The community identity is centered around the spiritual and cultural reverence of the land and ecosystem, especially with the porcupine caribou.ⁱⁱⁱ The group's livelihood is threatened with extinction due to oil drilling for an energy source.^{iv} Demientieff and her community struggled with food insecurity and food deserts due to the high prices and lack of close grocery stores.^v Demientieff's environmental activism work has always been the core of her identity and life at an early age.

Demientieff's Resistance

Oil extraction contributes to climate change. Demientieff has observed how it detrimentally impacted the Gwich'in community and coastal cities, which includes experiencing the opening of sinkholes, melting ice into large water bodies, and fires.^{vi} Demientieff joined her community's climate advocacy group, Gwich'in Steering Committee, utilizing her skills as an effective orator to speak up for her community in response to this injustice.^{vii} Her climate activism work includes speaking to government members to end current and future oil drilling to protect the Earth and future generations' livelihoods.^{viii} Above all, her work seeks to ensure that Indigenous People's rights and sovereignty are recognized and respected.^{ix}

Achievements

Demientieff's work revolves around defending the Gwich'in community's lifestyle and culture against fossil drilling. Demientieff had to be firm with values and boundaries to reject the manipulative state and corporation practices, including compensation for the land.^x Her work continues today as she fights to ensure her community's homeland livelihood and Mother Nature are valued and respected.^{xi}

Essential Questions

1. How is the livelihood and ecosystem of the Gwichyaa Gwich'in being threatened?
2. Why is it vital to effectively communicate to your community about an issue that is important to you?
3. ***“Take the time to learn to connect. Don’t listen to hear but listen to learn and remember climate change don’t care what color you are; if you are rich or poor.”***
 - a. How has climate change impacted your life?
 - b. Why is it important to connect and work with people to change this global problem?

ⁱ Giacobbe, Alyssa. “The Fight for the Alaskan Wildlife Refuge.” *GEN* (blog), July 10, 2019. <https://gen.medium.com/bernadette-43-fighting-drilling-in-the-arctic-national-wildlife-refuge-d0dc7069be6e>.

ⁱⁱ Giacobbe, “The Fight for the Alaskan Wildlife Refuge”

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^v Giacobbe, “The Fight for the Alaskan Wildlife Refuge”

^{vi} Giacobbe, “The Fight for the Alaskan Wildlife Refuge”

^{vii} Giacobbe, “The Fight for the Alaskan Wildlife Refuge”

^{viii} November 20, and 2020 | Sarah Ellis | ENVIRONMENT. “The Indigenous Woman Leading the Fight to Save the Arctic Wildlife Refuge - Women’s Media Center.” <https://womensmediacenter.com/fbomb/the-indigenous-woman-leading-the-fight-to-save-the-arctic-wildlife-refuge>.

^{ix} November 20, and 2020. “The Indigenous Woman Leading the Fight to Save the Arctic Wildlife Refuge - Women’s Media Center.”

^x Mongabay Environmental News. “‘Our Identity Is Non Negotiable’ Says Gwich’in Leader Bernadette Demientieff,” March 8, 2021.

<https://news.mongabay.com/2021/03/our-identity-is-non-negotiable-says-gwichin-leader-bernadette-demientieff/>.

^{xi} Giacobbe, “The Fight for the Alaskan Wildlife Refuge”