

Southeast Alaska Wilderness Tours Association

Our Mission: To Protect and Preserve the Alaskan Wilderness Experience for present and future generations

March 31, 2009

Senator Mark Begich
825C Hart Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senator Begich,

Please keep in mind the impact the "Sealaska Bill" will have on the economic vitality of the ecotourism industry in Alaska before supporting or introducing any new legislation.

I've read in full both HR 3560 and S 3561 both bills have a very serious negative impact on the eco tour industry which is important to Southeast Alaska's economic vitality. Both proposed pieces of legislation outlined so called "enterprise zones" which are in the middle of Wilderness areas this industry relies on to provide a wilderness experience to their diverse clientele who visits Southeast, Alaska from all over the world.

Port Houghton, Pybus, South Williams cove and almost every area in the Stephens Passage and the Frederick Sound area is critical to the eco tour industry. It is not only the summer feeding grounds to Humpback whales, it also supports several colonies of Sea Lions and is a huge nesting area for Bald Eagles as well as an area famous for Brown Bears.

It is bad enough to watch the proliferation of Cruise Ships in Tracy & Endicott Arms by a loophole in the Wilderness Act, now you're asking us to give away cherished places like Pybus on a National Monument with no real stipulation and limitation on what an "enterprise zone" means. South Williams Cove in the entrance of Tracy Arm is a favorite anchorage of the small overnight vessels that use the area. What development can we expect there? Recently the cruise ship industry and the small vessels and eco tour operators met in an effort to resolve issues affecting the experience we have in Tracy and Endicott Arms. We reached an accord called the Wilderness Best Management Practices for the area. One of our agreements was that no commercial operations would offer flight-seeing in the area.

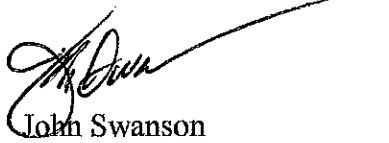


Southeast Alaska Wilderness Tours Association
WWW.SAWTA.ORG
P.O. Box 1431
Bellingham, WA 98227
Email: info@sawta.org

When I read the Sealaska proposal for South Williams Cove it outlined the proposed development of a flight seeing terminal as well as vessel floats in the area. First that is in direct contrast to what we as a group have agreed to. In addition this is in a Wilderness area we all rely on, any development in the area would seriously detract from a Wilderness Experience.

While I understand the importance of ANSCA and the needs of the Native People of Southeast Alaska please keep in mind that a thriving industry in Southeast Alaska relies on this area as well to provide a truly unique Wilderness Experience. Unfortunately it is almost on a daily basis we seem to be losing the ability to do just that. People come to Alaska to experience " the Last Frontier " that will be a thing of the past if we don't make every effort to protect what little Wilderness truly remains.

Thank You,
Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "John Swanson", with a long, sweeping horizontal line extending to the right.

John Swanson
President - SAWTA.ORG