



**BACKCOUNTRY  
HUNTERS & ANGLERS**  
ALASKA

March 9<sup>th</sup>, 2025

Senate Resources Committee  
Alaska State Legislature  
Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair  
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair  
Juneau, AK 99801

**Re: SB 224**

The Alaska Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers (BHA) appreciates the opportunity to comment on SB 224, *“An Act relating to state land; relating to contracts for the sale and lease of state land; relating to commercial development parks; and providing for an effective date.”*

**Alaska BHA opposes SB 224.**

While the bill is presented as an economic development opportunity for Alaskans—citing, for example, Section 3’s residency requirement for bidding—it ultimately opens the door for development within state parks and accelerates the process for leasing and selling state lands. These provisions raise serious concerns about the long-term impacts to public access, wildlife habitat, and the outdoor traditions that many Alaskans depend on.

For hunters, anglers, trappers, and foragers across the state, access to public lands is fundamental. Legislation that facilitates the transfer or privatization of public lands risks reducing those opportunities and limiting the ability of Alaskans to participate in the outdoor pursuits that are central to our culture, economy, and way of life.

Divesting public lands into private ownership may generate short-term revenue, but it often results in long-term loss of public access, habitat fragmentation, and diminished opportunities for fish and wildlife. Alaska remains one of the few places where residents can still fully participate in a year-round outdoor lifestyle supported by healthy wildlife populations and expansive public lands. That opportunity is part of what makes Alaska unique.

Public lands are a shared legacy that provide enduring benefits to all Alaskans. Policies that remove these lands from public ownership should be approached with caution and broad public consideration. For these reasons, the Alaska Chapter of Backcountry Hunters & Anglers urges the Senate Resources Committee to reject SB 224 and to carefully consider the precedent that legislation like this may set for the future of Alaska’s public lands.

Thank you for your consideration.

On behalf of the Alaska Chapter of BHA,

Mary Glaves  
Alaska Chapter Coordinator



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**From:** [Aaron Timian](#)  
**To:** [Senate Resources](#)  
**Subject:** Sb224  
**Date:** Sunday, March 15, 2026 11:09:30 AM

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Hey All - Please stop SB 224/HB276.

Some of the bill doesn't really do much. However in the bill is the creation of new laws, Article 13 Economic Development of State Land. The statute allows DNR to designate unlimited amounts of state land for state development parks. After designation, DNR could lease or sell this land without any further public process, so the public doesn't even get to comment on the proposed used, just the generic initial designation as a commercial park. This is huge! Not only does this purposely avoid the public process, it very well may violate the Alaska constitution in doing so, by disposing of state land without the proper safeguards of the public interest.

And all this is on top of the new regulations DNR recently created to give materials away for free, but the real kicker was creating a definition of "public purpose". This new definition will greatly expand the amount of land sales DNR can process under AS 38.05.810, such as selling large chunks of land to AIDEA.

<https://aws.state.ak.us/OnlinePublicNotices/Notices/Attachment.aspx?id=159814>

## Re: SB 224 – PUBLIC LAND: SALE/LEASE/COMMERCIAL DEVELOP

Chair and Members of the Senate Resources Committee:

Thank you for the opportunity to provide written comments on SB 224. Based on our review, the bill would significantly weaken meaningful public control over state lands and facilitate their long-term conversion to commercial and industrial use, without clear guarantees of durable public benefit. Below are key provisions, with bill language and an analysis of impact.

### 1. Long-term leases without mandatory surveys

- Bill language: “The commissioner may require an official cadastral survey ... before issuance of a long-term lease under AS 38.05.070 or 38.05.400.” (Sec. 2, AS 38.04.045(c))
- Impact: Surveys for long-term leases become optional rather than automatic. Long-term leases, including in commercial development parks, can be issued without full cadastral surveys, making it harder for communities and tribes to challenge the exact footprint and boundaries of leased state lands.

