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Sealaska Bill Still Unacceptable

WASHINGTON – The House and Senate are preparing to take up the ‘Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization and Jobs Protection Act,’ otherwise known as the ‘Sealaska bill,’ with the first of two hearings starting today in the Senate, and the second hearing occurring in the House on Thursday afternoon.

Statement by Cindy Shogan, Executive Director, Alaska Wilderness League:

“The Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska is a world-class natural treasure and belongs to all Americans. The Sealaska bill, S. 730 and H.R. 1408, threatens high-value old-growth and vital watersheds in our Tongass National Forest. The controversial bill has pitted neighbor against neighbor in the small towns of southeast Alaska and continues to be a single-stakeholder solution – benefitting only the Sealaska Corporation.

There is no question that finalizing Sealaska’s claims needs to be a high priority, but they must be balanced with conservation for the Tongass, as well as meet the needs of the local communities whose livelihoods depend upon the forest. The Tongass National Forest, otherwise known as the nation’s ‘crown jewel’ of the US Forest System, contains over 5,500 salmon-filled streams and rivers and all five species of Pacific salmon – it is truly a “salmon forest,” and a powerful economic engine. Any legislation for the Tongass must recognize the economic value of conservation and restoration, and ensure that high-value watersheds, old-growth forest, salmon habitat, and the forest-dependent jobs of southeast Alaskans are protected.”

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