

SEALASKA LANDS BILL IS BAD DEAL FOR HUNTERS AND FISHERMEN

BY WAYNE REGELIN

Territorial Sportsmen (TSI) supports conveyance of lands to Sealaska Corporation to meet requirements of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANSCA). Finalization of the land selections is necessary to allow continued economic growth and stability throughout Southeast Alaska. TSI supported ANSCA and has a long record of supporting responsible economic development on the Tongass. We supported the Greens Creek and Kensington mines and continue to support the logging industry. However, we have great concerns about the Sealaska Lands Bills S.B. 730 and/H.R. 1408 because it is just a bad deal for hunters, fishermen, others that enjoy the Tongass. We are urging Senator Murkowski and Representative Young to make significant amendments to these bills.

Amendments need to insure:

- Access to public land is not blocked or restricted by selected lands.
- New types of selections do not lead to reopening of native claims throughout Alaska.
- Passage does not trigger listing of the wolf as an endangered species.
- Land sections and resulting timber harvest have no severe deleterious impacts on nine small villages on Prince of Wales and Kosciusko Islands

The bills convey three long, narrow strips of land to Sealaska. One strip, between Yakutat and Dry Bay, is 25 feet wide and nearly 50 miles long. These conveyances would allow Sealaska to deny access or charge a fee for access to vast areas of public lands and the resources. These strips have no other use. This is simply bad public policy.

Sealaska continues to tell the public that they will be good neighbors, allowing the public to use or cross their newly selected lands. However their request to allow selection of long, narrow strips of land and rejection of specific language to protect public access tells a different story.

Inclusion of Traditional, Recreational, and Renewable Energy Use Value Sites and the migration routes will have dire unanticipated consequences. To date, no other Regional or Village Native Corporation has been allowed to select narrow strips of land or small areas with high value for fishing lodges or energy development. This legislation will set a precedent likely resulting in the reopening of native claims throughout Alaska. It is not reasonable to provide one Regional Native Corporation such lucrative entitlements without expecting the other Native Corporations to demand similar benefits. Reopening of native land claims will have a stifling impact on Alaska's economy for years.

Creation of old-growth reserves in the current Tongass Land Management Plan was a critical factor in the decision to not list the Alexander Archipelago wolf as an endangered species. The old-growth reserves provided enough protection to insure the long-term survival of the wolf.

The proposed legislation authorizes selection of several old-growth reserves by Sealaska. This will result in renewed efforts by environmental groups to list the wolf and will require a revision of the Tongass Land Use Management Plan. TLUMP revisions and ESA listings will have devastating impacts on the economy of southeast Alaska.

This legislation has become controversial throughout Alaska and especially in southeastern Alaska. We know of no one that opposes conveying all of the lands to Sealaska they are entitled to by ANSCA. Opposition arises because the bill:

1. Allows Sealaska to select lands outside of the boundaries for selection that were established by Congress at the specific request of Sealaska in 1975.
2. Authorizes the sections of 25 foot, miles long strips of lands to block access to public lands.
3. Allows Sealaska to select many small but highly valuable recreational and energy producing sites.

In 2008, Sealaska made their final selections within the 10 blocks of lands where selections could be made and asked the BLM to convey the lands. Subsequently, Sealaska asked the BLM to place a hold on the conveyances as they tried to get a more lucrative deal from Congress. No Congressional action is necessary for Sealaska to receive the lands they are entitled to under ANSCA.

Regelin is President of Territorial Sportsmen Inc. A Juneau based conservation organization that promotes the rights of all citizens to hunt, fish and trap. TSI was founded in 1950 and has 1800 members.