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April 19, 2022

*Sent via electronic mail*  
Senate Finance Committee Members  
Alaska State Capitol  
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: House Bill 54 - An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game and management of invasive species

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Finance Committee,

The Alaska Invasive Species Partnership (AKISP) is an affiliation of interested individuals representing agencies, organizations, and members of the public. Our purpose is to work together for the prevention and management of invasive species across the landscape, including freshwater and marine ecosystems.

**On behalf of the AKISP Board of Directors, we urge you to support House Bill 54 (HB54), which would establish the Alaska Invasive Species Council and represents an essential step toward facilitating and elevating the management actions and education needed to protect Alaska's environment, economy, and human health from invasive species.** We urge you to swiftly move this bill through your committee this legislative session.

Why is this bill important for Alaskans? We depend on our intact natural resources for food, cultural practices, jobs, and recreation. Our state is at a critical point with respect to many invasive species that threaten our rich natural resources and ways of life. Invasive species are marching northward, whether by ocean currents, commercial transport, or people. An invasive species council with state commissioner-level accountability and engagement by agencies, industries, researchers, managers, and concerned stakeholders, will enable planning and coordination to prevent and manage invasive species problems that are on our doorstep or already present in Alaska.

Prevention is the most cost-effective management action and a critical approach to addressing harmful invasive species. In the spring of 2021, invasive zebra mussels were found in Alaska attached to aquatic plants sold as "moss balls" by retailers statewide. The concern was that live zebra mussels attached to moss balls could be released into waterways when unwanted aquarium pets and plants are dumped, causing significant damage to our fisheries and infrastructure. If passed, the advisory council created by HB54 will recommend strategies for preventing new invasive species introductions and promote tactics such as improving policies and coordinating efforts to intercept invasive species before they arrive in Alaska. Our relative geographic isolation is no longer a failsafe protective measure.

Management of invasive species is important to prevent their spread and decrease risk of harm to native species. One example, Elodea, found in lakes, ponds, and other waterbodies around Cordova, the Copper River Delta, Anchorage, the Mat-Su Valley, Kenai Peninsula, and Fairbanks, has been the target of

coordinated research and control efforts from numerous stakeholders. According to recent research from the UAA Institute of Social and Economic Research, Elodea could cost the commercial sockeye salmon fishing industry \$159 million per year in damages should it go unmanaged. This is just one of many harmful invasive species that pose a high risk of environmental, economic, and social costs. Establishing an official network for statewide, multi-stakeholder collaboration is one way to increase capacity and share resources for efficient response to existing invasions.

House Bill 54 presents an opportunity for Alaska to avoid costly lessons learned in other states and regions by preemptively identifying and managing invasive species. We thank you for your consideration. Please do not hesitate to contact us if we can provide further information on invasive species issues in Alaska or your district.

Sincerely,



Danielle Verna, Vice Chair  
Alaska Invasive Species Partnership