



CHILKAT BALD EAGLE PRESERVE

Advisory Council



Dear Senators and Representatives,

The Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve Advisory Council writes to express its formal opposition to Senate Bill 75 / House Bill 72 (SB 75/HB 72).

The Advisory Council was established to advise on the management and protection of the Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve (CBEP), an area created by the Legislature to safeguard critical bald eagle habitat, salmon systems, and the ecological integrity of the Chilkat River corridor. Our opposition is grounded in the statutory purpose of the Preserve and the long-term stewardship responsibilities entrusted to the State.

SB 75/HB 72 would authorize long-term timber management leases of up to 55 years, with a one-time renewal of up to 55 years, allowing the delegation of timber management authority within the Haines State Forest Resource Management Area (HSF RMA). These leases may exempt portions of the existing statutory framework governing forest practices and allow administrative review to be limited to the discretion of the director. We are concerned that this proposed structure represents a significant shift in governance that is not aligned with the protective intent underlying the establishment of the CBEP and may alter the coordinated management relationship between the Preserve and the HSF RMA required under AS 41.21.620.

The CBEP is not an isolated landscape; it is hydrologically and ecologically connected to the Haines State Forest. The nationally and internationally significant congregation of bald eagles depends on intact salmon systems, functioning riparian habitats, and watershed stability, all of which can be affected by forest management decisions. Delegating forest management authority under long-duration leases introduces the potential for cumulative impact risks that may not be fully evaluated under a narrowed administrative review framework.

The Advisory Council is also concerned about proposed changes to public process and oversight. Long-term leases, combined with the elimination of best-interest findings under AS 38.05.035(e) for timber management leases, would eliminate longstanding mechanisms that allow for periodic, comprehensive public and advisory review. For a watershed that sustains resources of statewide, national, and international ecological significance, robust transparency and oversight are essential, and statutory changes absent a demonstrated need risk undermining the very values the Preserve was created to protect.

We recognize the importance of forestry to our community. However, governance changes of this magnitude warrant careful reconsideration, particularly where they intersect with lands and waters that sustain the CPEP and the subsistence economy of the Chilkat Valley. We respectfully urge you to consider whether the timber management leasing model proposed in SB 75/ HB 72 is consistent with the Legislature's longstanding commitment to protecting this unique and irreplaceable resource.

Thank you for your consideration,

Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve Advisory Council



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