

May 3, 2019

House Resources Committee
c/o Fairbanks LIO

re: HB 138, Outstanding National Resource Waters

Dear Committee Members,

Several days ago, I had the privilege to be able to provide oral testimony regarding the proposed change, in HB138 and equivalent SB51, to how Outstanding National Resource Waters may be designated. This issue is extremely important to me. I have been a fisheries and marine biologist in Alaska for most of my career, and have also fished commercially so I have first-hand knowledge of the critical importance of clean and intact natural waterways to the living natural resources of Alaska. Here is a written summary of the key points I made during my call on Wednesday. For the record, I am emphatically OPPOSED to HB138 and SB51.

1. The simple language disguises the true intent of this bill. The proposed change is sweeping and would completely remove the rights of ordinary Alaskans to step up to prevent harm to our most important natural waters. By restricting any initiative to designate Outstanding National Resource Waters (so-called Tier 3 waters) to the legislature only, the chances of any such designation occurring would be close to zero – given the the legislature has always had the ability to make such designations and has declined to ever do so.
2. Alaska is unique in the nation in having so many clean and unspoiled waterways, and in having such a large proportion of the people dependent upon the benefits provided by clean and unspoiled rivers, streams, etc. Our abundant and sustainable fisheries are particularly at risk, as well as the rights of Alaska Natives to continue their ages-old subsistence fishing and hunting and to manage and protect their ancestral lands.
3. The process to designate Tier 3 waters in Alaska is already in place. The existing process is based upon responsible use and stewardship of resources, the rights of ordinary citizens, and scientific review. This bill would remove a right from ordinary Alaskan citizens, and replace a commonsense and responsible process with a partisan process favoring outside interests with large amounts of money.
4. This bill would only take away rights from Alaskans without providing any benefits to them. Current normal uses of waterways such as boating, camping, fishing and fish cleaning, waterfront property, temporary construction, etc. are all protected. A Tier 3 designation simply protects the existing waterway, and existing uses, from destruction and degradation by massive waste dumping. The legislature always has had the authority to designate Tier 3 waters.
5. The bill is really designed to promote large-scale industrial activities which would pollute and destroy our natural clean waters, by removing public and scientific oversight from the process. The bill puts short-term corporate interests ahead of the interests of ordinary Alaskans and the uses of our waters that we all depend on. It disrespects the Alaska Native people who have lived

sustainably on our lands and waterways for countless generations, and it threatens all who enjoy fishing, clean drinking water, and the beauty of our unspoiled waters.

To sum up, this bill would do absolutely nothing to benefit Alaskans. It is instead all about attempting to remove protections from our most precious resources in order to fast-track short-term (and short-sighted) activities which irreparably damage our clean waters, our fisheries, and our unspoiled natural places. This bill should be rejected; it is unnecessary and would result in great harm to our great state.

Sincerely,

Jan Conitz