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Sponsor Statement

HB 155: AK Mental Health Trust Land Exchange

HB 155 authorizes a land exchange between the Alaska Mental Health Land Trust Authority and the United States Forest Service.

The Trust Land Office has been working with the United States Forest Service (USFS), communities, and interest groups to conduct an administrative land exchange between the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (AMHTA) and the USFS. HB 155 establishes the land exchange process. Senator Lisa Murkowski has introduced similar federal legislation at the congressional level with S. 131 and Representative Don Young introduced H.R. 513.

House Bill 155 details the process of the land exchange, including maps of land parcels, costs that must be paid by the AMHTFA and other involved parties, the timeline and order of priority for the exchange, how to handle potential differing value of the final appraisal, its relationship to the federal legislation, and an effective date. The exchange includes approximately 18,250 acres of mental health trust land and approximately 20,500 acres of USFS land.

This bill will protect lands vital to recreation and tourism, such as Ketchikan's Deer Mountain. The swap will allow for the preservation of iconic lands while still making available other lands of comparable value to the timber industry. Current and upcoming logging projects act as a bridge in the industry until young growth timber harvests are ready to be logged. Because this bill will allow for time-sensitive logging, it will help sustain the timber industry, which is particularly beneficial to Southeast Alaska.

Lastly, the bill will also allow the Alaska Mental Health Trust Fund Authority to continue logging and gaining resources from the timber industry. The revenue gained will fund programs that serve some of the most vulnerable people in Alaska. The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority provides funding to programs and services across the state that benefit people with mental illnesses, developmental disabilities, Alzheimer's disease, traumatic brain injuries, and substance abuse disorders.

Overall, HB 155 will increase revenue for mental health programs and the timber industry while still protecting iconic lands used for recreation and tourism.