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April 28, 2025

Sent via electronic mail

Senate Resources Committee Members

Alaska State Capitol

Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Senate Bill 174 - An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing for an effective date.

Dear Honorable Members of the Senate Resources Committee,

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 salmon rely upon.

The purpose of this letter is to give our support to Senate Bill 174 (SB174). One of the primary features of this bill is to establish an Alaska Invasive Species Council (Council) that will ensure agencies are coordinating efforts and resources in protecting Alaska's natural resources and ways of life from harmful invasive species.

Why this is so important is because invasive species are threatening Alaska's economy and environment with each passing day. It is critical that there is coordination among agencies because currently there is no central authority for management of invasive species in Alaska. A Council will ensure that there is coordination and cooperation among the federal and state agencies, as well as local and tribal governments, non-governmental organizations, policy makers, and the public.

As an example of why we need a Council is the discovery of European green crab during the summer of 2022 near Metlakatla. This seemingly innocuous, little crab is one of the most damaging marine invasive species. Since the first discovery of green crab in Alaska, thousands have been captured in near Metlakatla. Even with this localized effort, in 2024 it was discovered that green crab are expanding their territory in Alaska.

Green crab populations have exploded on the West Coast, where they have devastated native environments such as eelgrass, which provides shelter for juvenile salmon. Green crab were first found in Washington State in 2016, and by 2022 the governor of Washington signed an emergency declaration to address the rapidly expanding population. We need a coordinated response among all the agencies and stakeholders now to get ahead of the European green crab invasion to ensure we are not faces with the multi-million dollar response the State of Washington has invested in their crab issue.

Another example of why we need a Council is Elodea—the first invasive submerged aquatic weed discovered in Alaska waters. 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. In recent years, some Elodea infestations have been eradicated around the state. But significant infestations have faced response delays and cost increases caused by permitting issues and lack of financial resources, especially at the State agency level.

Research by UAA's Institute of Social and Economic Research shows what is at stake for Alaska salmon if we are unsuccessful in slowing Elodea's spread. 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. It was estimated that elodea could potentially cost the commercial sockeye salmon fishing industry \$159 million per year in damages should it go unmanaged. Alaska needs a Council, as would be established by SB174, to ensure permitting, planning, coordination, and resources are available to address existing and emerging threats such as elodea.

Thank you for your time and consideration of SB174.

Sincerely,



Dean Day
Executive Director



www.pwsrcac.org

Citizens promoting the environmentally safe operation of the Alyeska terminal and associated tankers.

Members:

Alaska State Chamber of Commerce

Chugach Alaska Corporation

City of Cordova

City of Homer

City of Kodiak

City of Seldovia

City of Seward

City of Valdez

City of Whittier

Community of Chenega

Community of Tatitlek

Cordova District Fishermen United

Kenai Peninsula Borough

Kodiak Island Borough

Kodiak Village Mayors Association

Oil Spill Region Environmental Coalition

Oil Spill Region Recreational Coalition

Port Graham Corporation

Prince William Sound Aquaculture Corporation

Anchorage

3709 Spenard Rd, Ste 100
Anchorage, AK 99503
O: (907) 277-7222
(800) 478-7221

Valdez

P.O. Box 3089
130 S. Meals, Ste 202
Valdez, AK 99686
O: (907) 834-5000
(877) 478-7221

April 29, 2025

Senator Forrest Dunbar
Senator.Forrest.Dunbar@akleg.gov
State Capitol Building
Juneau, AK 99810

Re: Support for Senate Bill 174

Dear Senator Dunbar:

The Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (PWSRCAC) is a federally mandated, independent nonprofit corporation whose mission is to promote the environmentally safe operation of the Valdez Marine Terminal and associated tankers. Our work is guided by the Oil Pollution Act of 1990, and our contract with Alyeska Pipeline Service Company. PWSRCAC's 19 member organizations are communities in the region affected by the 1989 Exxon Valdez oil spill, as well as commercial fishing, aquaculture, Alaska Native, recreation, tourism, and environmental groups.

We are writing to express our support for Senate Bill 174. The PWSRCAC appreciates your continued interest in prevention, early detection, and rapid response to invasive species in Alaska. As you know, invasive species have the potential to cause significant adverse impacts to the environment, the economy, and the lifestyle and culture of all Alaskans.

SB 174 will establish an invasive species council comprised of a diverse and modest number of members to serve in an advisory role for invasive species management across agencies and jurisdictional boundaries. We appreciate that the bill addresses both prevention and response, requires the preparation of a 5-year strategic plan, and establishes an invasive species response fund. We note that previous efforts to establish an Alaska invasive species council received strong bipartisan support.

