

U.S. Senate approves \$40 million for Interior operations in Alaska

The U.S. Senate recently approved nearly \$40 million in additional funding for the Interior Department's operations in Alaska and the release of \$340 million in Outer Continental Shelf lease sale revenues to the State of Alaska, according to Sen. Ted Stevens.

Funding for Interior projects in Alaska includes:

- Construction funds for Denali National Park and Preserve, including \$1.3 million to complete the Visitor Access Center and Polychrome Pass comfort station and \$60,000 for a bus shelter at the park's Savage River campground.

- \$5 million for the new Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage to purchase the site for the center, complete preliminary site work and begin planning and design.

- \$11 million for the purchase of Haida Corp. land near Hyaburg for inclusion in the Tongass National Forest.

- \$2.225 million for research in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Coastal Plain in preparation for possible oil and gas leasing.

- \$4 million for Cadastral surveying in the state.

In total, more than \$1.5 million has been approved by the Senate for Bureau of Land Management projects; \$4.8 million for Fish and Wildlife Service projects and \$2.3 million for Indian Health Service projects.

The Senate also approved an amendment that would retain for one year full funding for the Tongass National Forest timber programs.

"Funding for these projects comes at a good time in light of the state's financial situation," Stevens said. "I'm pleased the full Senate retained these provisions."

Also approved by the full Senate was a request from Stevens to release \$340 million in OCS lease sale revenues to the State of Alaska. The funds are currently being held in an escrow account by the Department of the Interior while a boundary dispute between the state and the U.S. government is resolved in court.

"Under an OCS revenue allocation formula, Alaska will receive at least 27 percent of these funds even if all the land is determined to be federal property," Stevens said.

The bill now goes to a conference committee between the House and the Senate.