ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
SENATE RESOURCES STANDING COMMITTEE
May 12, 2025
3:30 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Senator Cathy Giessel, Chair
Senator Bill Wielechowski, Vice Chair
Senator Matt Claman
Senator Forrest Dunbar
Senator Scott Kawasaki
Senator Shelley Hughes
Senator Robert Myers

MEMBERS ABSENT

All members present

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

SENATE BILL NO. 174
"An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing for an effective date."

- HEARD & HELD

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 20
Supporting federal, state, and local efforts to clean up and remove marine debris from the state; urging the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency to provide additional funding for those efforts and to remove barriers faced by tribes and rural communities in accessing those funds; and urging the Alaska Congressional delegation to advocate for increased federal funding and support for marine debris prevention, clean up, removal, backhaul, and education.

- HEARD & HELD

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

BILL: SB 174
SHORT TITLE: INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT
SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) DUNBAR

04/14/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/14/25	(S)	RES, FIN
04/28/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/28/25	(S)	Heard & Held
04/28/25	(S)	MINUTE(RES)
04/30/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205
04/30/25	(S)	-- MEETING CANCELED --
05/12/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

BILL: SJR 20
SHORT TITLE: CLEAN UP MARINE DEBRIS
SPONSOR(s): SENATOR(s) BJORKMAN

04/14/25	(S)	READ THE FIRST TIME - REFERRALS
04/14/25	(S)	RES
05/12/25	(S)	RES AT 3:30 PM BUTROVICH 205

WITNESS REGISTER

TOBIAS SCHWOERER, Research Assistant Professor
Natural Resources Economics
International Arctic Research Center
University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF)
Fairbanks, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 174.

DANIELLE VERNA, Program Manager
Environmental Monitoring
Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (RCAC)
Valdez, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 174.

SUMMER NAY, Chair
Alaska Invasive Species Partnership
Delta Junction, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SB 174.

SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D
Alaska State Legislature
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Sponsor of SJR 20.

LAUREN DIVINE, Director
Ecosystem Conservation Office
Aleut Community of St. Paul Island
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SJR 20.

MICHAEL LEVINE, Senior Director
Alaska Programs
Ocean Conservancy
Juneau, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SJR 20.

RALPH WOLFE, Director
Indigenous Stewardship Programs
Native Lands and Resources
Tlingit and Haida
Sitka, Alaska
POSITION STATEMENT: Testified by invitation on SJR 20.

ACTION NARRATIVE

3:30:58 PM
CHAIR GIESSEL called the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting to order at 3:30 p.m. Present at the call to order were Senators Myers, Dunbar, Kawasaki, Hughes, Wielechowski, Claman and Chair Giessel.

SB 174-INVASIVE SPECIES MANAGEMENT

3:31:37 PM
CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SENATE BILL NO. 174 "An Act establishing the Alaska Invasive Species Council in the Department of Fish and Game; relating to management of invasive species; and providing for an effective date."

3:32:26 PM
SENATOR FORREST DUNBAR, speaking as sponsor of SB 174, said this legislation establishes an Alaska Invasive Species Council in Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). He said SB 174 is the result of work done with advocates over the interim. Those advocates believe Alaska is at an increased risk for invasive species and that a more effective coordination across state departments is necessary to respond to that risk.

3:33:58 PM
TOBIAS SCHWOERER, Research Assistant Professor, Natural Resources Economics, International Arctic Research Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF), Fairbanks, Alaska, introduced himself and provided a brief history of his work in invasive species management.

3:34:54 PM
MR. SCHWOERER advanced to slide 2, containing an infographic illustrating Alaska's increasing biodiversity risk. He stated that Elodea research has illustrated the need for a statewide coordinated response in order to address this risk. He explained that Zebra mussels and Quagga mussels are highly invasive and are not native to North America. These mussels have been confirmed in various states and territories across North America and are moving northward. Lines on the infographic illustrate the movement of seasonal vessels from those regions and entering Alaska. This also applies to vessels that are purchased by Alaskans and brought by trailer to the state (from state's where Zebra and Quagga mussels have been detected). He noted that the infographic shows one port of entry.

