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January 19, 2012

Senators Joe Paskvan and Tom Wagoner
Co-Chairs, Senate Resources Committee
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: Senate Bill 159, Susitna State Forest

Dear Senators Paskvan and Wagoner:

The Resource Development Council (RDC) is writing to support Senate Bill 159, which would create the Susitna State Forest over 763,200 acres of state land west of the Parks Highway.

RDC is a statewide, non-profit, membership-funded organization founded in 1975. The RDC membership is comprised of individuals and companies from Alaska's oil and gas, mining, timber, tourism, and fisheries industries, as well as Alaska Native corporations, local communities, organized labor, and industry support firms. RDC's purpose is to link these diverse interests together to encourage a strong, diversified private sector in Alaska and expand the state's economic base through the responsible development of our natural resources.

The Alaska Department of Natural Resources currently manages 9.5 million acres of forest land in the Matanuska and Susitna Valleys. Of this land, timber management is allowed on approximately 2.1 million acres. Remaining land is designated for other uses, including land sales, recreation, water resources, and fish and wildlife habitat. Over 3.1 million acres is protected in legislatively-designated state parks, refuges, and public use areas.

The establishment of the Susitna State Forest would ensure that some land would remain available for long-term forest management. It would allow the Division of Forestry to more actively manage lands and vegetation to promote a variety of forest ages, which in turn would maximize the sustainable supply of timber from the state timber base and provide for more diverse and healthy habitats for wildlife. In addition, active management would also help reduce wildfire risk.

The Division of Forestry would manage the state forest for a long-term supply of timber to local processors and retain land in state ownership for other multiple uses. An enhanced long-term timber supply would help support the forest products industry, provide fuel for sustainable biomass energy projects, and create new jobs. It would also benefit the recreational sector as the state intends to develop access to the new state forest and encourage a broad range of multiple uses. These multiple uses, including annual timber harvests, would provide important economic opportunities to local communities, businesses, and residents.

It is important to keep in mind that SB 159 would establish a new state forest from state lands presently designated for forest management. The Susitna State Forest would be managed consistent with the management intent under the current Susitna Matanuska and the Southeast Susitna Area Plans. Alaska's Forest Resources Practices Act would apply to management activities on the forest and is designed to protect both fish habitat and water quality.

If established, the Susitna State Forest would be the fourth state forest in Alaska. RDC supports SB 159 and believes the proposed state forest will be of much benefit to the local economy – creating and sustaining much needed jobs in the forest products industry while providing many other opportunities. We urge the committee to pass SB 159.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Carl Portman".

Carl Portman
Deputy Director

Cc: Senator Linda Menard
Chris Maisch, State Forester