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a 501(c)(3) non-profit corporation

*"Protecting the rural and wild natural environment of the
Copper Basin/Wrangell Mountains region."*

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BILL WOULD GIVE NELCHINA HERD, TANGLES LAKES A BIG BOOST

One of Alaska's favorite areas for subsistence and recreation may have additional protection in the future thanks to Representative Andy Josephson. House Bill 272 "To Establish a Tangle Lakes State Game Refuge" was pre-filed by Rep. Josephson this January.

For the Nelchina Caribou Herd the Tangle Lakes area is essential habitat, especially for fall rut and winter grazing. Archaeological evidence shows that the Tangle Lakes region has been a magnet for human activities for many centuries, and ever since the Denali Highway opened sixty years ago, the region has drawn hunters, fishers, paddlers, berry pickers, photographers and many other admirers. Periodically, Outside and foreign mineral exploration companies have raised Alaskans' worries about the threat of hardrock mining.

As the state Board of Game wrote in 2008 to then-Governor Palin, "We recognize the potential for mineral extraction in this area and in associated mineral leases, but remain convinced the long-term value of maintaining wildlife habitat far outweighs the potential benefits of possible development projects known at this time." John Schandelmeier, who probably has spent more time in the region than anyone, has asked, "Are the minerals more valuable than what we already have here?"

HB 272 would not void existing mining claims, but it would preclude new hardrock claims and give the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) increased control over any development. The primary purpose of the designation is to protect wildlife populations so they remain available for hunters to harvest, and other visitors to see and photograph. In a state game refuge, ADF&G takes on the lead management role for fish and wildlife, human uses, and surface uses.

With or without any mining threat, the Tangle Lakes region stands on its own as a natural choice for a refuge. "[T]he importance of [these lands] as wildlife habitat, tourist destination, sport fishing, subsistence and sport hunting, subsistence food gathering and trapping area exceeds all mining value. All these uses except mining have minimal impact on the land and are renewable yearly," wrote ADF&G Game Biologist Bob Tobey (now retired).

Supporters of HB 272, including Copper Country Alliance, other organizations, and business owners, urge hunters, fishers, and other fans of Tangle Lakes and the Nelchina herd to ask their legislators to pass this bill. More information is at <https://www.savetanglelakes.org/>.

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