

# Greater Southeast Alaska Conservation Community

The Honorable Lisa A. Murkowski  
Chairman  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
709 Hart Senate Office Building Washington,  
DC 20510-0203

The Honorable Maria Cantwell  
Ranking Member  
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources  
511 Hart Senate Office Building Washington,  
DC 20510-4705

Subj: Introduced bills concerning the Tongass National Forest

15 September 2016

Dear Senators,

The Greater Southeast Alaska Conservation Community (GSACC) is a grassroots regional environmental (501 c.3) nonprofit formed in 2011. GSACC's mission is, *"To defend and promote the biological integrity of Southeast Alaska's terrestrial, freshwater, and marine ecosystems for the benefit of current and future generations."* Our volunteer board is composed of career professionals in resource management and biological research as well as commercial fishermen representing several gear groups focusing on a variety of target species.

On behalf of the Board of Directors and membership of GSACC, we urge Senator Murkowski to withdraw the full suite of bills. Individually as well as collectively, the bills are an assault on the already tenuous state of ecological integrity in our region, through transfers of land ownership and the resulting substantial deregulation of forest management. The unprecedented scale and sweeping changes imposed by any of these bills (S.3004, S.3005, S.3006; S.3202, S.3203, S.3204; & S.3273) is a breathtaking demonstration of opportunism at the expense of present and future generations of Alaskans and all American citizens as owners of our public lands.

S.3006 deserves special mention because of its intense press coverage. As the communities of Petersburg and Ketchikan face the Alaska Mental Health Trust's (AMHT's) daunting ultimatum to log its landslide-prone mountain slopes in those towns unless S. 3006 passes, much of Southeast's residents cannot help but feel being played as hostages and political pawns in this legislation. Senator Murkowski, you said in 2010 in Petersburg that you truly "regret the anxiety & tension that the Sealaska bill had created in our small towns and that you recognize, "...has pitted neighbor against neighbor" and that the "resentment is not good for communities."

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Indeed Senator, such is the pernicious effect your lands legislation has already had on our communities and continues to this day.

S. 3006 short-circuits the existing Agreement to Initiate a land exchange with AMHT and the USFS. It also short-circuits the necessary public involvement associated with that procedural protocol by employing the industry's perennial narrative of imminent collapse in order to justify congressional intervention.

Instead of the terms of S. 3006, we ask that you introduce a bill for a simple Federal legislative buy-out of the AMHT lands in question — to provide an equivalent monetary endowment for AMHT instead of a land-based one. In the words of GSACC board member Becky Knight, published in the Juneau Empire recently:

*“The best alternative would be for the federal government to trade an ample monetary endowment to AMHT in exchange for the land holdings (it) has been trying to unload. The endowment should be based on an appraisal of the profit that the Trust could be expected to net over two cutting cycles (i.e. the net value to the Trust of the present timber, plus something for the land.)*

As Ms. Knight points out, this would allow AMHT to focus on its primary mission, one normally expected of Mental Health service providers in government, instead of serving as a heavy-handed corporate proxy of the Southeast Alaska timber industry.

Your stated regret for pitting neighbor against neighbor, misses an essential fact. Your zeal for privatization and deregulation is also pitting the unsustainable sector of old growth clearcutting against our two world class, sustainable economic sectors. Even the Editor of the Ketchikan Daily News recently acknowledged the impacts to Ketchikan's tourism economy, should Deer Mountain get logged.

Southeast's billion dollars-apiece, commercial fishing and tourism industries are each dependent upon intact, old growth forests and the resilient, productive watersheds they provide. The timber industry is targeting those same old growth forests, which require centuries for the original structure and function to return. Whole watersheds comprised of centuries-old forest can be eliminated in a single cutting season, while timber represents all of 1% of the regional economy.

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In closing, please find evidential photographic documentation taken by one of GSACC's members, who as a commercial salmon troller is depending upon resilient, productive watersheds. The images represent State of Alaska-approved activities of the Sealaska Timber Corporation on the Cleveland Peninsula just a few miles north of Ketchikan. Please consider the effects of your privatization and deregulation legislation upon the changing vistas and natural wealth of our world famous Scenic By-Ways of the Inside Passage.

Sincerely,



David Beebe  
GSACC president



Sealaska Clearcut, and cruise ship, Clarence Strait, June 2014 photos by Joseph Sebastian, skipper, FV Alta E

