

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE



REPRESENTATIVE LES GARA

HB 144: Sponsor Statement Protecting Public Fishing Stream Access

Alaska's rivers are a treasured resource for fishermen, boaters, hunters, hikers, and people of all walks of life. We need to protect the public's access to them. House Bill 114 aims to ensure future public access to Alaska's fishing streams by putting in place a mechanism for encouraging the Department of Natural Resources to identify areas of public access that are in jeopardy of loss. The program would be facilitated by the Department of Natural Resources and would be completely voluntary. It would not take land away from citizens who do not want to trade for other public land; rather, it would encourage DNR to look for areas to secure needed public access easements.

There are currently large stretches of private land on streams such as the Anchor River, Deep Creek, Parks Highway Streams, the Salcha River and others throughout the state. Today the public uses these streams, and has access to them. Once they're developed, we will never be able to afford to get them back.

Other states have waited too long to take steps like the ones proposed by this bill. In Montana, for example, fishermen have to pay for public access to some rivers. One hundred eighty miles of the Missouri River have lost public access, and that state now budgets \$300,000 per year to buy back parcels of riverbank land.

HB 144 will help ensure that unparalleled recreational opportunities in our vibrant river corridors remain accessible, for our own and for future generations. It provides that the state should take action by providing a plan to the legislature on an annual basis that assess those areas most at risk of loss.