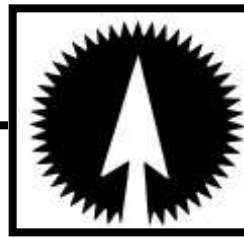


Alaska Forest Association



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March 28, 2017

Senator Cathy Giessel
State Capitol Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801
Senator.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov

Dear Senator Cathy Giessel,

The Alaska Forest Association supports SB-88 which enables the exchange of Mental Health Trust lands with Forest Service lands because this value-for-value exchange will allow the Trust to continue selling timber to the local timber industry while avoiding harvesting multiple parcels of land that are adjacent to local communities. In addition, the timing of the exchange is critical. The Forest Service timber sale schedule has been severely delayed by reckless actions of the past federal administration. These delays are now being addressed, but the agency projects it will take about three years to restore its timber sale program. The Mental Health Trust land exchange provides an opportunity to bridge this gap in the federal timber sale schedule.

We note an opposition letter from the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council. That letter alleges that the exchange will result in the "loss of increasingly important old-growth forest habitat". SEACC suggests instead that the Trust sell its land to taxpayer-funded conservation institutions like wetland mitigation, land and water conservation funds and carbon credit schemes. The alleged harm to habitat is a falsehood. We have been harvesting timber in Alaska for more than sixty years and fish and wildlife populations are doing fine, particularly in the most heavily harvested watersheds. Further, selling land or locking it up in conservation easements is not a sustainable use of the land; that strategy creates no wealth, doesn't help the local economy and is generally a burden on the American taxpayer.

About ten years ago the Forest Service proposed to purchase some of these Mental Health Trust lands in order to prevent development of the lands. The Alaska Forest Association objected to that sale for much the same reason; the land would have been taken out of the region's timberland base. We urged the Mental Health Trust to seek an exchange instead and we are grateful that the Trust is still willing to do so.

The federal government has monopoly power over the timber supply in Southeast Alaska and is currently managing nearly all of its 17-million acre forest for non-timber harvest purposes. We intend to restore a reasonable federal timber sale program from a small portion of the national forest. Enabling this land exchange by enacting SB-88 will give us a little time to accomplish that task.

Sincerely,

Owen Graham
Executive Director
Alaska Forest Association

CC: Senator Bert Stedman
Senator John Coghill
Representative Dan Ortiz
Paul Slenkamp, Mental Health Trust