### 2. Auction rules that speed disposals

- Bill language: “The sale of state land shall be made at public auction or by sealed bid ... The director may ... sell state land under this section at not less than 70 percent of the appraised fair market value of the land.” (Sec. 3, AS 38.05.055)  
“The successful bidder ... shall provide an earnest money deposit of at least five percent ... If a successful bidder fails to enter into a contract to purchase, five percent of the bid amount shall be forfeited to the state.” (Sec. 4, AS 38.05.055(c))
- Impact: These rules are optimized to move more land quickly through auction or sealed bid, with strong penalties if buyers walk away. They improve marketability of disposals but add no environmental or public-interest criteria, facilitating larger-scale privatization of state land.

### 3. Longer sale contracts and standardized termination

- Bill language: “Installments over a period of not more than 30 years.” (Sec. 5, AS 38.05.065(a))  
If a contract is breached, the director may “terminate the contract” after notice; if full payment is not made within 30 days, the decision “terminates all legal and equitable rights the purchaser has in the land.” (Secs. 7–9, AS 38.05.065(d)–(f))  
For non-auction sales, applicants must deposit “at least five percent of the purchase price ... five percent ... shall be forfeited to the state” if they fail to enter a contract or default. (Sec. 11, AS 38.05.065(j))
- Impact: Extending contracts to 30 years and standardizing termination and forfeiture makes it easier for the state to sell more land on credit while preserving strong remedies for default, increasing the volume of land that can transition toward private ownership.

### 4. Leasing standard shifts to “benefit” and “economic benefit”

- Bill language: “The lease compensation method shall be designed to maximize the benefit of the lease to the state, considering its economic benefit, and shall be a form of compensation set out in AS 38.05.073(m).” (Sec. 12, AS 38.05.075(a))

- Impact: Replacing “return on the lease” with “benefit ... considering its economic benefit” broadens the justification for lease terms and allows below-market or unconventional deals to be defended based on general economic-development claims, rather than clear, measurable public returns.

### **5. Commercial Development Parks – front-loaded review, minimal parcel-level process**

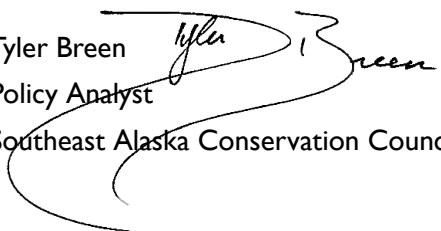
- Bill language: “The department may designate state land ... as a commercial development park.” (Sec. 14, AS 38.05.400(a))  
Eligible land includes: “state land in a qualified opportunity zone,” “state land nominated by a person,” and “any other state land the commissioner deems appropriate for commercial development.” (AS 38.05.400(b))  
“Land in a commercial development park ... may be leased or sold without further notice or a finding under AS 38.05.035(e).” (AS 38.05.400(c))  
Leases up to 55 years with renewal; lessee in good standing has an option to purchase, with lease payments credited; the state’s reversionary interest may be waived. (AS 38.05.400(d), (f), (g))
- Impact: Any person can nominate land, and the commissioner can designate virtually any state land as “appropriate.” After a single best-interest finding at the park level, individual leases and sales inside the park move with no further public notice or best-interest findings, while 55-year leases, purchase options, and possible waiver of the reversionary interest create a pipeline from public land to long-term private/industrial control.

### **6. Repeal of Business Park Wetlands Special Management Area**

- Bill language: “AS 16.20.030(a)(8), 16.20.030(a)(9); AS 38.05.065(b); AS 41.21.518, 41.21.520, and 41.21.522 are repealed.” (Sec. 16)
- Impact: AS 41.21.518–.522 establish and govern the Business Park Wetlands Special Management Area, including incompatible-use rules and acquisition provisions. Repealing them removes a specific wetlands protection framework so that land can be managed like ordinary state land and potentially swept into a commercial development park, aligning with the overall direction of weakening site-specific protections that constrain commercial land transfers.