3:36:31 PM
CHAIR GIESSEL noted that the Pacific Northwest Economic Region (PNWER) does work in this area. She said that vessels entering the state undergo an inspection yet invasive mussels may still be present. She asked whether there is surveillance at the Alaska Highway border.

MR. SCHWOERER said slide 3 would address this question.

3:37:16 PM
MR. SCHWOERER advanced to slide 3, containing an infographic with data related to the number of boats used both within and outside of Alaskan waters and related invasive mussel activity by region:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Is Alaska prepared?

Annually, more than 1,000 watercraft from outside enter Alaska through multiple unprotected / not monitored ports of entry

Overland
Boats enter Alaska on trailers via Canada/Alaska border

Southcentral by Sea
Boats enter Alaska on barge/ferry via Southcentral ports

Southeast by Sea
Boats enter Alaska on barge/ferry via Southeast ports

Total
1260 motorized boats brought to Alaska each year

Used
370 boats previously used in water outside Alaska

Mussels
129 boats previously used in states with invasive mussels

Freshwater
74 boats used in mussel states and likely destined for Alaska freshwater.

MR. SCHWOERER said the US Fish and Wildlife Service works with border protection to inspect vessels crossing the Canada/Alaska border. This seasonal (summer) inspection service provided the data from slide 2. He pointed out that there is no port inspection; therefore, boats arriving via ferry and/or barge to Southcentral and Southeastern Alaska are not inspected. He recalled that a high percentage (roughly one-third) of vessels arriving in Alaska via the Alaska Highway (Alcan) are not inspected. He emphasized that, despite having inspection stations in other states and in Canada, many vessels entering Alaska are not inspected prior to arriving at the Canada/Alaska border. He noted 2023 estimates that close to 1,000 watercraft are coming through ports in Southeast and Southcentral Alaska each year.

3:39:25 PM
MR. SCHWOERER advanced to slide 4:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Example:

Elodea response

- Current cum. damages from Elodea: close to $1 billion
- Current cum. spending managing Elodea: $7 million
    - around $1 million in inefficiencies
- Insufficient resources, personnel flat

- Fragmented decision
- Need for strategy, efficiency, and coordination
- Need for *resource emergency response plan*

MR. SCHWOERER explained that Elodea is an aquatic water weed. He drew attention to the image on slide 4, which shows the Elodea infestation in the Chena Slough, and noted that almost 100 percent of the slough is infested. He said the response began in 2013. He explained that the $7 million in spending has included herbicide and management. He emphasized that Elodea has caused over $1 billion in damage to Alaska's sockeye fishery. He asserted that this damage is due to the lack of a statewide response and statewide eradication of Elodea. He explained that, when some areas with infestation are left unmanaged, there is a chance for that infestation to spread to other areas (and back into and through waterbodies that have just been cleared of the infestation). He briefly discussed the impact of inefficiencies in affected regions. He opined that a council could have provided top-down strategies, increased efficiency and coordination, thus leading to the use of best-management practices statewide. He emphasized the need for coordination between agencies and for a statewide strategy and added that not having a council in place has increased costs.

3:42:00 PM
MR. SCHWOERER stated that increased biosecurity risks will lead to more difficult financial decisions related to invasive species management. He said this will require increasingly complex decisions about what resources the State of Alaska will protect - and which will be left to deteriorate. He briefly discussed the importance having strategies in place that will prevent fragmented decision-making. He said emergency response plans are necessary to effectively respond and protect natural resources. He urged consideration of what this could mean for salmon fisheries. He explained that salmon will be highly effected, as Quagga and Zebra mussels impact the salmon food chain. He noted upcoming research on this topic and said invasive mussels are a significant up and coming risk for Alaska's fisheries.

3:44:03 PM
MR. SCHWOERER advanced to slide 5, containing an infographic to illustrate the status of Elodea infestations across the state. He said there are 49 infestations statewide, 20 of which have been eradicated:

[Original punctuation provided.]

