

ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE

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Senator Cathy Giessel Senate District P

Senate Bill 181 Sponsor Statement

“An Act approving an interim classification by the commissioner of natural resources closing certain land within the Glacier Creek and Winner Creek drainages to new mineral entry; amending the mineral entry closure in sec. 2, ch. 8 SLA 2003, for certain land within the Glacier and Winner Creek drainages; and providing for an effective date.”

SB 181 closes presently state-owned and state-selected lands in the Glacier and Winner Creek drainages of the Girdwood area to new mineral entry. For both residents and tourists, the development and expansion of Girdwood’s potential as a year-round destination for myriad recreational activities will lead to more private sector jobs, opportunities for new business, and an enriched community and state.

In January 2011, Department of Natural Resources Commissioner Dan Sullivan, issued an interim classification (Mineral Order 1121) which closed state subsurface lands and state-selected lands to mineral entry within Glacier Creek and Winner Creek drainages in the Girdwood area. SB 181 approves this mineral order and amends sec. 2, ch. 8, SLA 2003, to exclude two federal mining claims that were inadvertently missed within Section 34 in the original legislation.

A Mineral Closing Order was issued in 1992 for this area and became necessary when numerous mining claims were staked at the same time that the federal government was in the process of conveying this land to the State of Alaska. The Municipality of Anchorage purchased the claims so that these lands could be developed for recreational use and to prevent conflict between surface and subsurface users. The Commissioner of the Department of Natural Resources closed this area to mineral entry on state-owned, state-selected, and municipal lands in the Upper Girdwood Valley under Mineral Closing Order 593. The closure had a limit of ten years unless the commissioner certified to the governor and the legislature that recreational land use and development plans had begun in this area. In 2003, the commissioner extended the mineral closing order for another ten-year term through Mineral Closing Order 593 Amendment 3. This extension was set to expire in April of 2012.

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Closing these lands to mineral entry supports the Department of Natural Resources findings that:

- Mining in this area is inconsistent with recreation and tourism development.
- It is important to protect current and future development including: Alyeska Resort, expanding Nordic ski trails, the upgraded Winner Creek Trail system, and commercial snowcat and helicopter skiing activities.
- A mineral closure in this area would be consistent with the Turnagain Arm Management Plan, Alaska Statehood Act, Alaska State law, and various natural resource court decisions.

Alyeska Resort commissioned and paid for a detailed analysis and technical feasibility study. The study concluded that expansion of skier based facilities into the area is feasible. Additionally, community interests in expanding recreational opportunities within the Girdwood Valley have increased significantly in the last decade. SB 181 mitigates future conflict between competing, potentially incompatible, interests.