

Congress OKs bill for Haidas

By unanimous consent the 99th Congress passed legislation authorizing the United States Forest Service to enter into a land exchange with the Haida Corp.

"It was critical that the Haidas obtain legislation this year," said Sen. Frank Murkowski, sponsor of the bill. "They are currently in Chapter 11 and are under a court-imposed deadline which provides that they must file a plan of reorganization by Dec. 31st or face liquidation in a Chapter 7."

Murkowski said the corporation has suffered greatly from the decline of the fishing industry and the crash in the timber market.

"The land they received under ANCSA had marginal timber value to start with. The disastrous drop in timber prices coupled with the government's delay in conveying the Haidas their land greatly exacerbated the problem of falling timber prices," he said.

Although the bill originally included a land exchange by which the Haidas could obtain valuable timber lands which had once been part of their traditional territory, Murkowski said that section was eliminated. The problem — objections from the Forest Service and conflicting interests of the timber industry and the environmentalists — will have to be solved later, he said.