

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

SESSION:
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SENATOR JAMES KAUFMAN

Sponsor Statement for SB 34 – Bill Version 33-LS0250\S

"An Act reestablishing the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas in Alaska; relating to the membership and duties of the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas in Alaska; relating to the authority of the Department of Natural Resources regarding the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas in Alaska; and providing for an effective date."

SB 34 reestablishes the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Management Areas in Alaska (CACFA), which sunset in 2021, and sets a new sunset date of June 30, 2031. The Commission is made up of two legislators and 10 public members who represent a balance of each judicial district. Two different members are required to be enrolled in a federally recognized tribe and a shareholder of an ANCSA Corporation.

CACFA was first established in 1981, shortly after Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA)—comprehensive legislation governing all federal public lands in the state. Under the balanced compromise Congress crafted in ANILCA, 104+ million acres (on top of the ~100 million acres already set aside) were set-aside in permanent federal ownership as conservation system units (e.g., parks, preserves, wildlife refuges, wilderness areas) while at the same time enabling Alaskan's to maintain their traditions, accommodate the social and economic needs of the state, provide a range of land-use and land access rights, safeguard opportunities for responsible resource development, and facilitate continued improvements in transportation and utility infrastructure. The provisions of ANILCA plus those of the Alaska Statehood Act and the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act mean that most Alaskans are regulated under a unique and extremely complex regulatory web.

For the decades that CACFA operated, it was an independent and impartial source of information and center for advocacy on Statehood, ANCSA, and ANILCA issues that impact all Alaskans. CACFA helps Alaskans navigate complex regulations and to works with federal agencies to ensure Congressional intent is implemented with respect to Alaska's interests. Among many things, the Commission holds hearings to collect public comment on decisions that affect them; disseminates information about historical and new regulation to the public, the Executive branch, and the Legislature; monitors the Federal Register and regularly submits written comment in response to actions that affect Alaska; and helps Alaskans navigate federal permitting processes. While the State's ANILCA program and CACFA both monitor federal actions, CACFA is the only entity that represents the views of Alaskan citizens concerning federal land management plans within the state.

The last state audit conducted in 2020 concluded that "there is a continuing public need for the commission." As time passes, institutional memory and ANILCA expertise is lost at both the federal and state level. An active CACFA is critical to ensure that this critical knowledge is preserved, remains accessible to Alaskans, and can be used to defend Alaska. Furthermore, without CACFA, there is no organized center for through which individuals can channel their concerns to the higher levels of government making important land use decisions that impact them. CACFA is an essential tool to ensure that Alaskans have a strong and powerful voice in what happens in our state.