

March 20, 2017

Representative Dan Ortiz
Juneau, Alaska

Dear Representative Ortiz:

I am writing in opposition to your HB 155 authorizing a land swap between the Alaska Mental Health Land Trust and the U.S. Forest Service. I have heard you state in the media that you didn't think anyone would be against this bill, but I have to voice my concerns.

First, in your March 7th press statement from your office, you mentioned that this bill would prevent logging the "Iconic" Deer Mountain, and would "allow for the preservation of Deer Mountain lands while making other lands of comparable value available to the timber industry". You go on to state that the areas that are affected by this legislation include Ketchikan, Wrangell, Petersburg, Sitka, Juneau and Meyer's Chuck.

I take exception to this because the real lands that are affected by your legislation are mostly if not all on Prince of Wales Island. Your bill trades 18,000 acres around the communities you mentioned in exchange for 20,000 acres (2,000 more acres) on what I would regard as "Iconic" Prince of Wales Island! If a bill was sponsored that would exchange 18,000 acres of POW land for 20,000 acres of land around Ketchikan to be logged, I'm sure the citizens there would go ballistic and also ask why we are exchanging 2,000 more acres. Pull out a map of Prince of Wales Island and look at the huge regions of clear cut Tongass National Forest as well as Native corporation lands and then the recent state and mental health land transfers. We are a mottled up mixture of land ownership as well as land use designations.

Another problem I have with the bill is that it is another transfer of public Tongass National Forest on Prince of Wales Island. We have seen it with recent land transfers to SEALASKA, Alaska Mental Health Trust Land, University of Alaska land and the Alaska State Forest. The public areas that residents on Prince of Wales Island once had for hunting, trapping, fishing, gathering and recreation have diminished in recent years, and once this land is logged, it can be transferred into private ownership. Those of us that have lived on this island for many years could potentially see land values drop due to the glut of private lands on our island.

I see the whole Deer Mountain issue as well as the view shed above Petersburg to be nothing more than a ploy by Alaska Mental Health Trust to get the land they really wanted on Prince Of Wales. They could have picked land near Ketchikan and Petersburg that was not "in your face" if they logged it, but they chose the land right there in town so that they could get it

transferred. How else would there already be tracts of land on Prince of Wales that they have designated for the logging?

I understand the importance of maintaining our last remaining mill which happens to be on Prince of Wales Island. You stated that you were "excited about the potential of this bill to increase revenue...for the timber industry". While I agree that it is important to keep our mill operating, I also feel that the entire region of Southeast Alaska should share in the harvest of the timber and share equally in the transfer of any land from the Tongass National Forest to any state or private entity. Remember, the Ketchikan Pulp Mill operated for all of those years off of timber that came from Prince of Wales Island. I think it is only fair that our one little mill gets a little of its' timber from Ketchikan!

I heard on the radio that there will be hearings by the Alaska Mental Health Trust in Petersburg and Ketchikan, which is understandable as they will only find support there. But I think the only fair and ethical thing to do would be to hold hearings in Nauyasut, Hollis and the other communities affected by this on Prince of Wales Island where they may actually hear a little opposition to your bill.

Thank you for your time reading this letter, and thank you for your hard work in the Alaska State House of Representatives.

Sincerely,

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