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Members of the Southeast Conference,

We are writing today to ask you to address an issue so urgent and distressing we are not sure where to begin. The residents of Edna Bay really need your help. We are at a loss as to where to turn. We feel as though we have been abandoned by the representatives we would normally turn to for assistance on our behalf. The issue at the heart of our angst is H.R.3560: Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization Act. If passed as proposed this bill stands to devastate the community of Edna Bay.

Edna Bay, as you may already know, is a remote community on the island of Kosciusko that sits on the north-west side of Prince of Wales Island. We are a subsistence based community established by a State land sale in 1982. At the time, the State of Alaska was encouraging people to move out into these areas of Southeast Alaska by making property available at a reasonable price. Over the years through state funded revenue sharing and capital matching grants this community has been encouraged to develop and grow.

During the years following the land sale many people purchased property here and made investments of time and hard effort to build homes and livelihoods for themselves. They did so with full confidence in the fact the State of Alaska supported their efforts, and the community would continue to prosper in perpetuity. Throughout the history of Edna Bay, residents have enjoyed and benefited from the access they have to state and federal land on this island. The extensive road system has been maintained by the U.S. Forest Service allowing them easy and reliable access to their subsistence needs such as hunting, fishing, berry picking, and other food harvesting; as well as firewood and personal use timber we all depend upon to heat & build our homes, outbuildings, and access boardwalks.

Because Kosciusko is a remote island with no road access or land bridge connecting us to anywhere else, we rely heavily on the road system on our island to provide our sustenance. This road system also provides us access to recreational opportunities such as biking, hiking, wildlife viewing, swimming, and picnicking to name a few. The only way to reach or leave our community is by floatplane or boat. Travel by boat means crossing a stretch of water that exposes us to the Pacific Ocean, which at times can be extremely dangerous.

Over the years residents have established livelihoods and businesses dependent upon access to and use of the forest around our community. We currently have a variety of businesses including lodges, cabin rentals, guiding, lumber mills, and emerging eco tourism. People come from all over the country and world to enjoy the opportunity to

experience the spectacular beauty of this area. There are incredible photo opportunities to be enjoyed by traveling the road system which will take you to scenic outlooks all over the island.

The land Sealaska is requesting includes three fourths of the existing road system, and over two thirds of the accessible parts of the island. The north end of Kosciusko is LUDII Wilderness and will therefore never be developed. If Sealaska is granted their request, the remaining roads and forest will not be enough to support our lifestyles or livelihoods. The acreage they have chosen is so large and includes all of the roads we regularly travel to fulfill our daily needs. They have elected to take the best of the island, leaving us with little to survive on as a community.

We do not blame Sealaska for making the choice of this island. From a purely business standpoint the second growth timber on this island now over 60 years old, and the extensive road system already in place provides them with a perfect opportunity to fill the gap in their declining timber harvests. As a private corporation they have to look to the financial needs of their shareholders, which is to be expected. We believe the responsible party in this unfortunate situation is the state and federal government for even considering to allow Sealaska to select lands from an area where there is already an established community that depends upon the same forests for the same reasons.

Sealaska representatives have recently visited our community in an effort to justify their needs for this island, and to gather feedback and responses from the community. While it appears they have sincere intentions to be a good neighbor, the fact they are a private landowner with legitimate liability concerns prohibits them from ever being able to offer us the same rights of access and use we have enjoyed throughout the history of this community. They cannot replace the personal use timber or firewood needs we depend upon to maintain our daily lives.

The impact of this legislation goes far beyond it's affect on the residents of Edna Bay. Over the years we have had numerous groups here who have explored and catalogued the extraordinary caves and caverns on this island. Many of them are of a class so unique they are found nowhere else in the world. It is obvious members of Congress appreciated the national treasure these natural phenomena represent, as evidenced by The Federal Cave Protection Act. This island represents a public interest on an international level. We have met people from all over the world who have traveled great distances for the experience of seeing these caves.

Something we would ask our representatives to consider is the fact Sealaska can choose from many other islands and places where there are no established communities to select their lands from. Edna Bay residents on the other hand have no other choices. The average age of the population at this current time is 50 years. Nearly everyone has invested decades of hard work and effort into building what they have. Most are beyond the point in their lives of being able to simply start over again.

Another factor that comes into play is the economic debacle this bill stands to create.

Many residents are still paying for property they purchased here. Most struggle to maintain what they have from the limited resources a remote rural life allows. Property values are certain to drop as a result of the loss of the road system and opportunity for a subsistence lifestyle. Even if people are able to sell out, the result will be the certain demise of the community. The few comforts of civilization we have will be gone if our numbers drop below what they are now. Mail planes, the Post Office, general store, school, and church; even the basic necessity of phone service cannot function below a certain population level. We have had a steady increase in residents over the last few years. AT&T is bringing broadband internet into the community this fall. This will undoubtedly bring about another boost to our population. We are in contact with several families who have suspended their plans for moving here while we await the outcome of this legislation. How unfortunate the timing is. We are at a point where there is promise of insured economic prosperity which has now been threatened by something that should never have been considered in the first place.

It is obvious by letters some residents have received from the Dept. of Commerce & Economic Development, the State fully supports efforts to provide Sealaska with economic opportunity. We ask to be extended the same opportunity. As residents of Alaska and a community the State helped establish do we not deserve an equal consideration for prosperity? Please do not ignore us. We need your support as well. We urge you to take a closer look at the long term devastating impact Sealaska's land request on Kosciusko Island stands to make on our community before it is too late.

Sincerely,
Edna Bay Community