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Sponsor Statement

Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 159

The Committee Substitute for Senate Bill 159 will establish a new Susitna State Forest from state lands presently used for timber harvest and exclude private in-holdings from the proposed forest. Further, this CS includes intent language that urges the governor to work to acquire or purchase forest land in the Tongass National Forest.

With a state forest designation, the Division of Forestry will be able to manage for a long-term supply of timber to local processors, and retain the land in state ownership for multiple uses. The Susitna State Forest would be the fourth state forest established in Alaska, joining the Haines State Forest, the Tanana Valley State Forest and the Southeast State Forest.

The proposed Susitna State Forest includes **33 parcels totaling approximately 763,200 acres**. The parcels are Forestry classified lands located in 14 large management blocks listed below. The Division of Forestry worked with the Division of Mining, Land, and Water Management to identify and exclude lands that are priorities for the state land disposal program.

In the region where the State Forest is proposed, timber sales and personal use sales for fuelwood are growing steadily. Local mills depend on state timber for their raw material supply, and there is a growing interest in the use of wood in the form of roundwood, chips or wood pellets for both commercial and residential space heating.

The state is committed to long-term management solutions by:

- maximizing the sustainable supply of timber from the state timber base;
- developing access and encouraging a broad range of multiple uses on state forest lands including motorized uses;
- providing economic opportunities to the communities, businesses and residents of the region.

Legislatively designating a State Forest would ensure that some land will remain available for long-term forest management and the region will retain large open spaces of public lands for the range of benefits residents of the region currently enjoy. It will also allow for mining on state forest land.

The Susitna State Forest would be managed as part of the State Forest System under AS 41.17.200-.230. Lands in the State Forest would continue to be open for multiple uses, including wildlife habitat and harvest and recreational activities.