

STATE OF ALASKA

DEPARTMENT OF NATURAL RESOURCES

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Senate Bill 127

Establishing the Southeast State Forest and relating to the Southeast State Forest; and providing for an effective date

This bill would establish a new Southeast State Forest (SESF). The SESF 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. The State Forest designation would not affect the Wrangell Borough municipal entitlement, nor would it affect calculation of entitlement acreage for future municipalities in southeast Alaska.

Section 1 – Southeast State Forest.

Legal descriptions. Section 1, subsections (a) and (d) provide legal descriptions for the lands to be designated as the Southeast State Forest (SESF). Designated lands include 20 parcels totaling approximately 25,291 acres (see chart) on Prince of Wales, Tuxekan, Kosciusko, Heceta, Revilla, and Gravina islands, and on the mainland at Crittenden Creek. These parcels are an important part of the state timber base, but are classified as General Use land, which may be sold in the future. Legislatively designating a State Forest would ensure that some land will remain available for long-term forest management, and enable thinning to increase timber volumes. Designated lands exclude areas identified as important sites for future state land disposals.

Management plan and transportation corridor. Subsection (b) directs DNR to prepare a management plan for the Southeast State Forest. Under AS 41.17.230 a management plan is required within three years after a State Forest is established. State Forest management plans must consider and permit multiple uses, include recreation and tourism, mining, use of fish and wildlife, and other traditional uses, unless the Commissioner issues a site-specific written finding that a use is incompatible with one or more other uses. Public, interagency, and Board of Forestry review is required prior to adoption of a State Forest management plan. As in other state forests, Subsection (c) states that the DNR Commissioner may also establish transportation corridors within the State Forest.

Municipal entitlements. Subsection (e) clarifies the relationship of the Southeast State Forest to current and potential municipal entitlements. State Forests can

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affect the amount of land a municipality is entitled to select, and the land available for selection. The amount of land a municipality may select is based on the maximum total acreage of vacant, unappropriated, unreserved (VUU) land in the borough boundaries within two years after the date of incorporation (AS 29.65.030). Municipal selections are limited to VUU land. Land classified as General Use land is VUU land, but State Forests are not.

The SESF is designed to have no impact on Wrangell Borough land selections. The amount of land that Wrangell Borough may select is already fixed by its date of incorporation, and this bill specifies that the Wrangell Borough may select State Forest land within the borough boundary. Three parcels in the SESF are within the Wrangell Borough boundary.

If new municipalities are incorporated before June 30, 2019, the SESF will not affect the amount of land that they can select. The bill specifies that State Forest lands that were VUU land before establishment of the State Forest will be included in the calculation of the entitlement acreage. However, parcels in the SESF may not be selected. If municipalities form after 2019, the amount and location of their entitlement would be based on the VUU land at that time.

Section 2. Regulations. This section authorizes DNR to immediately adopt regulations to implement the bill.

Section 3. Effective date for regulations. Under Section 3 the authority to adopt regulations (Section 2) takes effect immediately.

Section 4. Effective date for State Forest. Section 4 provides for an effective date of July 1, 2008.