



December 5, 2023

The Honorable Harriet Hageman
Chair
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable Teresa Leger Fernandez
Ranking Member
House Committee on Natural Resources
Subcommittee on Indian and Insular Affairs
U.S. House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chair Hageman, Ranking Member Leger Fernandez, and Members of the Indian and Insular Affairs Subcommittee:

On behalf of our more than one million members and supporters, The Wilderness Society (TWS) writes to express views on H.R. 4748, which is being heard before the Subcommittee on December 5, 2023. We respectfully request that this letter be included in the hearing record.

H.R. 4748, Unrecognized Southeast Alaska Native Communities Recognition and Compensation Act

The Wilderness Society has a long, established history of advocating for the conservation and protection of our country's invaluable, natural places, including areas like Alaska's Tongass National Forest. Our advocacy has evolved to include prioritizing inclusivity and intersectionality, as well as Tribal Sovereignty and Tribal Self-determination, acknowledging that Indigenous Peoples are a foundational partner in stewardship and conservation of our public lands.

While our defense of the Tongass continues, we must correct the injustices faced by certain Native communities in Southeast Alaska. We acknowledge that the Tongass is the ancestral homelands of the Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples. We acknowledge the fact that five Native communities were wrongfully excluded from the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act when the bill was passed in 1971, and we must, at a minimum, support efforts to correct this. As a result, we support H.R. 4748, the Unrecognized Southeast Alaska Native Communities Recognition and Compensation Act, sponsored by Rep. Peltola, in recognition of important equity issues that must be addressed.

We ask Congress to ensure proper capitalization of these corporations at the outset to avoid forcing the corporations to rely on extractive industries to fund their startup costs. Adequate initial funding will also attempt to compensate these five communities for the earning potential they were denied for the past 50 years.

We apologize to our Native partners for the hurt our past opposition to this bill has caused; we continue to do the necessary work of centering our Native partners and reflecting on how we can better support them; and we trust in the communities of Haines, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Tenakee Springs, and Wrangell to continue to steward this land as they have since time immemorial through their newly formed corporations.

Despite this long-standing injustice, several Southeast Alaska Tribes, including some of the Alaska Native communities affected by this issue, continue to partner with us, including in defense of Roadless Rule protections in the Tongass. We hope this shift from The Wilderness Society is the first step in restoring balance in Southeast Alaska, and we hope we can continue to

build trust with our Native partners, both in Alaska and across the country. We urge the Committee to support this legislation.

Thank you for considering our views.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Karlin Itchoak". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Karlin Itchoak, J.D.
Senior Regional Director, Alaska Region
The Wilderness Society