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March 9, 2020

Representatives Andy Josephson and Geran Tarr
Co-Chairs House Resources Committee
State Capital
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Dear Representatives Josephson and Tarr,

Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association (CIAA) is a private, non-profit corporation organized under the laws of the State of Alaska, engaged in salmon enhancement work throughout the Cook Inlet Region. We are strong proponents of protecting and preserving salmon resources and the habitat these fish rely upon. The purpose of this letter is give our support to HB 280 An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing an effective date—a bill that would allow the State of Alaska to swiftly address outbreaks of invasive species. This bill takes advantage of lessons learned in other states and regions—it allows the State of Alaska to take a coordinated effort through the establishment of a council to deal with harmful aquatic invasive species before they spread and cause ecological and/or economic impacts to our valuable resources, especially salmon.

Compared to other areas in the country, Alaska has the opportunity to eradicate aquatic invasive species threats such as the current elodea infestations found in different areas around the state. Elodea is the first invasive submerged aquatic weed discovered in Alaska waters and it was commonly used and sold in pet stores for use in aquariums. Discards of invasive plants and fish from aquariums in Alaska waters is the source of many invasive species introductions. A rapid response to eradicate an invasive species as close to its introduction is paramount. Elodea is a typical harmful invasive species because left unchecked, it will establish itself and dominate habitats, choking out native vegetation and fish, such as salmon. Many water bodies around the world, especially in Europe, have been decimated by elodea. Millions of dollars are spent each year just to keep water bodies from being choked off by elodea.

The swift and rapid response by a partnership of government and private organizations to this threat on the Kenai Peninsula showed that eradication can be successful and is much more cost effective then letting this threat grow into detrimental economic and ecologic impacts on our resources and landscapes. Unfortunately, due to permitting delays, an elodea infestation in Alexander Lake spread from 10 acres in 2014 to over 500 acres by 2016. The cost for treatment has expanded greatly (from less than \$15,000 to over \$1 million), funding the State of Alaska has had to seek through grants and other sources. This two-year delay also allowed for the spread of elodea into neighboring lakes, putting more environments and resources at risk.

Salmon enhancement today means better salmon fishing tomorrow.

Recent research by Dr. Schwoerer (Institute of Social and Economic Research) showed that elodea can significantly threaten Alaska Salmon. The odds for Alaska Salmon in elodea-infested habitats to not exist beyond 20 years from now are 4 to 1. That is an 80% probability of extirpation. Dr. Schwoerer estimated the constant annual average economic damage of elodea for Alaska's commercial sockeye salmon fisheries and floatplane sector to equal \$100 million each year now and into the future. Given the results of this research, it is clear that Alaska needs a council to ensure permitting, planning, coordination, and resources are available to address existing and emerging threats.

We also strongly support the response fund provision in HB 280. In an economic climate where funding is stretched thin, it only makes sense to establish and fund early detection and rapid response to address harmful aquatic invasive species in Alaska. Ultimately such efforts will save the State of Alaska millions if not billions of dollars, and maintain the thousands of jobs created by Alaska's robust salmon fisheries.

Thank you for introducing HB 280, and please let us know if there is anything we can do to support your work.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dean Day". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Dean" and last name "Day" clearly distinguishable.

Dean Day
Executive Director



Alaska Invasive Species Partnership

March 12, 2020

Representatives Andy Josephson and Geran Tarr
Co-Chairs House Resources Committee
State Capital
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: House Bill (HB) 280 An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G); relating to management of invasive species; and providing an effective date.

Dear Representatives Josephson and Tarr,

The Alaska Invasive Species Partnership is an informal statewide group of natural resource managers, ecologists, and interested individuals representing agencies, organizations, private industry, and members of the public. Our organization aims to raise awareness of the harmful impacts of invasive species as well as promote coordination and cooperation towards their management. We believe that HB 280, which would establish the Alaska Invasive Species Council and empower ADF&G with new authorities to proactively define, prevent, and address invasive species, represents an essential step toward facilitating and elevating the management actions needed to protect Alaska's environment, economy, and human health from disruption from invasive species.

