



Southeast Alaska Conservation Council

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March 24, 2017

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair
Senator John Coghill, vice-Chair
Senate Resources Committee
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska

Dear Senators Giessel and Coghill;

For over 47 years, the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC) has dedicated itself to preserving the integrity of Southeast Alaska's unsurpassed natural environment while providing for balanced, sustainable use of our region's resources. Our members live across Southeast Alaska, from Hydaburg on south Prince of Wales Island to Yakutat in the northeast corner of the Gulf of Alaska. The Tongass National Forest, America's biggest, wettest and wildest National Forest, is a natural treasure of international and national renown. It is also our home and our Native brothers and sisters enjoy an intimate connection to this incredible place that stretches back for millennia.

Since 2007, the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council has worked in good faith to fashion the best possible outcome for a land exchange proposed between the Alaska Mental Health Trust and the Forest Service. The best outcome for this exchange protects the safety and community use areas important to Southeast Alaska communities. Both SB 88 and the bills introduced by the Alaska Delegation in Congress earlier this year accomplish some of these objectives but at the loss of increasingly important old-growth forest habitat from the Tongass National Forest to prop up a shrinking piece of Southeast Alaska's economy.¹

In statements offered by the Trust Land Office at the Senate Resources hearing on SB 88 on March 22, 2017, the Trust revealed its primary purpose for the exchange was not to fulfill its responsibilities to improve the lives of its beneficiaries but to keep the Viking Mill in business. Statements by SB 88's sponsor also reveal that "helping us with the logging industry" is as important an objective for the bill as protecting critical community use areas and providing services to our most disadvantaged Alaskans. We disagree.

For decades, unrelenting global market forces have thwarted politically driven efforts to increase and continue old growth logging on the Tongass National Forest.² The Trust's feeble efforts to reverse the inexorable march of today's economic realities will also fail. We encourage the Trust to seize opportunities to develop new, innovative conservation finance options for Trust lands that yields financial and environmental benefits for Trust beneficiaries and Southeast Alaska communities. Collaboration between the Trust and conservation buyers can create new finance opportunities by using funds such as carbon credits, Land and Water Conservation Funds, wetland mitigation, and other grants.

¹ See [Southeast Conference, Southeast Alaska by the Numbers 2016](#) at 9 (Sept. 2016) ("Since 2010, employment in this industry has been reduced by 24%.").

² See Alaska Dept. of Commerce, [Alaska Economic Trends, Vol. 23, No. 12 \(Dec. 2003\)](#) (global market forces make Tongass timber uncompetitive).

Now is the time for the Trust to [develop long-term conservation revenue sources](#) for mental health beneficiaries aggressively without liquidating valuable old growth fish and wildlife habitat on the Tongass. SEACC supports maximizing returns to trust beneficiaries through non-timber revenue sources, such as selling parcels, easements, or carbon credits to conservation buyers.

For the record, SEACC agrees with Senator Stedman that it is in the public interest for the Trust to exchange the No Name Bay parcel to the Forest Service. Contrary to statements made by the Trust Lands Office at the March 22nd Senate Resources hearing on SB 88, SEACC has never contended that the Alaska Legislature is prohibited from enacting this exchange legislation. Instead, we advised Senator Stedman and Representative Ortiz, the sponsors of SB 88 and HB 155 respectively, that the State of Alaska and the Alaska Department of Natural Resources had irresponsibly breached a legally binding agreement with SEACC and violated Chapter 5, FSSLA 1994 when they conveyed No Name Bay to the Trust Authority in 2012. In 1994, SEACC and the State/DNR agreed to a list of state lands in Southeast Alaska that would be conveyed to the Mental Health Trust for development. In exchange for SEACC's support of the historic settlement of the Weiss litigation, the State committed not to designate No Name Bay as Mental Health Trust land and to classify and manage it for "wildlife habitat purposes." We defer resolution of this matter to the separate, ongoing judicial forum.

Thank you for opportunity to submit testimony on SB 88 and for considering our position.

Best Regards.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Buck Lindekugel", written in a cursive style.

Buck Lindekugel
Grassroots Attorney