Elodea infestations - current status

Alaska Lakes

- Elodea still present (33)
- Elodea treatment, not detected (10)
- No Elodea detected (509)

3:44:25 PM
MR. SCHWOERER advanced to slide 6, containing an infographic showing how floatplanes contribute to the increasingly complex and remote infestations of Elodea across Alaska. He pointed out that there is a large amount of floatplane traffic from Southcentral Alaska into Bristol Bay. These floatplanes come from waterbodies (in Southcentral Alaska) that have potentially be infected with Alodea. He emphasized the risk this poses to Sockeye salmon fisheries statewide. He stated that, once Elodea infests Bristol Bay, it is too late. Elodea is increasingly seen in remote areas (e.g. Alexander Lake), which results in highly complex, lengthy, and increasingly costly infestations.

3:45:37 PM
MR. SCHWOERER advanced to slide 7, containing a graph to illustrate infestation response times in Anchorage, Cordova, Fairbanks, and the Kenai Peninsula from 2015-2024. He emphasized that an initial, under-resourced response ultimately leads to a longer, more costly response. He said the cost has doubled or even tripled during the past 10 years. He expressed concern with this increasing cost. He explained that the high cost is due to a combination of an under-resourced response and an infestation that, over time, impacts more costly locations. He reiterated that managing Elodea infestations in remote locations is complex and costly.

3:46:47 PM
SENATOR MYERS observed that the response times on slide 7 vary based on location. He pointed out faster response times for Anchorage and Southcentral and slower response times for Fairbanks and Cordova. He asked if the response time is related to geography as well as resources.

3:47:29 PM
MR. SCHWOERER agreed with that assessment. He said it also depends on flow rate (i.e. whether a water body has flow or is

static). He explained that herbicide concentration is relatively easy to manage in areas where flow is minimal. He contrasted this with areas with higher flow-through and potentially high precipitation, both of which impact herbicide concentration. He emphasized that diluted herbicide is potentially ineffective. He said this is an issue in Chena Slough. Remoteness is another factor. He said that, while the distribution on the graph on slide 7 appears to be regional, it does not tell the full story. He emphasized that it depends on the complexity of the system and added that each eradication is different.

3:48:51 PM
SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked about the cost per water body to eradicate Elodea. He also asked how much the State of Alaska should spend on continued eradication per year.

3:49:09 PM
MR. SCHWOERER addressed the cost per year and indicated that he could provide a rough estimate. He opined that doubling the current amount of dedicated funding would be sufficient. He indicated that he would address this in more detail on an upcoming slide.

3:49:27 PM
SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI repeated his questions related to the cost per water body and the cost per year.

3:49:37 PM
MR. SCHWOERER replied that the cost for the herbicide is roughly $1,000/surface acre. He explained that the herbicide must remain at a specific concentration. Water flow and precipitation can impact herbicide concentration levels, which can result in increased costs of over $2,000/surface acre (or more). He explained that remote locations - which are more difficult to access in order to apply and monitor herbicide levels - have even higher costs.

3:50:40 PM
SENATOR WIELECHOWSKI asked whether the herbicide kills fish.

MR. SCHWOERER replied no. He explained that fluridone is the primary herbicide used to eradicate Elodea. This is a systemic herbicide that interrupts the plant's ability to photosynthesize. He added that fluridone is rated as safe to use in water reservoirs.

3:51:32 PM

SENATOR DUNBAR noted the limited time remaining and said upcoming invited testimony would address policy and structure questions. He asked Mr. Schwoerer to advance to slide 10 and discuss impacted fisheries.

3:52:04 PM
MR. SCHWOERER advanced to slide 10 and discussed the cost of not eradicating Elodea. Slide 10 contains a graph illustrating the hidden fisheries damages from 2017-2100. Slide 10 also references a paper titled, "Elodea mediates juvenile salmon growth by altering physical structure in freshwater habitats." He explained that not eradicating Elodea carries a $1 billion hidden cost. He said this estimate is in line with the latest research regarding Elodea's impact on juvenile salmon growth. He reiterated that (based on research in the Copper River Delta) Elodea has a negative effect on the salmon food web.