PWSRCAC has over a 25-year history of working to prevent the introduction of invasive species into the marine environment in the Exxon Valdez oil spill region, which includes Prince William Sound, lower Cook Inlet, and the Kodiak archipelago. Our primary concern is the introduction of invasive species from ballast water and biofouling as a result of Trans-Alaska Pipeline System tanker operations. We have been successful, along with partners in Alaska, in addressing this issue by funding research projects to sample the ballast water of tankers, engaging in various working groups, and supporting changes in Federal regulations such as the Vessel Incidental Discharge Act (VIDA). In addition, PWSRCAC maintains an active early detection monitoring program for marine invasive species, including European green crab, in the communities of Valdez, Cordova, and Kodiak.

Thank you again for sponsoring Senate Bill 174. Please contact us if you have any questions or if there is anything further we can do to assist.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Donna Schantz". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Donna Schantz
Executive Director



April 28, 2025

Senator Forrest Dunbar
State Capitol Room 125
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Senator Dunbar,

I am writing in support of SB174—An Act Establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game. Since the discovery of Alaska's first aquatic invasive species, *Elodea spp.* (Elodea) in 2010, I have studied the management and economic impact of Elodea on Alaska's economy. This work has been published in ten peer-reviewed scientific journals and informed on-the-ground resource management decisions.

Not addressing the biosecurity threats to Alaska has far reaching but often hidden economic consequences associated with reduced food security, reduced property values, commercial fisheries loss, and impacts on energy infrastructure, to name a few. Since 2010, the cumulative loss to commercial sockeye salmon fisheries from not eradicating Elodea in Alaska is estimated to exceed \$1 billion in 2025. In contrast, since 2010, only \$6.9 million has been spent on Elodea response, 72% funded by federal agencies, 21% by non-profit organizations, and 7% by the State of Alaska.

Over the past ten years, the time to respond to new Elodea infestations has grown from less than 1 year in 2015 to 2.5 years on average in 2024. Of the 49 currently known Elodea-infested waterbodies, Elodea has been eradicated from only 20. Thirteen are currently being managed, not all of which have funding for herbicide applications in 2025. A total of 16 waterbodies have not had any treatment.

The reasons for Alaska's failure to eradicate Elodea are complex. First, the arrival of new invaders is on an exponential trajectory, pulling away limited resources to manage ever more complex infestation in remote locations. Additional challenges include inconsistent management goals across agencies, lack of implementing a formalized statewide strategy, inconsistent application of best management practices, and the fragmentation of jurisdiction, response, and funding. For Elodea, these challenges resulted in inefficient allocation of resources estimated at \$0.9 million (13%). The establishment of the Alaska Invasive Species Council will enable a more formalized and more efficient use of public and private resources for Alaska's response to an increasingly challenging biosecurity environment.

Sincerely,

Tobias Schwoerer
Research Assistant Professor of Natural Resource Economics



April 28, 2025

Sent via electronic mail
Senator Dunbar
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Senate Bill 174 - An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing for an effective date

Dear Senator Dunbar,

The Alaska Invasive Species Partnership (AKISP) is a coalition of individuals representing agencies, organizations, and concerned citizens united in the goal of preventing and managing invasive species across Alaska's terrestrial, freshwater, and marine environments.

On behalf of the AKISP Board of Directors, we strongly urge your support of Senate Bill 174 (SB174), which would establish the Alaska Invasive Species Council. This legislation represents a vital step toward strengthening the coordination, education, and actions needed to protect Alaska's environment, economy, and public health from the growing threat of invasive species. We respectfully request that you advance this bill through your committee during this legislative session.

Why does SB174 matter to Alaskans? Our livelihoods, cultural heritage, and economic well-being are closely tied to Alaska's intact natural resources. Invasive species—whether transported by ocean currents, commercial traffic, or human activity—are advancing northward and threatening these resources. The proposed council, comprising state commissioners and representatives from agencies, industries, and stakeholder groups, would foster collaboration, planning, and accountability to prevent and respond to these threats.

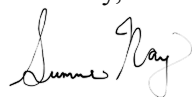
Preventing the introduction of invasive species is the most effective and economical way to protect Alaska's natural resources. In early 2021, zebra mussels — a highly invasive species — were detected in Alaska, attached to aquatic plants called "moss balls" that were sold by retailers across the state. There was immediate concern that if these mussels were released into waterways through the improper disposal of aquarium plants and animals, they could cause extensive harm to fisheries and infrastructure. SB174 proposes the creation of an advisory council that would develop strategies to prevent new invasive species from establishing in Alaska. The council would focus on improving policies, enhancing coordination, and strengthening efforts to intercept invasive species before they arrive. Alaska's geographic isolation is no longer sufficient protection against these growing threats.

Management of already-present invasive species is equally important. Elodea, an aquatic plant found across multiple regions of the state, has prompted collaborative research and control efforts. A recent

UAA Institute of Social and Economic Research study found that if left unmanaged, Elodea could cost Alaska's commercial sockeye salmon industry an estimated \$159 million annually. This underscores the need for a statewide framework to enable coordinated, timely responses.

