

Southeast Conference

Resolution 17-04

A RESOLUTION OF THE SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE IN SUPPORT OF AND URGING PASSING OF THE ALASKA MENTAL HEALTH LAND EXCHANGE ACT OF 2016

WHEREAS, in 1956, Congress passed the Alaska Mental Health Enabling Act, granting an entitlement of one million acres of federal land to the Territory of Alaska to generate revenues for the benefit of Alaskans with mental illness, developmental disabilities, chronic alcoholism, Alzheimer's disease, and dementia; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Board has a fiduciary responsibility to: (1) maximize long-term revenue from Trust Land; (2) encourage a diversity of revenue-producing uses of Trust Land; (3) manage Trust Land prudently, efficiently, and with accountability to the Trust and its beneficiaries; and (4) protect and enhance the long-term productivity of Trust Land; and

WHEREAS, for nearly a decade, the Alaska Mental Health Trust has been seeking to exchange with the US Forest Service 17,341 acres of forested and undeveloped Trust lands within community boundaries of Ketchikan, Juneau, Petersburg, Wrangell, Sitka, and Myers Chuck, in exchange for US Forest Service timber lands of equal value in the Ketchikan Gateway Borough and on Prince of Wales Island; and

WHEREAS, from the perspective of Trust beneficiaries, the highest and best use of the 17,341 acres of Trust lands is to harvest high-value timber lands and develop other Trust lands for residential, commercial, or industrial purposes; and

WHEREAS, communities are concerned that harvesting and development of the 17,341 acres could have wide ranging adverse impacts on tourism, recreation, wildlife management, watershed protection, and public safety; and

WHEREAS, the exchange of the 17,341 acres of Trust lands for up to 20,580 acres of US Forest Service lands of equal value would avoid many of the concerns of communities regarding the potential adverse impacts on tourism, recreation, wildlife management, watershed protection, and public safety, and would also help sustain what remains of the timber industry in Southeast Alaska by providing more timber lands that could be managed on a sustained yield basis; and

WHEREAS, communities, agencies, and some environmental groups have consistently and repeatedly endorsed most elements of the proposed land trade; and

WHEREAS, on June 30, 2015 the US Forest Service and the Trust completed an "Agreement to Initiate" an administrative land exchange which requires preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement that could take years to complete; and

WHEREAS, delays in the US Forest Service timber sale planning efforts have caused serious concerns that there will not be enough timber available to support what remains of the timber industry in Southeast Alaska to allow it to transition to young-growth timber unless the State of Alaska and Mental Health Trust can provide bridge timber sales in the interim; and

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WHEREAS, The Alaska Mental Health Trust Land Exchange Act of 2016, sponsored by U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski and co-sponsored by U.S. Senator Dan Sullivan, would provide Congressional authorization and direction for the exchange, which should expedite completion of the transfer so that timber lands could be transferred to the Trust within 12 months; and

WHEREAS, the Alaska Mental Health Trust Land Exchange Act of 2016 is fair and responsible; notably, it requires: (1) the land exchange to be of equal value, based on appraisal; (2) environmental reviews to protect all species, cultural, and historic resources, wetlands, and floodplains; (3) that tribal consultations be conducted; and (4) that the trust cover all expenses incurred by the US Forest Service in completing the exchange; and

THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED in consideration of the above facts. Southeast Conference strongly supports and urges passage of Alaska Mental Health Land Exchange act of 2016

ADOPTED BY THE SOUTHEAST CONFERENCE ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2016 AND IS DUE TO SUNSET ON SEPTEMBER 22, 2017.

Witness By:



Chelsea Goucher, President

Attest:



Shelly Wright, Executive Director