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Sealaska Land Legislation Receives Subcommittee Hearing

Juneau, Alaska— Sealaska Director Byron Mallott testified before the US Senate Public Lands and Forest subcommittee in support of S 881, the *Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Act*, which Sealaska refers to as *Haa Aani*. “This legislation is a reflection of the significance of Native land to our people and its importance in meeting cultural, social and economic needs,” Mallott testified. “It is also about balancing the protection of sacred sites, sustainable economic development and environmental protections.”

S 881 was introduced by Alaska US Senator Lisa Murkowski and received bi-partisan co-sponsorship by Senators Mark Begich, Daniel Inouye, Daniel Akaka and Mary Landrieu. The legislation allows Sealaska to select its remaining ANCSA land entitlements, about 85,000 acres, outside of pre-determined withdrawal areas under the original Act. “This legislation is about equity to Sealaska shareholders under the original intent of ANCSA,” said Murkowski.

Sealaska is requesting to select lands from outside of the withdrawal areas as a protective measure for intact watersheds and commercial and subsistence fisheries that exist in areas where the corporation could select. When asked about the remaining land available for selection Mallott stated, “Sealaska could select primarily old growth and intact watersheds in existing withdrawals but the proposed legislation addresses our Native values, environmental and community concerns. The legislation focuses on more appropriate selection areas, largely second growth and already roaded areas in addition to Native sacred sites.”

“I thought the hearing went well and was an excellent opportunity to reinforce the importance and urgency of this legislation,” said Chris E. McNeil, Jr. Sealaska president and CEO. “I appreciate Senator Wyden calling the hearing and for Senator Murkowski and Senator Begich’s continued leadership. I believe there is a greater understanding of the rapid action necessary to bring Sealaska’s entitlements to conclusion and I look forward to working with Congress and interest groups to finalize the Bill.”

“We continue to appreciate Congressman Don Young’s introduction of legislation in the House,” said McNeil. “The companion House bill has bi-partisan support and we are requesting a House hearing as soon as possible.”

Sealaska leadership has engaged in over 150 meetings with stakeholders throughout the Southeast region. The legislation has evolved as a result of the engagement and according to McNeil, “Sealaska requested protection of existing access provisions to be included in the legislation as a result of the extensive outreach we have conducted. We will continue to work with communities and stakeholders and we additionally remain committed to work on larger issues within the Tongass. We will always be at the table to contribute to comprehensive solutions as they pertain to Southeast forests.”

“I hope in 2107, the bicentennial of the creation of the Tongass National Forest, that the United States celebrates the Tongass as a Native place,” concluded Mallott. “I hope it is celebrated as a successful administrative model that also celebrates ANCSA as a success, as envisioned by the founders of the Act in 1971. This Bill could help realize that vision.”

Mallott’s complete testimony and S 881 language can be accessed at www.sealaska.com

Sealaska, a Growing Tradition

Sealaska has strengthened business with culture since 1972. We are a Native corporation owned by more than 20,000 tribal member shareholders and guided by our traditions of environmental stewardship and positively impacting our communities. Learn more at www.sealaska.com

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