3:53:49 PM
DANIELLE VERNA, Program Manager, Environmental Monitoring, Prince William Sound Regional Citizens' Advisory Council (RCAC), Valdez, Alaska, provided a brief work history and overview of RCAC. She stated that that commercial shipping is a prevalent vector of marine invasive species and RCAC supports monitoring invasive species. In addition, RCAC has advocated for policies to prevent introducing invasive species. She stated that invasive species pose a significant threat to the health of the environment, the economy, and ways of life in Alaska. She compared invasive species to the damage caused by an oil spill and emphasized that prevention is the key to mitigating the impacts. She stated that RCAC supports SB 174.

3:55:00 PM
MS. VERNA said that it took a disaster like the Exxon-Valdez oil spill to recognize the value of oil spill prevention and overcome complacency. She stated that Alaska's Prince William Sound now has one of the most robust spill prevention and response systems in the world. She said RCAC would like to see more emphasis on invasive species prevention and rapid response in Alaska. She stated that an Invasive Species Council is a proven and effective model that results in increased coordination for the purposes of prevention and rapid response. She pointed out that over 18 other states have invasive species councils. She noted that the Invasive Species Council proposed by SB 174 would serve in an advisory role, establishing consistent approaches across state agencies. The council does not have the authority to direct state agencies or funding. The council would elevate the discussion of invasive species while

building awareness at higher levels of government. This would include an annual update to the legislature on invasive species issues and management in Alaska.

MS. VERNA acknowledged that, for the past few years, the governor has signed a proclamation recognizing the second full week of June as Alaska Invasive Species Awareness Week. She briefly discussed invasive species work across the state, both by state agencies and by the Alaska Invasive Species Partnership (AKISP). She stated that RCAC recognizes the need for top-down, strategic leveraging of resources and stakeholder engagement. An Invasive Species Council would create the venue for this to occur. She stated that SB 174 takes previous legislative feedback regarding council size into consideration. She explained that the proposed council is made up of five voting members and includes legislative and state agency participation. In addition, there is the option to broaden participation by including advisory members.

3:58:08 PM
SENATOR MYERS noted that SB 174 does not mandate the council to consult with private industry. He briefly discussed the work Alyeska does with respect to monitoring and wondered whether input from private industry might be helpful.

3:58:49 PM
MS. VERNA replied that input from industry is vital to the successful management of invasive species. She stated that utility and pipeline rights-of-way are pathways for invasive species (along with tankers and cruise ships). She explained that previous legislation related to creating an Invasive Species Council specified membership. In that legislation, the size of the council grew to 27 members, which she described as unwieldy. She explained that in SB 174 reduces the number of seats on the council; advisory council seats would provide additional input and could include industry representatives.

4:00:15 PM
SUMMER NAY, Chair, Alaska Invasive Species Partnership (AKISP), Delta Junction, Alaska, said AKISP strongly supports SB 174. She briefly described AKISP, which is a statewide coalition united by the shared mission to prevent and manage invasive species across Alaska's terrestrial, freshwater, and marine environments. AKISP provides credible, science-based information to support sound management decisions and develop effective policy. She briefly described monthly virtual meetings, annual workshops, and outreach efforts. She acknowledged that valuable

work is being done across many sectors; however, she stated that establishing an Invasive Species Council would be foundational, providing strategic information and statewide perspectives.

MS. NAY stated that a council would help to align efforts, reduce redundancy, and ensure that resources are used effectively. It would also improve Alaska's top-down collaboration. She pointed out that invasive species councils have proven effective in other states and offered examples. She emphasized that invasive species threaten ecosystems, cultural traditions, economies, and recreational resources. She pointed out that possible vectors for the spread of invasive species include float planes, recreation, agricultural activities, highway construction equipment, and commercial shipping, among others. She stated that a council would help insure rapid, coordinated responses when prevention is not possible. She urged support of SB 174, which would help protect Alaska's natural resources, livelihoods, and ways of life.

