



Cold Climate Housing Research Center

**CCHRC**

March 13, 2023

The Honorable Senator Click Bishop  
The Honorable Senator Cathy Giessel  
Senate Resources Committee

**RE: Senate Bill 87 – Lumber Grading Program**

Dear Senators,

For the last few years, the Cold Climate Housing Research Center (CCHRC), in partnership with the National Renewable Energy Lab (NREL) have been working with Alaska Division of Forestry and the United States Forestry Service on wood innovation projects funded by USFS. Our research has focused on strategies that could overcome the barriers to utilizing locally harvested lumber to address rural Alaska's acute housing shortage. Currently, we are partnering with the Kuskokwim Corporation on a USFS Wood Innovation Grant project that incorporates local timber wall construction and a distinct method of milling to create a 'harvest to home' model for the Middle Kuskokwim region.

The organizations' work on this subject goes farther back than just this suite of current projects, including economic development studies of potential truss fabrication plants in rural hubs. As you may know, the smaller and more remote an Alaskan community, the less likely it is to be able to utilize its local forest resource to create lumber for housing projects. While there are some barriers in capacity and training for local mill operators, the largest barrier by far is an administrative one.

*Remote communities do not have equitable access to national lumber grading mechanisms, and as a result are required to import structural lumber at some of the highest costs per unit in the nation despite being located in one of the largest forested areas left in North America.*

This administrative barrier disproportionately affects uses for energy-efficient construction types that would qualify for many HUD-funded programs, Alaska Housing Finance requirements, and conventional lending. As a result, most local-harvest housing projects in rural Alaska tend to be traditional butt-and-pass log cabins, which do not require a lumber grade. These traditional structures are durable and resilient, but not energy efficient and not easily financeable, exacerbating the deficiencies in the current housing stock.

This legislation has the potential to greatly improve the ability of small communities, Tribes, and corporations to address the continuing housing shortage in their regions, and we urge your support.

Thank you,

Mindy L. O'Neill  
Executive Director  
Cold Climate Housing Research Center

**CCHRC** [www.cchrc.org](http://www.cchrc.org)

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**Sitka**  
CONSERVATION  
SOCIETY

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Protecting the natural environment  
of the Tongass National Forest and  
supporting the development of  
sustainable communities within  
Southeast Alaska

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March 13, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

The Sitka Conservation Society would like to offer its support of bills SB87 and HB93 currently being heard in the Alaska Legislature.

The Sitka Conservation Society has a long history of supporting Alaska sawmills in supplying lumber to local markets. We have been purchasing lumber from Southeast Alaskan mills for the Sitka High School Career Technical Education program and over the past ten years, we have supported students in construction projects including cabinetry, garden sheds, garden chairs, and a tiny home. We have also sourced locally milled lumber for Sitka Conservation Society projects including cabin and deck projects, woodsheds, barns, sauna, and flooring. We have consistently found that the locally sourced product has superior characteristics to the lumber that is shipped to Alaska from the Pacific Northwest, Canada, and the Southeastern United States, which is where most of our available lumber supply comes from.

We support this bill because the Sitka Conservation Society believes that using locally sourced building materials for local construction and carpentry work is a critical component of community sustainability. The historic model for timber resource utilization has been to export our products to out-of-state and foreign markets. This bill is a start for the State of Alaska to invest in the capacity and ability of local businesses to meet the demand of local markets with more value-added benefits to local economies and the local workforce.

We acknowledge that there is often conflict over timber harvest in Alaska. We believe that this conflict is a result of timber harvest that is done beyond the carrying-capacity of the land, with a harvest level that surpasses the sustainable yield that the Forest can provide, which results in a degraded landscape and damaged habitat for the subsistence resources that Southeast Alaskans depend on to fill their freezers. Conflict also arises when valuable trees are exported in the round, while local residents can't purchase and use locally produced timber products. This bill is a move towards figuring out how to use our local resources sustainably, improve local economies, provide more economic niches for small businesses, and give Alaska consumers options for sourcing Alaska-made products. We are in full support of these bills.

Sincerely,

Andrew Thoms  
Executive Director

**From:** [Laura Achee](#)  
**To:** [Anne Rittgers](#); [Jesse Logan](#)  
**Subject:** FW: Lumber Grading  
**Date:** Monday, March 13, 2023 11:37:30 AM

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-----Original Message-----

From: Josh Leatherman <[precisiontimberworks@yahoo.com](mailto:precisiontimberworks@yahoo.com)>  
Sent: Monday, March 13, 2023 11:35 AM  
To: Laura Achee <[Laura.Achee@akleg.gov](mailto:Laura.Achee@akleg.gov)>  
Subject: Lumber Grading

Hi Laura,

I own and operate a small contracting company that specializes in log and timber framing. I also operate a sawmill and have to ship Douglas fir in from Washington state every season.

The reason for this is the fact that most municipalities in Alaska have adopted the international building code which states that all lumber used in a structural application must bear a grade stamp by an accredited lumber grading agency.

Passing these bills would enable many small businesses like mine to utilize our bountiful and high quality Alaskan timber. We have the two largest national forest in the nation and we should be able to obtain and utilize our resources.

Most Alaskan's that I deal with would rather use and support local grown products. Being able to use the local timber in structural applications is a great start to put us on the right path a more sensible and sustainable future.

Regards,

Josh Leatherman

Precision Timberworks

[https://urldefense.com/v3/\\_http://www.timberframingalaska.com\\_!!LdOKC6s!KNYz7IWvzdWUjibwWcxcrWKR\\_NG0BIEgec1mnt1aHBjhSXCPbLQeh5hiReLuyio\\_DIX7-qpklsEe9n\\_s-cS5VRYSE60P95sS](https://urldefense.com/v3/_http://www.timberframingalaska.com_!!LdOKC6s!KNYz7IWvzdWUjibwWcxcrWKR_NG0BIEgec1mnt1aHBjhSXCPbLQeh5hiReLuyio_DIX7-qpklsEe9n_s-cS5VRYSE60P95sS)  
907-362-7688

Sent from my iPhone

**From:** [Gordon Chew](#)  
**To:** [Senate Resources](#)  
**Cc:** [Laura Achee](#); [Jesse Logan](#)  
**Subject:** Letter in Support of SB 87  
**Date:** Monday, March 13, 2023 10:54:02 AM

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Dear Senate Resource Committee

It is with great encouragement that I offer our support for the proposed lumber grading bill.

As builders, restoration contractors and lumber millers this is a great opportunity to begin using the high quality products we offer in a wider application: this will support further employment opportunities and promote local production and sales of timber to owner/builders and contractors across the state.

There is no downside to this bill as we need to use all of our Alaskan resources to build and to rebuild the infrastructure in our towns, city's and state.

Buying from Alaskans and keeping our industry alive and thriving are just a couple of the lasting benefits to this action.

Many thanks,

~Gordon

Gordon Chew  
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**From:** [Andrew Traxler](#)  
**To:** [Senate Resources](#); [House Labor and Commerce](#)  
**Cc:** [Laura Achee](#)  
**Subject:** Senate Bill 87, House Bill 93  
**Date:** Friday, March 10, 2023 12:36:03 PM

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This email is to show that we support Senate Bill 87, and House Bill 93. In regards to making local lumber grading possible, for smaller scale sawmill operations. I Andrew Traxler write this, with the permission of the fellow business owners listed here. We are Sawmill and Logging business owners. Thank you for your time.

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