

Sealaska: Corporation pleased with Tongass bill

JUNEAU — Sealaska Corp. officials announced recently their pleasure with the outcome of the Tongass Reform Act legislation, a compromise Tongass bill which is expected to receive presidential approval.

The bill sets aside one million acres of the Tongass National Forest from logging, requires renegotiation of the long-term contracts for the mills at Sitka and Ketchikan and establishes 100-foot buffer zones on major anadromous fish streams.



'Sealaska is happy Congress resolved the inequities created by the long-term contracts.'

—Robert W. Loescher

"The new Tongass law parallels the intent and objectives of the State Forest Practices Act on which Sealaska worked diligently this past legislative session," said Bryon I. Mallott, president and chief executive officer for Sealaska.

"The issues within the Tongass Reform Act legislation, such as buffer strips, contract reform and protection of lands are matters of concern to many Alaskans.

"Land use designations under the new law are similar to the recommendations of the Southeast Conference. Both the local Southeast communities and Sealaska Corp. will benefit from the Tongass legislation since many of the areas set aside are compatible with our land interests," he said.

Congress also made changes to the long-term contracts with the pulp mills.

"Sealaska is happy Congress resolved the inequities created by the long-term contracts," said Robert W. Loescher, executive vice president of Sealaska.

"Renegotiation of the contracts will create a level playing field within the timber industry and will provide opportunity for Native timberland

owners and small business interests to be competitive in what was once a monopolized market," he said.

Although a Sealaska land exchange amendment to the Tongass bill was dropped earlier this month, Section 502 of the legislation directs the U.S. Forest Service to continue land exchange discussions with Shee-Atika Inc., Atikon and Sealaska.

Statements made by the Alaska delegation and by congressional floor leaders encouraging Sealaska to continue negotiations with the Forest Service for lands in the Greens Creek mine area reflect the concern of Congress with the Admiralty Island issues.

"The secretary of agriculture noted in a letter to the Congress that a land exchange may be the only way to extend the life of the mine," Loescher said. "Sealaska will continue its efforts to consummate a land exchange in that area."

He also congratulated the Haida Corp. on the success of its land exchange into the Sulzer Portage area of Prince of Wales Island.