4:03:54 PM
SENATOR KAWASAKI noted that travelers returning from Hawaii must pass through a check before entering the state. He opined that this method is relatively inclusive. He asked how vectors and points of entry would be addressed.

4:04:36 PM
SENATOR DUNBAR deferred the question. He explained that SB 174 would create a more coordinated response and would elevate the issue through the creation of the council. He stated that he is unsure what recommendations the council would make. He surmised that, due to Alaska's size, monitoring the various points of entry could pose a challenge.

MS. NAY asked to hear the question again.

4:05:41 PM
SENATOR KAWASAKI asked how the Invasive Species Council would respond to various vectors and points of entry once they are identified. He wondered if the response could include inspectors at every port.

4:06:13 PM
MS. NAY replied that currently there is a check station at the Alaska-Canada border. She stated that the response would include more checks and inspections of that kind. She briefly noted related research in Valdez.

4:06:49 PM
CHAIR GIESSEL held SB 174 in committee.

SJR 20-CLEAN UP MARINE DEBRIS

4:07:09 PM
CHAIR GIESSEL announced the consideration of SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION NO. 20 Supporting federal, state, and local efforts to clean up and remove marine debris from the state; urging the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the Environmental Protection Agency to provide additional funding for those efforts and to remove barriers faced by tribes and rural communities in accessing those funds; and urging the Alaska Congressional delegation to advocate for increased federal funding and support for marine debris prevention, clean up, removal, backhaul, and education.

4:07:33 PM
SENATOR JESSE BJORKMAN, District D, Alaska State Legislature, Juneau, Alaska, paraphrased the sponsor statement for SJR 20:

[Original punctuation provided.]

SJR 20 Clean Up Marine Debris
Sponsor Statement
Version N

Alaska's culture revolves around a healthy ocean and ecosystem, the ocean provides us with food, jobs, and tradition. Alaskans use the ocean to provide for themselves every single day.

Foreign trash floating through Federal water collects in remote areas where it pollutes beaches and kills wildlife. Distance, expense, and rugged conditions make cleanup a challenge. Allowing marine debris to continue to collect around the state's shorelines is detrimental to our way of life.

Since 2006, NOAA has directly funded projects in Alaska that have removed over two million pounds of debris. Federal agencies like NOAA and the EPA can continue to help Alaska get on track to clean up the state's waters. The state of Alaska has an estimated 44,000 miles of shoreline, almost as much as the entirety of the United States combined. Based on the estimate of shoreline, only around 6 percent of the

coastline in Alaska has been cleaned since efforts begun.

It is extremely difficult to properly dispose of marine debris after removal, leaving communities with messes they did not create. SJR 20 urges the Alaska Congressional Delegation to advocate for increased federal funding to support marine debris cleanup, backhaul, prevention, and education.

We urge members support of SJR 20. This Foreign debris must not trash Alaska any longer!

4:09:42 PM
CHAIR GIESSEL announced invited testimony on SJR 20.

4:10:12 PM
LAUREN DIVINE, Director, Ecosystem Conservation Office, Aleut Community of St. Paul Island, Anchorage, Alaska, expressed appreciation for SJR 20. She described the decades of extensive work done by the Aleut Community of St. Paul to remove marine debris from its remote shorelines. She emphasized the time, resources, capacity, and financial investment. She stated that this is a never-ending battle. She pointed out that the debris is not locally sourced; tens of thousands of pounds of marine debris are brought to Alaska via ocean currents. Over 80 percent of the debris on the St. Paul shoreline is fishing-industry related. This includes nets, ropes, fishing lines, and buoys, among others. She emphasized the negative impact marine debris has on wildlife.