Alaskans depend on our natural resources for food, cultural practices, jobs, and recreation. However, our state is at a critical point with respect to many invasive species that threaten our rich natural resources and ways of life. An invasive species council with state commissioner level accountability and engagement by agencies, industry, members of the research and management community, and concerned stakeholders will enable planning and coordination to prevent and prepare for invasive species problems that are on our doorstep.

Prevention is the most cost effective management action and a critical approach to addressing harmful invasive species. At this time our borders are wide open to invasive species that are known to cause immense economic and environmental damage in other states and provinces. Personal watercraft are transported to Alaska from infested waterbodies as far away as Florida! Our relative geographic isolation will only protect us for so long. This bill takes advantage of painful lessons learned in other states and regions by preemptively identifying and managing for invasive species. ADF&G needs the authority to take active invasive species prevention measures such as inspecting, decontaminating, and quarantining watercraft that are infested with invasive species before such vectors can spread harmful invaders.

An invasive species council will also facilitate and promote rapid response when new invasions are detected. This will help Alaska avoid future situations such as the Alexander Lake *Elodea* expansion where the invasive species problem became unnecessarily cumbersome and costly due to slow management response. The strategic plan required by HB 280 will ensure that the priorities and recommendations of the council are timely and appropriate.

We thank you for your consideration of this bill. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide further assistance or explanation.

Best,

Lisa Ka'aihue, Chair

March 13, 2020

Representatives Geran Tarr and Andy Josephson
Co-chairs of the House Resources Committee
State Capitol, Juneau Alaska 99801

*Transmitted via email to rep.geran.tarr@akleg.gov, Representative.Andy.Josephson@akleg.gov,
Thatcher.Brouwer@akleg.gov*

Re: Support for House Bill 280, An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council

Dear Representatives Tarr and Josephson,

I offer this letter as an individual, based on the perspective I have gained while serving as the invasive plants program coordinator at the Salcha-Delta Soil and Water Conservation District (SDSWCD). In my role, I have observed an urgent need for greater leadership and coordination among local, state and federal entities in preventing and managing the spread of invasive plants. I am optimistic that formation of an Alaska Invasive Species Council under House Bill (HB) 280 would help to stimulate cooperative action statewide and would underscore the need for agencies and other resource managers to take responsibility for minimizing damage from invasive species.

SDSWCD is home to one of Alaska's largest agricultural centers, producing commercial hay and grain crops including barley, oats and wheat. Major roads including the Richardson and Alaska Highways carry traffic into the district from populated areas of Alaska and Canada. Agriculture and roads are key vectors for the introduction of invasive plants and the destructive, costly infestations that come with them. These vectors present a continual threat to our natural and agricultural resources that must be managed actively to prevent and minimize damage. Consequently, my district invests substantially each year to maintain an invasive plant program that monitors and manages invasive plants and educates the public about best management practices. While our efforts are motivated primarily by our interest in protecting resources within the district, we recognize that invasive species do not observe administrative boundaries; we will not be successful without fostering partnerships that reach beyond our district's margin.

My district understands the value of collaboration in tackling invasive plant issues, and we strive to exemplify it. In 2019 we bolstered local prevention capabilities by installing state-of-the-art seed cleaning equipment with the local farmer's cooperative. Each year we dedicate our own resources to perform invasive plant control on roadsides for the City of Delta Junction, and on behalf of the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities as a cooperator under their Integrated Vegetation Management Plan. We established Alaska's Weed Free Forage Program in partnership with the Cooperative Extension Service and Division of Agriculture, and we organized participating entities to establish the Alaska Weed Free Committee to administer the weed free program statewide. We frequently answer the call from agencies (such as the Natural Resources Conservation Service, Bureau of Land Management, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and regional military installations) to provide technical assistance in achieving invasive plant management goals on their lands. While I believe our cooperative efforts can help to improve invasive species awareness and prevention, I am certain that my district cannot successfully defend itself against destructive invasive species without a comparable commitment from other local, state and federal organizations. The threats are too profuse, and too persistent, for any one entity to combat alone.

While I value the partnerships my program has cultivated, I also perceive a pressing need for resource managers in Alaska to take more responsibility for invasive species management and prevention. I understand that agencies need legislative direction to commit resources to a task. I hope that the passing of HB 280 will establish a clear statutory expectation and motivate overdue, coordinated institutional leadership toward invasive species management. Without more ardent engagement from agencies and natural resource managers, I fear many of Alaska's resources are destined for the irreversibly degraded fate of so many other western states.

