

**Statement of
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Bureau of Land Management
Department of the Interior
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forests, and Mining
S. 340, Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization and Jobs Protection Act
April 25, 2013**

Thank you for the opportunity to provide the views of the Department of the Interior (Department) on S. 340, the Southeast Alaska Native Land Entitlement Finalization and Jobs Protection Act. My comments are limited to the programs administered by agencies of the Department, including the administration of the Alaska Land Conveyance Program by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM).

S.340 would amend the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) to allow the Southeast Alaska Native Corporation (Sealaska) to receive conveyance of Federal lands from areas of Alaska outside of originally designated withdrawal areas, finalizing its entitlement under ANCSA. The Department supports the goals of completing ANCSA entitlements as soon as possible so that Alaska Native corporations, including Sealaska, may each have the full economic benefits of completed land entitlements. The Department defers to the U.S. Forest Service on matters regarding the disposition and management of National Forest System lands.

We look forward to working with the Congress, Sealaska, and community partners and interests to fulfill entitlements. Over the past years, the BLM has maintained an accelerated pace in administering the ANCSA land conveyance program; at mid-Fiscal Year 2013, the BLM had surveyed and patented to Native corporations nearly 32.6 million acres of ANCSA entitlements and had granted interim conveyance (all right, title, and interest of the Federal government) on approximately an additional 11.2 million acres of entitlements.

Background

The BLM is responsible for expediting Federal land conveyances to individual Alaska Natives, Native corporations, and the State of Alaska under five core statutes: the Alaska Native Allotment Act of 1906, the Alaska Statehood Act of 1958, the Alaska Native Veterans Allotment Act of 1998, ANCSA, and the Alaska Land Transfer Acceleration Act (ALTAA). When these land conveyances are completed, about 150 million acres, or approximately 42 percent of the land area of Alaska, will have been transferred from Federal to State and private (Native) ownership.

ANCSA established a framework under which Alaska Natives formed private corporations to select and receive title to 44 million acres of public land in Alaska and receive payment of \$962.5 million in settlement of aboriginal claims to land in the State. Sealaska is one of 12 regional corporations formed under ANCSA.

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S. 340 would allow Sealaska to receive conveyance of lands outside of the original withdrawal areas established by ANCSA in 1971; specifically, to receive conveyance of lands from among 18 identified parcels in the Tongass National Forest other than those that were originally available for selection, and to receive conveyance of up to 490 acres of Federal land for cemetery sites and historical places. Conveyance of these parcels would constitute finalization of Sealaska's entitlement under ANCSA.

The BLM would like the opportunity to work with the Committee on technical concerns related to finalizing the Sealaska entitlement. We note that if S. 340 is enacted other corporations might seek similar legislation for the substitution of new lands. In addition, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service notes that if S. 340 is enacted as proposed and the Tongass Forest Management Plan is modified, the Service may have to review its findings not to list the southeast Alaska distinct population segment (DPS) of Queen Charlotte goshawk and the Alexander Archipelago wolf.

Conclusion

The BLM in Alaska has made significant progress since the enactment of ALTAA, which gave the BLM tools to expedite land conveyances. We look forward to continuing to work with Alaska Native corporations, Native individuals, the State of Alaska, and other agencies and interests to fulfill the remaining land entitlements. Thank you for the opportunity to testify. I will be glad to answer any questions.