MS. DIVINE pointed out that St. Paul Island is home to the majority of the world's breeding population of northern fur seals. She emphasized that this fur seal population is an important subsistence resource and adds to the island's biodiversity. She stated that, in the Bering Sea, millions of seabirds and other marine wildlife are at risk due to exposure to marine debris. She said that the Aleut Community of St. Paul has worked to strengthen state and local partnerships to address the challenges of clearing marine debris. She emphasized the need for partnerships and financial assistance - and the important role SJR 20 would play in bringing greater attention and support to this issue. She added that this would benefit both remote and tribal communities and would aid statewide efforts.

4:13:19 PM

SENATOR KAWASAKI directed attention to an Ocean Conservancy map of the Alaska shoreline. He noted that the map indicates storm currents in the Gulf of Alaska and the [Alaska Stream], which could bring debris to Alaska. He recalled Ms. Divine's testimony that most of the debris does not originate in Alaska and asked for more information about where the debris is coming from.

4:13:56 PM
MS. DIVINE replied that Alaska currents carry debris from global currents. She explained that the debris can and does originate from outside of Alaska. Marine debris can come from beyond the Arctic and sub-Arctic areas. She said that St. Paul sees debris from countries across the Pacific Ocean. This includes large, commercial-scale debris. She noted that the debris often contains foreign language labels indicating its origins. She said the debris finds its way into currents around the Bering Sea and the Bering Sea shelf and float, which bring it to St. Paul Island. St. Paul Island shares debris sources and problems with Western Alaska and the Northern Bering Sea (i.e. the debris travels across the Pacific Ocean), while debris in the Gulf of Alaska has different origins. She invited others to note where debris in their regions is coming from.

4:15:39 PM
MICHAEL LEVINE, Senior Director, Alaska Programs, Ocean Conservancy, Juneau, Alaska, expressed gratitude for SJR 20. He briefly described Ocean Conservancy's work in Alaska, which includes programs focused on fisheries, shipping, clean ocean energy, and marine debris. Ocean Conservancy has worked on marine debris issues for close to 40 years. He briefly described the International Coastal Cleanup program, which began in 1986 and has engaged more than 18 million volunteers and cleaned up 440 million pounds of trash in 155 countries.

4:17:18 PM
MR. LEVINE said the International Coastal Cleanup program - and the Ocean Conservancy's work in Alaska - is built on providing support to communities (including tribes, individuals, and local organizations) that are working to clean up local beaches. He explained that Ocean Conservancy provides technical expertise, raise funding, and build connections among individuals working on marine debris issues. He emphasized that marine debris is prevalent and unique in Alaska. He explained that debris washes up on Alaskan shores in amazing quantities. He directed attention to SJR 20, page 2, lines 16-18, which states that as of 2014, tribes, communities, and organizations around the state

have removed more than 3,000,000 pounds of debris in documented cleanups.

MR. LEVINE estimated that this amount has increased by hundreds of thousands of pounds since that time. He turned to Senator Kawasaki's question about where the debris originates and confirmed that the debris comes from faraway places. He explained that debris from the Fukushima nuclear accident (Fukushima, Japan, 2011) has crossed the Pacific Ocean and washed up on Alaskan shores. He shared his belief that this issue is uniquely Alaskan, cutting across geographies and political lines. He noted that marine debris is a larger problem in Alaska than in other states, in part due to Alaska's large coastline. He emphasized partnerships with many organizations across multiple industries and said this is a lesson in what Alaskan's can do if they work together.

4:19:29 PM
MR. LEVINE emphasized that the work is extremely expensive. He explained that debris cleanups in remote locations (e.g. St. Paul Island) require equipment, manpower, and technical expertise in order to transport the debris to the landfill. He pointed out that the debris then takes up space in the landfill, which creates another issue. He said Ocean Conservancy and other organizations are working to create a "back haul" program to transport the debris from remote communities to recycling and disposal facilities (largely in the Lower 48). He said Ocean Conservancy received a federal grant from the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) to begin a back haul pilot program in Alaska. He noted support from Alaska's Senate delegation and others across the state. He reiterated that this is a non-partisan issue that requires an "all hands on deck" approach. He encouraged the legislature's support and passage of SJR 20.

