



April 28, 2025

Representative Rebecca Himschoot
State Capitol Room 411
Juneau, AK 99801

Dear Representative Himschoot,

I am writing in support of HB191—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



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
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Valdez, AK 99686
O: (907) 834-5000
(877) 478-7221

April 29, 2025

Representative Rebecca Himschoot

Rep.Rebecca.Himschoot@akleg.gov

State Capitol Building

Juneau, AK 99810

Re: Support for House Bill 191

Dear Representative Himschoot:

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 House Bill 191. 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.

HB 191 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 House Bill 191. 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

May 5, 2025

Dear Members of the Alaska House Resources Committee,

We provide this letter of support for HB 191 (Invasive Species Management) on behalf of the board, staff, and members of Alaska Community Action on Toxics (ACAT), a statewide environmental health and justice nonprofit organization dedicated to research and advocacy to protect public health in Alaska and the world. We respectfully request that you support the passage of this critical piece of legislation. We want to thank Representative Himschoot for sponsoring HB 191, which we strongly support because Alaska needs to coordinate efforts to stop invasive species from spreading in our state.

Currently, there is no coordinated effort between all the stakeholders on how to stop the spread of invasive species and those species from entering our state and local ecology environment. We must establish a coordination system between the various stakeholders in dealing with an invasive species threat. For example, with the threat of the Mayday tree's invasive species, some stakeholders believe that using chemicals to stop the spread of Mayday trees is. However, other stakeholders believe using chemicals is unnecessary and harms the lives of animals and the surrounding community. When there are disagreements between stakeholders, it is vital to have a task force where the issue can be brought up and systematically discussed.

Protecting our environment should be one of the top priorities of the legislative branch. When an invasive species threatens our environment, it is vital that the state muster all its stakeholders to combat the problem from the beginning. In this area, we need to be proactive, and by having a task force to combat invasive species, we are fighting the issue from step one before it becomes an enormous issue.

We ask you to support this bill, pass it out of committee, and bring it to a vote on the House floor. Thank you for your careful consideration

Sincerely,

Francisco "Cisco" Mercado
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Pamela Miller
IPEN Co-Chair (www.ipen.org) and
Executive Director
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May 5, 2025

Representative Himschoot
Alaska State House
120 4th Street
Juneau, Alaska 99801

Re: Support of House Bill 191 – Alaska Invasive Species Council

Dear Rep. Himschoot,

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on HB 191, the establishment of an Invasive Species Council. My name is Katherine Schake, and I am the Manager of the Kachemak Bay National Estuarine Research Reserve based in Homer, which is a partnership between the University of Alaska Anchorage (UAA), Alaska Center for Conservation Science (ACCS), and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA). The Research Reserve has maintained a marine invasive species community monitoring program for two decades, focused on invasive European green crab and invasive tunicates, and maintains the Alaska Aquatic Invasive Species Clearinghouse – a statewide database and mapping application for freshwater and marine invasive species data. Previously I worked for the Homer Soil and Water Conservation District as the Coordinator for the Kenai Peninsula Cooperative Invasive Species Management Area, and I have been an active member of the Alaska Invasive Species Partnership (AKISP) for seven years.

I am in support of establishing an Invasive Species Council because it is what Alaskans need to catalyze response to the most harmful invasive species, increase biosecurity, and protect our fisheries, wildlife, agriculture, and economic livelihoods. Especially with the European green crab arriving in Southeast AK, and invasive mussels at our doorstep, now is a critical moment to establish this council.

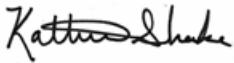
I am honored to be a member of the AKISP – it is a well-informed, collaborative network of professionals and volunteers, agencies, nonprofits and tribal entities who actively engage in monthly meetings, sharing resources, and adapt management practices based on lessons learned statewide. We have a statewide strategic plan, and very active committees focused on management of the most harmful species (e.g., Elodea, Northern Pike, European green crab, zebra & quagga mussels). The Kachemak Bay Research Reserve co-hosted a rapid response workshop for invasive European green crab last summer and worked closely with ADF&G to publish statewide community monitoring protocols to standardize data collection and methodologies. The Research Reserve and ACCS host dependable statewide data portals for researchers, managers, and decision-makers.

This partnership of professionals works with limited funding and impressive collaboration across the vast landscape and waterways of Alaska. However, we face increasingly detrimental threats from invasive species, and much will be lost if we do not elevate these issues. We are thankful for your work as legislators to consider how to improve statewide cohesiveness and strategically leverage resources while bringing together stakeholders through the establishment of an Invasive Species Council. This top-down approach at the commissioner-level is critical for informing and advising on priorities, rapid response

capabilities and management, and establishing a funding mechanism because invasive species populations will continue to put pressure on our natural resources and economies.

Higher-level, cross-agency coordination by state department commissioners with professional and community experts at the table is the ultimate purpose of the council. Those of us who work in this field are here to help as a resource and appreciate your public service.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Katherine Schake". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large initial 'K'.

Katherine Schake



Homer, AK 99603



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May 5, 2025

The Honorable Representative Rebecca Himschoot
House of Representatives
Alaska State Capitol
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Sent via email

Re: House Bill 191 - 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 Representative Himschoot,

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 House Bill 191 (HB191). 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 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 faced 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 HB191, to ensure permitting, planning, coordination, and resources are available to address existing and emerging threats such as elodea.

Thank you for sponsoring HB191.

Sincerely,



Dean Day
Executive Director