

Greater Southeast Alaska Conservation Community

(GSACC)
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March 26, 2017

To: House Resources Committee

Subj: Recommending a change to HB155, and opposing the bill as-written

GSACC is a region-wide conservation organization founded in 2011. We defend and promote the biological integrity of Southeast Alaska's terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations. Maintaining the integrity of these natural resources is fundamental to the economic health of Southeast Alaska.

In line with HB155, we recognize the need to avoid *any* logging on the lands the Mental Health Trust owns within or adjacent to communities, in order to protect the life, limb and property of residents, and the viewsheds of the communities.

However, as written HB155 is not the way to fix this problem because it will greatly damage the ecological integrity of Revillagigedo and Prince of Wales Islands. As the Mental Health Trust points out on Slide 7 of its presentation,¹ the bill would "consolidate" the Trust's present scattered acreage. This will result in massive clearcuts, because the Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (FRPA) has no limitation on clearcut size.

Only a few years ago, the Trust created a clearcut of nearly 4,000 acres on Revilla Island (see photos, page 2), and HB155 would convey another 8,000 acres immediately adjacent to that (see map, page 3). *The result of this is predictable, inconsistent with resource protections in Alaska's Constitution, and absolutely unacceptable.* Similarly, HB155's other "consolidations" into a few large parcels on Prince of Wales Island, totaling another 12,000 acres, is also flatly unacceptable for the same reason. Past intensive, industrial-scale logging has already heavily impacted the forest ecosystems of both islands, and those impacts are not yet fully realized because it takes several decades for the second growth forest canopy to close in.

A different solution is needed — a federal buyout of the lands in question. This would: fix the problem in the communities; provide the Trust with needed funds; and prevent the certainty of massive environmental damage. It is good, in every respect.

WHY A FEDERAL BUYOUT OF AMHT'S LANDS IS JUSTIFIED

Congress established the Alaska Mental Health Trust in the mid-1950s, endowing it with a large corpus of land. Through various twists and turns, this has resulted in the present dilemma for several communities, a dilemma that must be fixed. For decades Congress has spared itself the expense of caring for mental health in Alaska by having established the Trust and its land endowment. Now there is a need to Congress to *spend a fraction of those savings* to fix this problem that Congress itself created through this endowment scheme.

Representatives of the Trust have said on several occasions that a buyout of the lands in question would be an acceptable solution. Although the Trust has not pressed for this solution, it is by far the best one because it will make all parties whole and will entirely avoid

¹ Referring to Slide 7 in the March 22 presentation to the Senate Resources Committee; numbering for the presentation to the House Resources Committee may differ.

lasting, substantial damage to Southeast Alaska's other natural resources. A buyout is in the best interests of the State of Alaska and its people.

OUR REQUEST TO THE COMMITTEE

Accordingly, GSACC requests the House Resources Committee to amend the bill by striking all references to a land exchange, and to instead craft the bill to accept a buyout of the land by the federal government, with the lands to be added to the Tongass National Forest and the proceeds to go to the Trust.



This is a recent clearcut by the Alaska Mental Health Trust, on its nearly 4,000 acre Leask Lakes tract, on the same island as Ketchikan (Revillagigedo). The cutting was done in just a few years.

HB155 includes transfer to the Mental Health Trust of 8,000 acres abutting this tract (map next page), and it too can be expected to be rapidly clearcut.

Many thousands of tourists fly over this area daily, in float planes enroute to Misty Fjords, and this kind and scale of logging harms fisheries (despite the Forest Resources & Practices Act).

Photos: October 5, 2015.



Map of Revillagigedo Island, showing:

- (1) part of AMHT's already-clearcut Leask Lakes tract (**cross-hatched**).
- (2) other State of Alaska land (**also cross-hatched**).
- (3) 8,000 acres of forest land AMHT intends to get in the exchange (**orange**).
- (4) Tongass National Forest land (**green**).

All of the cross-hatch area to the left of the western-most orange is part of the Leask Lakes tract, AMHT has already clearcut.

Cross-hatching directly beneath the orange is **other state land**, with some logging planned for 2019.

Yellow is **Cape Fox, Inc.** land, much of it heavily logged.

