



SB 51 Testimony – Sarah Davidson, Southeast Alaska Conservation Council – 3.20.19

Esteemed Chair and members of the Alaska Senate Resources Committee. It is my sincere honor to address you today.

My name is Sarah Davidson and I'm here on behalf of the Southeast Alaska Conservation Council (SEACC).

I did not come here today to appeal to your scientific sensibilities, though it would be scientifically sensible to defeat this bill. I'm not here to speak to your logic, though the only logical course forward would be to defeat this bill. I'm not here to convince you of your fiscal responsibilities, though there is only one fiscally responsible thing to do here and that is to defeat this bill.

I'm here to appeal to your humanism, with one simple message: Senate Bill 51 will hurt all of us, even those who proposed this bill and those who are here to advocate for it. Whoever stands to gain in the short-term will lose in the long-term. Allow me to explain.

One of the distinct privileges of my job as the Inside Passage Waters Program Manager at SEACC is the opportunity to travel throughout this **phenomenal** region, speak to communities about water challenges and opportunities, and to listen to their concerns, needs, and interests.

Last week, I was in the Chilkat Valley, where I heard from several community members in Klukwan and Haines, including those who nominated the Chilkat River as an *Outstanding National Resource Water* because of its enormous cultural, economic, and ecological importance to their lives and the resilience of their communities. One person shared his experience growing up in the rust belt where it was not safe to eat the fish caught in nearby waters because of decades of heavy industrial pollution and lax water quality regulations, like 40% of our country's waterways that are officially considered impaired. He searched for a place to call home throughout the US and finally found it in the Chilkat Valley where he can eat the fish he catches and drink the water out of a nearby spring. He was brought to tears as he expressed his frustration of having searched over much time, only to have the one place he found now be threatened by industrial pollution, just like the waters where he grew up.

Another community member, whose family has called the Chilkat home for thousands of years, addressed the notion of time. She shared the idea that the impacts of the decisions we make today persist far beyond our own lives. It is not our own costs and benefits that we should be considering here as we weigh this decision, but the costs and benefits to the grandchildren of our grandchildren, or in her eloquent and powerful words "those yet to come".



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When I think about the weight of a decision such as this on SB 51 from **that** perspective, it becomes heavier, more meaningful, more urgent, and its consequences more dire. If we think about those yet to come, it's not about our own personal gain, or our family's economic standing, it's about all of us and our collective human future.

What will be the cost of making it more difficult to protect our most valuable waters? And who will bear this cost? It won't be us. It will be to those yet to come.

DEC will tell you this is a political issue. The proponents of this bill say it's a land-use issue, and therefore a legislative one. Don't be fooled. This is neither a political nor a legislative issue. It's a moral issue, as I was reminded by an elder who spoke passionately last week in the Chilkat Valley. We all stand to lose when we don't prioritize our clean water resources.

There must be a mechanism for us to protect our most valuable waters – those that offer anadromous fish habitat to the last wild salmon stocks in the world, those that form the backbone of our livelihoods, cultures, identities – those whose degradation degrades the health and wellbeing of our communities. This mechanism to protect our waters must be equally as streamlined, efficient, and accessible as the mechanism to degrade them. This is not my perspective alone. It is shared by the more than 90 people who signed our petition calling for a Tier 3 designation process equally as administrative and streamlined as the permit process to degrade our waters.

Any short-term financial gains made by the passing of SB 51 will be undermined by the long-term detriment of our clean water, our healthy fish, and our resilient communities. SB 51 hurts all of us. I call on each of you to have the courage to prioritize clean water for those yet to come by defeating this bill.