



Sealaska Logging- Cleveland Peninsula- Photo by Joe Sebastian

What So Called "Landless" Supporters and Media Don't Tell You*

A hyperlinked transcript of this commentary will be posted to the KFSK Commentary website

Because there has been a virtual news blackout on what's inside the Landless bill, I've unpacked it here in my five, short minutes. However, the public deserves a much deeper "hard look" at the bill's impacts.

The so-called "Landless" legislation¹, would privatize over 115 thousand Tongass acres in 61 cherry-picked [selections](#) and create five new Southeast Alaska Native corporations scattered across vast areas of the Tongass. This, where ten such

¹ [S.1889](#) and its companion [H.B.4748](#) Unrecognized Southeast Alaska Native Communities Recognition and Compensation Act

corporations already exist.² Over the decades, they have made their indelible scars on these landscapes in the form of tidewater to alpine clearcuts.

There's reason plenty for everyone who depends on and cherishes our beautiful, public wild places to be concerned. We are all in this together.

If enacted, the conservation gains realized by the recent [reinstatement of the Roadless Rule](#) on the Tongass will be largely erased—in a heartbeat. This is because nearly all the selections contain inventoried roadless acres amounting to 52% roadless.³ That represents more than two decades of public hearings, rallies, and [500,000 public comments](#) in support of the Roadless Rule-undone.

The Landless legislation is opposed by national, state, and regional environmental organizations. In that order and to name but three, this includes, Defenders of Wildlife, Alaska Wilderness League, and Alaska Rainforest Defenders.

“Landless” advocates refuse to write enforceable language into the bill to prohibit logging. Instead, they claim that logging in our region has waned and use vague, verbal assurances that it won't occur on their selections. In fact, landless

² Cape Fox (village corp/Saxman); Huna Totem (village corp/ Hoonah); Haida INC (village Hydaburg); Goldbelt INC (Juneau urban corp); Kivilco INC (village corp Kasaan). Klukwan INC. (village corp Klukwan); Shee Atika INC (urban corp, Sitka); Sealaska INC. (Regional); Kake Tribal INC.(village corp.Kake); Kootznoowoo INC. (village corp,Angoon
Cape Fox Corporation <https://www.capefoxcorp.com/>), village corporation for Saxman (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Saxman,_Alaska); Huna Totem Corporation (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Huna_Totem_Corporation), village corporation for Hoonah (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hoonah,_Alaska); Haida Corporation (<http://www.haidacorporation.com/>), village corporation for Hydaburg (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hydaburg,_Alaska); Goldbelt, Inc. (<http://www.goldbelt.com/>) , urban corporation for Juneau (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Juneau,_Alaska) Kivilco Incorporated (<http://www.kivilco.com/>) , village corporation for Kasaan (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Kasaan>) Klukwan, Inc. (<http://www.adn.com/article/20120810/klukwan-files-bankruptcy>), village corporation for Klukwan (<https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Klukwan>) Shee Atika, Incorporated (<http://www.sheeatika.com/>), urban corporation for Sitka (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sitka,_Alaska) Sealaska Corporation (https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sealaska_Corporation) (Regional); Kake Tribal Corporation (<https://www.kaketribalcorporation.com>) ; Kootznoowoo Inc (<https://kootznoowoo.com/our-story/>). for Angoon

³ Testimony of Jacqueline Emanuel, Associate Deputy Chief, UDSA Forest Service, Before the United States Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources Subcommittee on Public Lands, Forest, and Mining, October 25, 2023 <https://www.energy.senate.gov/hearings/2023/10/subcommittee-hearing-to-receive-testimony-on-pending-legislation>

representatives have admitted “that nothing — including logging — would be off the table.”⁴ Legal Notices in the Petersburg Pilot confirm that export-in-the-round logging continues in SE Alaska—unabated.⁵ To maximize profits, the industry prefers landscapes they can clearcut under lax State regulations—thus the privatization scheme.⁶

Other anticipated development includes mining and lodges at the head of popular bays and inlets. The lands proposed for selection are already fully utilized to their highest purpose and will displace current, fully occupied public uses;

The proposed legislation is not “Land Back” as it is cloaked. Beneficiaries of the bill will receive additional⁷ corporate shares-not land. They were not “left out” [of ANCSA]. The legislation, backed by a half-million dollar campaign,⁸ employs a greenwashed script using repeated marketing catch phrases, to dupe the public into accepting the legislation, no questions asked.

The bill will restrict access. Bill advocates claim that they have taken extraordinary measures to allow public access, but the bill’s text confirms it includes “reasonable exceptions”— which are highly subject to interpretation. Moreover, the bill language allows only for access through “roadways, trails, and forest roads.” It does not provide for shoreline access—the most popular way users get to uplands.

⁴ With \$500,000 in support from Sealaska, landless Alaska Native communities continue push for their own village corporations September 6, 2019 by June Leffler, KSTK - Wrangell <https://www.ktoo.org/2019/09/06/with-500000-in-support-from-sealaska-landless-alaska-native-communities-continue-push-for-their-own-village-corporations/>

⁵ For instance, Legal Notices. Petersburg Pilot: August 24 & 31/2023, Kaliki Cove Timber Sale; Whale Pass Timber Sale, Sept 22 & 29, 2022 (and many more in recent issues).

⁶ Under the State of Alaska Forest Resources and Practices Act (“FRPA”) vs. Federal regulations. For instance, there are no limits on the size of clearcuts, narrower fish stream buffers, no consideration of cumulative impacts, no enforceable considerations for wildlife habitat.

⁷ This is in addition to their existing biannual Sealaska “At Large” shares granted under ANCSA. <https://www.sealaska.com/shareholders/sealaska-announces-spring-2023-distribution/>

⁸ With \$500,000 in support from Sealaska, landless Alaska Native communities continue push for their own village corporations September 6, 2019 by June Leffler, KSTK - Wrangell <https://www.ktoo.org/2019/09/06/with-500000-in-support-from-sealaska-landless-alaska-native-communities-continue-push-for-their-own-village-corporations/>

Landless advocates claim that they only want a “1% tiny sliver” of the Tongass. What they don’t tell you is that two thirds of the Tongass is rocks, ice, muskeg and scrub timber. The remaining high-volume old growth stands, important to various species, are coveted by the timber industry but now [represent only a fraction](#) of the original on the Tongass. Those stands on Native corporation land, have been essentially extirpated.

No [Congressional field hearings](#) or other fact finding forums for this monumental legislation have been held throughout affected SE Alaska communities, despite the Delegation’s frequent travel in the region.

Most troubling of all is that the bill is a Pandora’s box. There are about 80 other similarly ineligible⁹ Alaska communities as the five seeking corporate status, that will demand similar treatment if the bill is enacted.¹⁰ This amounts to 1.8 million acres of new, privatized statewide land selections—“all demanding recognition and financial resources.”¹¹

Federal public lands should remain in federal public hands-not corporations.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Knight
Petersburg, AK

⁹ Failed to meet simple eligibility criteria of not being modern or urban in character and having a majority Native population.

¹⁰ U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of the Secretary, “Responses to Questions Posed by Senator Frank Murkowski Following the July 29, 1997 Senate Energy and Resources Committee Hearing on S.967,” September 23, 1997.”

¹¹ Letter to Honorable Don Young, Chairman Committee on Resources, House of Representatives, Washington, D.C 20515. Jul 24, 1996 from Sylvia Baca, Assistant Secretary Department of the Interior and Jim Lyons Under Secretary Department of Agriculture.