SB174 offers Alaska the opportunity to proactively address invasive species—avoiding the far more costly and complex scenarios experienced elsewhere. We appreciate your consideration of this important legislation. Please don't hesitate to contact us if we can provide additional information about invasive species concerns in your district.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Summer Nay". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "S" and "N".

Summer Nay, Chair
Alaska Invasive Species Partnership

April 29, 2025

Submitted electronically via Senate.Resources@akleg.gov

The Honorable Cathy Giessel
Chair, Senate Resources Committee
Alaska State Legislature

The Honorable Bill Wielechowski
Vice Chair, Senate Resources Committee
Alaska State Legislature

In Support of SB 174: Invasive Species Management

Dear Chair Giessel, Vice Chair Wielechowski, Members of the Senate Resources Committee:

The purpose of this letter is to express my support for SB 174 due to its interagency coordination through an Alaska Invasive Species Council that will result in more cost-effective and successful management of invasives on public and private lands.

Background

The Southeast Alaska Land Trust (SEALT) conserves and stewards in perpetuity almost 4,000 acres of private land for public benefit located in communities in Juneau, Kake, Sitka, Haines, Petersburg, Excursion Inlet, and Admiralty Island. We work with willing landowners to conserve lands that are important for productive fish and wildlife habitat, recreation (hunting, fishing, hiking, wildlife viewing), scenic open space, and cultural and historic areas. Our partners in this work include municipal governments, tribal governments, Alaska Native Corporations, and the land trust's 300 members. As an additional service to southeast Alaska, we also operate the state's longest-standing compensatory mitigation program, meeting the private sector's need to fulfill permit conditions when developments result in unavoidable impacts to aquatic resources.

History of Partnership with the State of Alaska

- Since our inception in 1995, we have partnered with, invested in the ecological integrity of, and supported management of Alaska's special areas including the Mendenhall Wetlands State Game Refuge (MWSGR) in Juneau and Dude Creek Critical Habitat Area in Gustavus. Our land conservation projects often focus on properties connected to public lands, and align with state management plans.

- Beginning in 2000, SEALT conserved 21 upland properties associated with the MWSGR to establish a permanent, fixed upland management boundary for ADF&G to effectively manage hunting and fishing on a unit that is otherwise defined by the Extreme High Tide (EHT) – a boundary that has changed over time.
- We also worked with the City & Borough of Juneau (CBJ) to exempt land trust parcels around the Refuge from the CBJ prohibition on hunting on private lands, allowing the parcels to remain intact for ADF&G's management of hunting on the Refuge.
- As part of the most recent Juneau Airport expansion in 2009 – which was the only permissible impact to the MWSGR for a transportation facility, as the airport cannot expand in any other location but into the Refuge that surrounds it – SEALT acquired acreage to replace what was lost to the runway extension. In 2015 SEALT conveyed this new property, called Wigeon Ponds, to the state under ADF&G's management, and it is high quality waterfowl habitat used by hunters and birders alike.
- With ADF&G's partnership and support, SEALT recently completed a comprehensive Habitat Mapping Project for the Mendenhall wetlands complex, which is a 5,252-acre area that includes the MWSGR. This project updated the original habitat map from 1979 that is used in ADF&G's 1990 MWSGR Management Plan.

Invasives on SEALT Properties

SEALT staff and volunteers monitor conservation properties on a regular basis and have observed an increase in and migration of invasive plant species. Many of these invasives are propagating near roads, neighborhoods, construction activities, and trails where human activity is concentrated and likely to facilitate the spread of invasive species. For example, Japanese knotweed was brought into Alaska as an ornamental plant in landscaping, and outcompetes valuable native plants like salmonberries, blueberries, highbush cranberries, and willows – doubling its size every year with exponential growth.

In the last year, SEALT has worked with experienced advisors to identify a protocol for dealing with invasive plants where feasible, but there are substantial challenges to tackling the issue piecemeal. We are limited in our interventions by staff capacity as well as neighbors' property management; if a neighboring landowner does not allow us to remove invasive plants near our boundary, it is just a matter of time before it spreads and requires a more expensive and labor-intensive intervention on both properties. And, although we are alert to the encroachment of invasive fish and wildlife (e.g. European green crab) on sensitive tidelands like Crescent Bay in Sitka or Auk Nu Cove in Juneau, we have no current capacity or protocol to monitor that threat.

Greater coordination and strategic guidance from the state would assist us and other land managers in finding common-sense solutions to the spread of invasive species that 1) threaten the ecological integrity of both private and public lands and 2) pose a risk to economically and culturally important species in Alaska.

Support for SB 174

Comprehensively tracking, evaluating, mitigating, and preventing the spread of invasive species in Alaska will require proactive coordination between landowners and resource managers. Senate Bill 174 addresses this need for coordination through the establishment of an Alaska Invasive Species Council under ADF&G.

The land trust would welcome guidance from such a council on invasives in our region and would build upon our existing relationships with the department to work towards coordinated management of invasives on and around lands that SEALT stewards.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this bill.

Margaret Custer, Executive Director