Sincerely,
Toni Smith



Homer Soil & Water CONSERVATION DISTRICT

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March 12, 2020

Representatives Andy Josephson and Geran Tarr
Co-Chairs House Resources Committee
State Capital
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: HB 280 An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing an effective date.

There are a multitude of invasive species at Alaska's doorstep, and the state requires a more robust management system for preventing and responding to harmful invasive species infestations. We are writing to express our support for House Bill 280, which would establish the Alaska Invasive Species Council and empower the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) with new authorities to proactively define, prevent, and address invasive species in the state.

As the coordinating entity of the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area (KP-CWMA), Homer Soil and Water Conservation District has facilitated development of strategic plans and Integrated Pest Management (IPM) techniques in response to multiple invasive plant infestations across the Kenai Peninsula for the past 15 years. This includes *Elodea* eradication efforts in 6 infested waterbodies, Alaska's first known submerged freshwater invasive plant. *Elodea* is estimated to cost the commercial sockeye fishing industry \$100 million annually and threatens aviation-related recreation, should it become widespread across Alaska's freshwater systems (Schwoerer, T., et al. 2019. <https://doi.org/10.1007/s13280-019-01295-7>). Invasive species are a significant threat to Alaska's salmon, wildlife, freshwater and marine resources, terrestrial ecosystems, local economies, recreation activities and livelihoods.

Through experience, we have learned a critical component of successful eradication is to act fast, while it is financially feasible to eradicate infestations before populations become unmanageable and costly to control. Even better, is to prevent the introduction of harmful invasive species in the first place. Managing vectors such as boats, vehicles and people crossing state boundaries through a variety of measures is critical and should be facilitated by a multi-stakeholder invasive species council, enhancing the state's ability to prevent costly economic and social impacts.

Thank you for your consideration of HB 280, and we urge you to support this bill and protect Alaska from harmful invasive species.

Sincerely,

Chris Rainwater

Board Chair
Homer Soil & Water Conservation District



Cooperative Weed
Management Area

March 12, 2020

Representatives Andy Josephson and Geran Tarr
Co-Chairs House Resources Committee
State Capital
Juneau, Alaska 99801

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relating to management of invasive species; and providing an effective date.

We are writing to express our support of House Bill 280, which would establish the Alaska Invasive Species Council and empower the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) with new authorities to proactively define, prevent, and address invasive species in the state.

The Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Weed Management Area (KP-CWMA) has a strong history of collaboratively implementing *Early Detection and Rapid Response* of non-native, invasive plants throughout the Kenai Peninsula. Guided by a strategic plan for over 10 years, we continually identify and update priorities and management plans for the most harmful invasive plants that threaten Alaska's ecosystem, wildlife, and local economies. We think that establishment of an Alaska Invasive Species Council and providing the ADF&G with authority to take preventative actions will provide tools that are needed to improve coordination between state partners and develop state-wide invasive species prevention practices.

Prevention and rapid response to eradicate new infestations are the most cost efficient and effective ways to manage invasive species. The KP-CWMA has actively treated and eradicated the invasive aquatic plant *Elodea* on the Kenai Peninsula from 5 lakes since 2014. This was only possible because of the early detection of these populations and the partnership's ability to treat them quickly, but at a high monetary cost. *Elodea* is Alaska's first known submerged freshwater invasive plant and is widely considered to be a threat to Alaska's salmon and freshwater resources with significant ecological and economic consequences. Based on modeling by Dr. Toby Schwoerer at the UAA Institute of Social and Economic Research, we know that if *elodea* were to spread across Alaska, it would likely cost the commercial sockeye fishing industry \$100 million per year in lost revenue. This is just one of many harmful invasive species that pose high risk of economic and social costs. We believe that House Bill 280 provides important first steps in establishing robust prevention measures, enabling a cost-effective strategy to stop the spread and introduction of invasive species into Alaska.

The KP-CWMA strongly supports House Bill 280 and appreciates your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Katherine Schake".

Katherine Schake
Invasive Plant Coordinator, Kenai Peninsula – Cooperative Weed Management Area (KP-CWMA)
Home Soil & Water Conservation District