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March 16, 2023

To Whom It May Concern:

The Sitka Conservation Society (SCS), Spruce Root, Inc., and The Nature Conservancy's Alaska Chapter (TNC) would like to offer our 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. SCS has 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. SCS has also sourced locally milled lumber for cabin and deck projects, woodsheds, barns, sauna, and flooring. SCS has 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 collectively support this bill because the SCS, Spruce Root and TNC all believe 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  
Sitka Conservation Society

Alana Peterson  
Executive Director  
Spruce Root, Inc.

Julia Nave  
Interim SE Alaska Program Co-Director  
The Nature Conservancy, Alaska