

**STATEMENT OF OPPOSITION**  
**TO HB155-THE ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH TRUST LAND EXCHANGE**  
March 27, 2017

Hello House Resources Committee:

I respectfully submit the following testimony on behalf of myself today.

I oppose HB155 on a variety of grounds and believe there is much better alternative which would result in a win/win for the trust beneficiaries, landowners, and affected residents while avoiding landscape level impacts, as outlined below.

1. Support for this legislation and similar legislation before Congress was the direct result of the Trust's tactics which placed local citizens in a Sophie's Choice style position—either support the legislation or have our backyards logged. Notified of the Trust's threat, they were faced with a very close deadline of Jan. 15, 2017 for the legislation to pass Congress—or the Trust would log the lands in question. Worried about their safety from risk of landslides on over-steepened slopes, impacts to their scenic backdrop and related loss of tourism dollars, loss of favorite recreation areas, and water quality, the local citizenry had no option but to support the legislation. This support was absent little consideration of the consequences of shifting AMHT landscape level impacts elsewhere. AMHT's threat was intended to force a stampede of support for the legislation which many regard as a case of extortion.
2. According to an Aug. 17, 2016 email (attached), by the Trust's Paul Slenkamp, the AMHT was, "in final negotiations with Viking Lumber for purchase of all timber on POW associated with this proposed exchange." From my reading of this as well as minutes of the Alaska (government) Board of Forestry (of which one of Alcan's principals is a member) and statements made by him in news stories, as well as AMHT's eagerness to log in the Ketchikan area (e.g. Deer Mountain), suggests that similar negotiations have been made with Alcan. It should be noted that the lands in question were public lands on Aug 18—as they are now. How can the Trust enter into "final negotiations" when they do not even own the land? It appears the public was cut out of any influence regarding this exchange from the beginning and their forced support was only window dressing. A concise clarification about the possible existence of timber sale contracts and the meaning of "final negotiations" is needed before HB155 moves any further. Do contracts exist either in draft or final form, or did they last August with these companies and if so, were/are they dependent on the outcome of the federal legislation?

3. The lands in question would be logged under the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act regulations which are far weaker than federal regulations. FRPA is in dire need of revision. The threatened logging in the communities would ruin cherished viewsheds and, because the slopes are steep, jeopardize residences and domestic and municipal waters supplies. Giving up forestland from the Tongass is equally problematic. Under state law, clearcut size is unlimited, the public process is far weaker, there are no enforceable provisions for wildlife habitat or risks to public safety from landslides. Fish stream no-cut buffers are narrower.
4. There is a much better way—a federal buyout of the Trust Lands which the Trust has repeatedly said it is agreeable to during various community meetings and in the media. Clearly, the federal buyout option would achieve multiple beneficial outcomes by providing revenue to the Trust, protecting the well-being of the communities and their threatened residents, and preventing clearcuts of unrestricted size on 21,000 acres of public forest on Revilla, Gravina, and Prince of Wales Islands. A buyout is a much simpler way to fund the Trust and especially because it would involve only about half the lands in question meaning survey/appraisal costs would be roughly half. It would be a clear win/win for all involved, but most importantly for the Trust beneficiaries for whom this legislation is intended to fund.
5. Finally, in a September 22, 2016 letter to the Trust and US Forest Service (attached), the Petersburg Borough Assembly wrote, “In the event the land exchange fails to move forward prior to the deadline of January 15, 2017 mandated by the Trust, we suggest, strictly as a “Plan B” option to the 2016 Act, the federal government offer an ample monetary endowment to the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority in exchange for the controversial Trust lands in Southeast Alaska, including Petersburg and Ketchikan.” (last paragraph). The Assembly’s support for a buyout, given the Jan. 15, 2017 deadline has passed, should weigh heavily in your decision to amend the bill to remove the exchange option and replace it with the federal buyout option as the best way to settle the issue.

Sincerely,

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Recent typical logging practices - nearly 4,000 acres - at Leask Lakes, Revilla Island by the Alaska Mental Health Trust. The legislative exchange would give AMHT an additional 8,000 acres adjacent to this.