

**Statement of
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Bureau of Land Management
Department of the Interior
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands and Forests
S. 292, Salmon Lake Land Selection Resolution Act
May 18, 2011**

Thank you for the opportunity to testify on S. 292, the Salmon Lake Land Selection Resolution Act. As a party to the Salmon Lake Area Land Ownership Consolidation Agreement, the BLM has supported efforts between the State of Alaska and the Bering Straits Native Corporation (BSNC) to resolve competing land selections at Salmon Lake. As such, BLM supports S. 292, with one minor technical amendment, because it will ratify the agreement between the BLM, BSNC, and the State of Alaska; and allow for a reasonable and practicable conveyance of lands in the Salmon Lake area.

Background

Salmon Lake is located on the Seward Peninsula, approximately 40 miles northeast of Nome. The lake is one of the largest bodies of fresh water on the peninsula, and has long been an important source of food and resources for the Native people. Because the area contains significant fisheries and other subsistence resources, it remains a popular resource and destination for local communities.

The BLM is responsible for expediting the conveyance of Federal lands to Native corporations, including the BSNC, under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA), and to the State of Alaska under the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958.

The BSNC, the Native regional corporation for the Bering Straits area, and the State of Alaska each sought to gain title to the Salmon Lake area through selection applications filed under respective provisions of ANCSA and the Alaska Statehood Act. However, the land addressed by the two applications overlapped. The BSNC and the State negotiated a resolution to this issue whereby each entity would receive title to distinct lands. The BLM supported this resolution, and the three parties signed the Salmon Lake Area Land Ownership Consolidation Agreement on July 18, 2007. Legislation is now required to ratify the Agreement between the United States (acting through the Department of Interior, BLM), the BSNC, and the State of Alaska. The Agreement would have expired January 1, 2011, but its term was extended until January 1, 2013 in anticipation of ratifying legislation. Accordingly, the Department recommends that Section 3(1)(b) of the bill be amended to reflect the extension of the Agreement to January 1, 2013.

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S. 292 represents an opportunity to resolve the overlapping land selections between the BSNC and the State. The bill would ratify the Agreement between the BLM, the BSNC, and the State, and allow for finalization of land conveyances in the Salmon Lake area. The lands would be transferred in accordance with the terms of the signed agreement.

As noted, the BLM supported the efforts between the BSNC and State, and signed the agreement to recognize the desires of the entities. The bill would also further the intent of the Alaska Land Transfer Acceleration Act of 2004 (PL 108-452), expediting the transfer of title to Federal lands to Native corporations and the State of Alaska.

Conclusion

Thank you for the opportunity to testify in support of S. 292. I am happy to answer any questions.