Bottom line: SB 224 is not just a technical cleanup of land statutes. It creates broad tools for moving state lands into long-term commercial and private control, strips an existing wetlands protection, and reduces parcel-level public oversight. For these reasons, I urge the committee not to move SB 224 forward.

Thank you for your consideration,

Tyler Breen   
Policy Analyst  
Southeast Alaska Conservation Council



Supporting Salmon, Wildlife, and Community

March 9, 2026

Senate Resources Committee  
Alaska State Legislature  
State Capitol  
Juneau, AK 99801

RE: SB 224: Concerns Regarding Erosion of Public Process in State Land Disposals

Dear Chair and Members of the Senate Resources Committee:

The Susitna River Coalition is a 501(c)(3) conservation organization committed to the responsible stewardship of Alaska's public lands. We write today not to oppose economic development on state land, but to raise concerns about a troubling pattern we see emerging across multiple pieces of legislation this session which is potentially a pattern of reducing the public's ability to participate meaningfully in decisions about how their land is used.

#### A Pattern of Diminishing Public Voice

SB 224 would create a new "commercial development park" framework under which the Commissioner of Natural Resources could designate state land for commercial leasing and eventual sale. The bill is designed so that public notice and best-interest findings occur once, at the time a park is designated. After that, individual parcels within the park may be leased or sold without repeating that process.

This approach eliminates the regular inflection points that currently allow Alaskans to evaluate whether specific projects on specific parcels are consistent with community standards, regional plans, and the public interest. Under existing law, individual land disposals are subject to their own review. Under SB 224, the public's window to weigh in is compressed to a single early moment and before anyone knows what uses are actually being proposed, who the lessees will be, or what the impacts on surrounding communities might look like.

This is not an isolated concern. SB 75, the Governor's timber leasing bill, follows the same structural approach which is to consolidate public process at the front end and create long-term lease commitments with limited ongoing oversight. Both bills use an identical 55-year lease term with a 55-year renewal option, effectively committing public land for up to 110 years. In the case of SB 75, this duration was justified by the timber industry's stand rotation cycle. No comparable justification has been offered for applying the same term to general commercial development. The reuse of this framework across unrelated sectors suggests a deliberate strategy to establish a uniform pipeline for long-term land disposal and one that systematically reduces public participation at the project level.

## Communities Have Governance Structures for a Reason

Across Alaska, communities have invested decades in building the institutions that allow them to manage growth and land use thoughtfully. Community councils, planning commissions, borough assemblies, and regional comprehensive plans all exist because Alaskans understand that land-use decisions shape the character of the places people live, work, and raise families. These bodies represent accumulated local knowledge about what kinds of development are appropriate, where, and under what conditions.

When the state leases or sells public land for commercial use, those decisions directly affect the communities that surround that land. A project that begins as one thing can evolve into something quite different over a 55- or 110-year period. Ownership changes. Markets shift. What was proposed as a small-scale facility becomes an industrial operation. Without regular public checkpoints the opportunities for communities to assess whether a project remains consistent with local plans and the public good disappears and there is no meaningful mechanism for course correction.

SB 224's front-loaded public process effectively disenfranchises these community institutions. It asks Alaskans to comment on a concept, in this case a designated park boundary, without the ability to evaluate the specific projects that will follow. That is not meaningful public participation. It is the appearance of process without the substance.

## The Current Process Works—A Real-World Example

A current example illustrates both why existing public process matters and what stands to be lost under SB 224. On March 4, 2026, DNR published a solicitation of interest for ADL 234691, a lease application from Clear Energy, for approximately 269,795 acres of state land in the Talkeetna Mountains for renewable energy generation, storage, and associated infrastructure. This is a massive footprint of public land in a region where communities have active community councils, planning commissions, and adopted comprehensive plans.

Under the current framework, this project is proceeding through a structured process that provides multiple opportunities for public engagement: a solicitation of interest to determine whether competitive bidding is warranted, followed by a preliminary decision with a public comment period, and then a final finding and decision. These are the regular inflection points that allow communities to evaluate whether a specific project on a specific piece of land is consistent with local plans, community standards, and the public good. Since this notice was published, our inbox has been flooded with questions from community members seeking to understand the proposal and its implications which is exactly the kind of engaged public participation that responsible land management depends on.

