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STATEMENT

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: April 24, 2009

Statement by Steve Kline, Senior Government Affairs Representative for Alaska Wilderness League, on the introduction of the Murkowski-Begich Sealaska Land Settlement Bill:

“We are deeply disappointed that Senators Begich and Murkowski have decided to introduce stand-alone Sealaska land entitlement legislation. We believe this legislation is counterproductive to achieving a shared vision for Southeast Alaska and the Tongass National Forest. We support, and want to see, legislation that accounts for the needs of all involved stakeholders, because that is what’s best for the region. A meaningful and productive collaboration between these numerous stakeholders has been making significant progress toward that goal. Native communities, sawmill owners, commercial fishing interests, conservationists and others have been building trust and hammering out potential solutions that serve the many, not just the few. But while we are appreciative that the Senators took the time to meet with some members of the conservation community and listen to our concerns, we feel that the stand-alone Sealaska bill, unfortunately, has the potential to undo much of that hard-earned progress.”

“We look forward to working with Sealaska to achieve a solution to its land entitlement claims that we can mutually support. Any durable, legislative solution for the Tongass must include meaningful landscape and watershed protections. The long-term health the Tongass' remaining old-growth forest, the vitality and productivity of fish and wildlife habitat, and the vibrancy of Southeast Alaska communities is too important to leave open to conflict and controversy.”

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