

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

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Essential legislation, House Bill 155, that will help clear the way for a land exchange between the Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority (Trust) and the United States Forest Service (USFS) has been introduced in the Alaska Legislature by Representative Ortiz of Ketchikan. The transaction would be a value for value land exchange of approximately 20,000 acres of USFS land for 18,000 acres of Trust land, the result of extensive negotiations between the Trust and the USFS and years of work with interested parties in Southeast Alaska.

The land exchange also requires approval from the U.S. Congress. Senators Lisa Murkowski and Dan Sullivan and Rep. Don Young have introduced companion bills (S.131 and HR.513) to direct the USFS to complete the exchange. The congressional bills have not yet had hearings.

The exchange will help the Trust Land Office fulfill its mission by replacing trust-owned property adjacent to several communities with land that has higher value for timber harvest. This will help the Trust Land Office increase revenue production from Trust-owned land, which supports vital mental health services for Alaskan beneficiaries. The Alaska Mental Health Trust Authority funds programs that serve Alaska's most vulnerable populations and includes programs for people with mental illnesses, developmental disabilities, Alzheimer's disease and related dementias, traumatic brain injuries, and substance abuse disorders.

"This land exchange is good for the Trust and its beneficiaries and good for the communities of Southeast Alaska," said John Morrison, Trust Land Office Executive Director. "We hope people express their support for this exchange by writing or calling our congressional delegation and state legislators."

By transferring certain lands to the USFS, it will protect popular trails, viewsheds, and iconic recreational sites along the Inside Passage. It will also help to protect certain watersheds near communities and preserves some old growth timber stands. The exchange will also ensure jobs stay in the Southeast communities by protecting the timber and tourism industries.

As the USFS transitions to sustainable young growth timber management, there is a lack of timber supply to keep the timber industry alive in Southeast Alaska. The key to the transition is to have sufficient timber supplies to bridge to the time when sufficient young growth timber is available for market. This exchange is a critical component of



supplying that transition timber. It is essential to get state and federal legislation passed this spring so as to not further delay this land exchange.

The Trust Land Office will be holding public information meetings in several Southeast communities in late March and early April, beginning with Ketchikan March 21 and Petersburg March 23.

More information on the land exchange and the informational meetings can be found at: <http://mhtrustland.org/index.php/land/land-exchange/>

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