4:20:50 PM
SENATOR KAWASAKI recalled funding that was allocated for Pacific states to use for cleanup after the Fukushima disaster occurred. He asked how the money was divided and what it was used for. He surmised that it was not enough to address all the associated cleanup needs.

4:21:23 PM
MR. LEVINE replied that he does not know how all the money was spent. He recalled surveys to discover debris "hot spots." He said he would research this question and provide additional information to the committee. He pointed out that large quantities of debris have washed up on shore after recent

weather events, including after Typhoon Merbok in 2022. He commented that, regardless of how the funds from the Fukushima disaster were spent, additional assistance is needed to clean up Alaska's shoreline.

4:22:47 PM
RALPH WOLFE, Director, Indigenous Stewardship Programs, Native Lands and Resources, Tlingit and Haida, Sitka, Alaska, discussed the important role partnerships play in clearing marine debris. He stated that Tlingit and Haida partners with organizations like Ocean Conservancy to clean up marine debris in communities throughout Southeast Alaska. Over the past year, Tlingit & Haida has picked up nearly 10,000 pounds of debris across 4 communities (with two days spent by 10-15 people in each community). He said this does not cover a fraction of the debris that is present and in need of cleaning. He explained that coordination and logistics are often a challenge, as many of the locations are remote. He explained that time and funding pose a challenge. He said cleanup events must account for tide, weather, hazards, and arranging disposal. He stated that items left in Southeast Alaska dumps are at risk of ending up back in the ocean.

4:25:13 PM
MR. WOLFE said that the coordination continues once the cleanup event is complete. He said the hope is to recycle the debris, rather than move it from one location to another. He emphasized the intention to find an ethical way to dispose of the debris. He said nets and fishing equipment washes up on beaches. He explained that large fishing nets are difficult to remove and offered a personal anecdote to illustrate this. He shared his belief that SJR 20 would help organizations like Tlingit and Haida find additional funding sources outside of Alaska. He opined that Alaskans should not have to deal with this issue but acknowledged that Alaskans are the ones on the ground and feeling the direct impacts. He briefly discussed microplastics and the impact they have on wildlife such as seals, sea otters, and sea lions. Microplastics are found throughout the marine food chain and pose a significant risk to the ecosystem. This negatively impacts sea life as well as those who rely on the ocean for subsistence and challenges indigenous ways of life. He indicated that Tlingit & Haida will continue to do this work regardless, but emphasized the importance of partnerships that can offer financial support. He stated that it is not simply "picking up trash" - rather, it is about safeguarding livelihoods, restoring ecosystems, and honoring the connection between people and place. He commented that SJR 20 would

encourage investment in marine debris cleanup and would support partnerships throughout Alaska. He said Tlingit & Haida has partners from the southernmost coast of Southeast Alaska up to Kodiak and beyond.

4:27:39 PM
CHAIR GIESSEL opened public testimony on SJR 20; finding none, she closed public testimony.

4:28:03 PM
SENATOR KAWASAKI shared that Japan provided a goodwill gift to National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) to collect marine debris after the Fukushima disaster. He asked if there are other (national or international) avenues to address marine debris. He opined that each country should be responsible for its own debris - and should not be required to clean up debris from other countries. He asked if there are any international treaties that address this issue. He expressed uncertainty regarding whether the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) would apply in this case, as the United States is not party to that treaty.

4:28:50 PM
SENATOR BJORKMAN deferred the question.

4:29:12 PM
MR. LEVINE replied that he does not know. He said he would research this alongside Senator Kawasaki's earlier question related to Fukushima funding and provide any additional information to the committee.

4:30:11 PM
CHAIR GIESSEL asked if Mr. Levine would also investigate whether the Arctic Council has any related policies or activities and provide this information to the committee.

4:30:45 PM
CHAIR GIESSEL held SJR 20 in committee.

4:31:22 PM
There being no further business to come before the committee, Chair Giessel adjourned the Senate Resources Standing Committee meeting at 4:31 p.m.