This is the current process working as intended. It gives communities time to understand what is being proposed, ask questions, consult their own plans and governance bodies, and provide informed comment. The timeline, the check-ins, and the structured public process are what build the informed public consent that supports economic activity which strengthens rather than disrupts communities.

Now consider how this same proposal might unfold under SB 224. If this area in the Talkeetna Mountains area had been designated as a commercial development park, the public notice and best-interest finding would have already occurred at a park designation stage, before anyone knew that a nearly 270,000-acre energy project was coming. The individual lease could proceed

without a project-specific comment period. The communities most directly affected might never have a formal opportunity to weigh in on the actual use of the land. And under SB 224's terms, that lease could extend to 55 years with a renewal option for another 55, and the lessee could eventually purchase the land outright. That is a fundamentally different outcome than a 40-year lease with project-level public review and the communities living alongside that land deserve a say in which path is taken.

We note this contrast: the bill was presented to the Committee today alongside examples of small, sympathetic parcels, in this case a 3-acre lot in midtown Anchorage burdened by a trespass camp and costing the state \$80,000 in cleanup. That is an easy case, and no one disputes the need to address it. We also recognize that certain provisions of the bill, including the qualified opportunity zone designation and best-interest finding requirements, may tend to favor more developed areas where commercial activity is already established. But the statutory authority SB 224 creates contains no hard limits on parcel size, geographic location, or land character. The commissioner retains broad discretion to designate any state land deemed appropriate, and any person may nominate state land for inclusion. The same framework that might reasonably apply to a few urban acres could be applied to hundreds of thousands of acres of remote public land in the Talkeetna Mountains, on Kodiak Island, or anywhere else a future commissioner sees fit. The bill should be evaluated not by its most modest possible application, but by the full scope of authority it grants because that authority, once enacted, will be exercised under circumstances none of us can predict. A 270,000-acre energy lease in the mountains above the Mat-Su Valley is a very different proposition than cleaning up a homeless camp off C Street, and the public process governing each should reflect that difference.

### Going Too Far, Too Fast

We understand the argument that Alaska's economic potential is constrained by slow and uncertain land-use processes. There is truth in that. But the solution to bureaucratic delay is not to eliminate public accountability. The answer is to build processes that are both efficient and transparent and one that will give developers clarity and timelines while preserving the public's right to evaluate individual projects on their merits.

SB 224 does not strike that balance. It tilts decisively toward speed and administrative convenience at the expense of the ongoing public engagement that responsible land stewardship requires. Combined with SB 75 and the broader direction of the administration's land policy, it represents a significant shift in the relationship between the state, its lands, and the people who depend on them. It is a shift that is happening bill by bill, without the comprehensive public debate it deserves.

The implementing regulations for SB 224 do not yet exist. The department's own fiscal note acknowledges that revenue projections are speculative and that rules will not be finalized until December 2028. The legislature is being asked to approve the architecture of a major new land disposal program before the guardrails have been designed. We believe that is the wrong sequence.

### Our Request

We respectfully ask the Committee to ensure that any land disposal framework preserves meaningful public participation at the project level and not only at the moment of initial designation. Alaskans should have the ability to evaluate specific lease and sale proposals, assess

their consistency with community plans and standards, and hold both the state and its lessees accountable over the life of these long-term commitments.

We also urge the Committee to consider SB 224 not in isolation, but alongside SB 75 and the administration's broader approach to state land. When viewed together, these proposals amount to a fundamental change in Alaska's land policy and one that deserves open, comprehensive public deliberation rather than piecemeal adoption.

Public land decisions are among the most consequential choices a state can make. They are effectively permanent. The processes that govern those decisions should reflect that weight and not shortcut it in the name of efficiency.

Thank you for your consideration.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Melis Coady". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Melis Coady  
Executive Director  
Susitna River Coalition