

Testimony on HB155, to House Resources Committee, 29 March 2017

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I am Larry Edwards, a 40-year Southeast resident. HB155 is unacceptable as written, by trading one very bad problem for another, equally bad. The problem the bill would create is well explained in record comments by POW resident Doug Rhodes, Rebecca Knight, and GSACC. (The latter is in [HB 155 Public Comments.pdf](#).) The Committee should amend the bill to authorize a *federal buyout* of the problematic Mental Health Trust lands, *instead of a land exchange*. Congress established the Trust and its land endowment, leading to the dilemma. Buying out this 1.8% of the original endowment is a *reasonable and sellable solution*. The legislature's passage of a bill, amended accordingly, would direct Alaska's congressional delegation to secure a buyout act.

The Trust's March 27 testimony blatantly misinformed the Committee in several ways, and I will focus on that.

1. The Venn diagram on page 9 of the Trust's presentation claims the land exchange proposal "*Address[es] concerns from conservation groups.*" The Trust's witness added that the former Tongass Future's Roundtable's 35 members, including conservation groups, concluded the land exchange was a good idea. (1:53:15). However, the elitist TFR's conservation members were picked for their pliability. Excluded conservation groups strongly objected to the TFR's creation and conduct as being unethical. Eventually, the TFR collapsed, unable to reach consensus on its primary purpose – timber issues.

Similarly, several years of negotiations between the Trust and Forest Service never reached the stage of asking the public for scoping comments (the planning stage where the public can suggest alternatives). Now, the congressional bills would preclude NEPA process, blocking: disclosure to the public of impacts to other resources; the consideration of alternatives; and the opportunity for the public to comment and influence the outcome. This is unacceptable.

2. The Trust's "brown" map on page 10 (MP3 at 1:54:50) either demonstrates utter incompetence on Southeast's land management issues, or is an outright lie. The brown color is labeled "*Natural settings with old-growth harvest Land Use Designations,*" and is mostly overlain with cross-hatching to indicate that this supposed old-growth cannot not be logged because of the roadless rule.

In fact, most of the brown is *not* old-growth forest — or even forest — at all. Committee members should note, by example, the big brown block near Juneau. It is almost entirely the Juneau Ice Field and other high alpine areas. Very, very little of that brown is old-growth forest! Look at the brown Chilkat Peninsula, across Lynn Canal – same thing! The unforested, high mountain spines of Chichagof and Baranof Islands — same again! *This deception repeats itself throughout much of the brown on the map, and also in the tan Wilderness.*

The map is complete garbage.

3. The statistics table on page 10 amplifies the brown map's garbage. Its percentages are based on the gross land area of the Tongass National "Forest." Two-thirds of the Tongass is alpine rock and ice terrain, muskeg, and stunted unproductive old-growth forest that is little more than shrubbery. **Most of this two-thirds of the Tongass National so-called "Forest" is not forest at all.** *None* of it is productive old-growth wildlife habitat; and *none* of it would be useful to the timber industry. The Trust's ploy, used for decades by Southeast's timber industry, disguises the industry's impact through *illusions* that the logging footprint is minuscule and that loggers are locked-out nearly everywhere. The actual truth is that, for example, you can't log the Juneau Ice Field! Executing the ploy, the Trust also withheld from the Committee that over the past six decades the industry has clearcut close to 900,000

acres of generally the most productive old-growth forest in Southeast, about half done on federal and half on non-federal land.

The map and table also misinform by not focusing on the southern half of Southeast (below Fredrick Sound), the most productive half — where logging has principally been focused from the beginning, and where it now is almost entirely focused. This failure obfuscates the situation. More important is the *failure* to give statistics for the islands where the Trust would get land — Revillagigedo and Prince of Wales Islands. On page 8, the Trust claims the “benefit” of “*concentrating*” its proposed ownership on those islands. But, both islands are already very heavily impacted by logging, and amplification from additional concentrated logging impacts would be severe. For more, see the record comments by: **POW resident Doug Rhodes** ([HB155 Opposing Document-Doug Rhodes Letter.pdf](#)); **Rebecca Knight** ([HB 155 Letter of Comment - Knight.pdf](#)); and **GSACC** ([HB 155 Public Comments.pdf](#)).

In Conclusion

Tragedies will stem from either the Trust’s existing land ownership situation or the proposed land exchange. The Trust’s testimony conceals the latter part of that. The only reasonable solution is a federal government buyout of existing parcels.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Larry Edwards". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Larry Edwards