

# Oppose Sealaska Lands Bill

Rep. Don Young's H.R. 1408

Continues Conflict in Tongass National Forest

## Conflict is the not the way to finalize Southeast Alaska Native land entitlements



*The Tongass National Forest comprises nearly one-third of the world's remaining old-growth coastal temperate rainforest.  
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Representative Don Young has reintroduced the “Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization and Jobs Protection Act,” H.R.1408. This controversial bill would allow the Sealaska Corporation to select some of the highest value lands within the Tongass National Forest, including lands and waters that are open to the public for Alaskans to fish, hunt, recreate. It also threatens to privatize lands and waters that are currently used by guides and commercial fishermen. Last year the congressional delegation held a series of listening sessions in the region, this newly proposed Sealaska bill clearly ignores constituents’ concerns and serves only the needs of one stakeholder – Sealaska Corporation. H.R. 1408 is considerably worse than earlier versions of the bill.

### Lopsided Legislation

- Settlement of Sealaska’s land entitlements can be accomplished without further congressional action. Currently the Sealaska Corporation may finalize remaining land entitlements, approximately 65,000 acres, from within the withdraw areas established by the U.S. Congress under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA). **The proposed legislation would allow the Sealaska Corporation to select 99,444 acres – approximately 20,000 over its legal entitlement.**
- The legislation targets for clear-cut logging some of the richest and most biologically productive lands in the Tongass including inventoried roadless areas. It also targets for private development extraordinary bays and river valleys throughout the Tongass, like the Honker Divide area. **These areas are among the most used and visited by the southeast Alaska residents, commercial fishermen, local outfitters and guides, and visitors to the famed Inside Passage.**
- The legislation is not a multi-stakeholder solution – the clear winner is the Sealaska Corporation. For example, **Rep. Young’s bill ignores the concerns of North Prince of Wales community.** It privatizes public lands on which communities recreate and rely upon for subsistence, and will allow Sealaska to continue its heavy logging practices in an area that has already been significantly logged in the past.
- The legislation sidesteps ANSCA and sets new cooperative agreements and selection processes for cultural sites. **One of the most controversial examples is language for management of cultural sites within the renowned Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve.** The legislation would create a new cooperative management partnership where Sealaska can weigh in on all park issues – not just cultural site preservation. It would also transfer responsibility to the for-profit Sealaska Corporation to protect historic and cultural sites that might be of development interest to the Corporation.

### Logging Zones

The legislation seeks to remove from public ownership biologically and culturally valuable lands and open them to logging by the Sealaska Timber Corporation. Sealaska plans to continue to intensively clear-cut the vast majority of its land selections.

- The Forest Service currently manages these lands for multiple uses and has announced a transition plan to ensure a sustainable future for the Tongass. This transition will be adversely affected by the Sealaska bill. Under private ownership, clear-cut logging of old-growth forests would be the priority.
- The proposed lands selections target Prince of Wales Islands and smaller barrier islands which have already been severely impacted by decades of clearcut logging. Remarkably, despite previous logging, the islands contain some of the most biologically productive old-growth forest lands in the Tongass National Forest.
- Prince of Wales Island is particularly enticing to Sealaska, since the Forest Service has built roads and other infrastructure with taxpayer money, and the lands themselves include areas with the oldest and most mature second growth timber on the Island.



© Gavin Newman/Greenpeace  
Sealaska Corporation clear-cuts  
Kasaan Peninsula, Prince of Wales Island.

### “Futures” Sites

- The legislation identifies numerous “futures” sites, such as Pegmatite Mountain, across the Tongass National Forest to be removed from the public domain and transferred to the Sealaska Corporation, a private company. The legislation does little to describe how future management and use of these sites might occur.
- The majority of the sites are in the middle of popular anchorages, hunting and fishing hotspots, and/or sit on the edge of designated Wilderness areas.
- The legislation provides little definition of the scale of potential commercial enterprises on these sites. Without limitations, there is nothing to prevent private corporate uses that would dramatically impact the remote character and existing public uses of these sites.
- Commercial development of these sites could foreclose the possibility of future conservation protections, impact local economies, create confusing and multiple jurisdictional issues between federal agencies, state agencies, municipalities and the corporation and, most importantly, displace existing multiple uses of the sites.



Upper Tenakee Inlet – photo by John Schoen

### Background on the Sealaska Native Corporation

- With 290,000 acres of land and an additional 560,000 acres of subsurface rights, the Sealaska Corporation a for-profit corporation, is the largest private landholder in southeast Alaska. It is also the largest of 13 regional native corporations in Alaska established under the ANCSA.
- After 3 decades of extensive and intensive logging, the Sealaska Corporation has left a legacy of expansive clear-cuts across most of the lands they have already selected.

### About the Tongass National Forest and Alaska Wilderness League

On our continent’s shimmering western edge, lies a mist-shrouded place of emerald islands with towering ancient spruce, rugged mountains, abundant wildlife, and fast-running rivers bursting with fish. It is our Tongass National Forest – America’s rainforest in southeast Alaska. It is a place where we do not have to talk about how things used to be, but can appreciate what we have today.

Rising majestically from the deep, clear waters of Alaska’s Inside Passage, this is a land of huge bears grown fat on salmon, eagles soaring the endless skies, and 500-year-old trees standing silent sentry over a rich and verdant world. We can make decisions about America’s rainforest that we can be proud of—balanced decisions which allow us to continue to experience and use the rainforest and its resources, without losing them.

Alaska Wilderness League is working in Alaska and Washington DC, and everywhere in between, as an advocate for the Tongass. This national and natural treasure belongs to all Americans, and we have the opportunity to conserve this special place for future generations. With your help and your voice, the League is working to ensure our actions today keep the Tongass special.