



Questions from Rep. Westerman for Ms. Sheri Buretta, Chairman of the Board, Chugach Alaska Corporation, Anchorage, AK

1. Question: In your opinion, what has stalled the resolution of this split-estate for Chugach for years?

The federal agencies have not recognized the full extent of this issue and how it impacts the region and specifically, Chugach Alaska Corporation (Chugach). This has been a problem for Chugach since the Exxon Valdez Oil Spill (EVOS) Trustee Council began their land grab in the late 1990s. The lack of federal agencies being willing to address this problem through an administrative land exchange led Chugach to focus on a legislative fix in Congress.

2. Question: If H.R 3903 is enacted, how will Chugach use the land they receive?

a. Could you speak to the economic prosperity that will occur in the region as a result of this legislation?

The land Chugach has identified in the Bill has been selected for cultural and economic significance. The economically viable lands have potential for timber, tourism, and transportation opportunities. Chugach has been strategic in selecting these lands and believes they will provide economic benefits within the region. As the largest private landowner in the region dwarfed by federal lands, Chugach can significantly contribute to prosperity within the region on traditional Alaska Native lands.

3. It is my understanding that Chugach is offering more subsurface land than they would receive in this exchange.

Question: Could you speak to the reasoning behind Chugach's decision on this exchange?

Generally, subsurface land is valued at 20-30% of surface land value. The Chugach Region Land Study Report which the Department of Interior submitted to Congress in December 2022, fell short of that exchange ratio with a roughly 19% exchange ratio. Since the USDI report was written, Chugach research has identified opportunities for critical minerals and rare earth elements located on subsurface lands Chugach would trade in the Bill. Given this possibility, the subsurface lands traded should likely be valued higher than typically.

4. Question: Why is Chugach pursuing this land exchange legislatively rather than administratively with the Department of the Interior and the U.S. Forest Service?

Congressional direction will ensure the Administration resolves this issue in a timely manner. In addition, it will provide future administrations with guidance and prioritization. Previous efforts by Chugach to engage the Forest Service in discussing an administrative land exchange, going back as far as 2003, were summarily dismissed by high-ranking agency officials.



5. Question: How is the current split-state structure that Chugach has dealt with inconsistent with the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act?

The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971 provided the regional corporations with the subsurface estate where village corporations received the surface land. The intent was for the regional and village corporations to work cooperatively to develop mineral resources. Now that the federal and state governments own surface land purchased from village corporations, for conservation purposes, the village corporations no longer own the surface land and Chugach must now work with a federal or state government to develop mineral resources. This creates an additional cost and adds more time for Chugach to develop mineral resources on lands they rightfully own.