

Testimony of Scott Newman, President, Alaska Bear Guides, LLC

Good morning Chairman Rahall, Ranking Member Hastings, and members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts about HR 2099 today.

It is a point of great pride for me to say that I was born and raised in Southeast Alaska, and that I have been able to make a suitable living in the only place I have ever called home. The forest puts the food on my family's table, clothes on their backs, and the roof over their heads. I wouldn't want to have it any other way.

For 22 years I have been guiding hunters on the Tongass National Forest, and for the past 17 years, as a Master Guide and President of Alaska Bear Guides based out of Petersburg. My entire adult life has been spent working in the woods and on the waters of Southeast Alaska; it is a place I care about deeply and want to see protected for the sake of my four children.

Guides and outfitters provide visitors to the Tongass with their most intimate opportunity to experience one of the rarest places on earth first hand. As a guide I have taken visitors from all fifty states on once-in-a-lifetime adventures deep into pristine places, experiences that they simply would not have had without a guide who is familiar with the landscape. Hundreds of guides like me all across Southeast fill this important role.

Guides and outfitters have been the agents of positive economic change in Southeast. Where once the timber industry was king, many factors have led to the rise of a more sustainable and diverse economic model; a model based in large part on the incredible beauty and astounding wildlife of the Tongass. People from all over the world are willing to spend their hard earned money to experience a wild Tongass, and with the proper management and oversight, we can continue to ensure that their expectations of scenery and solitude are met.

My company has a tremendous positive impact on the local economy. We operate most frequently from the decks of the *Chester B*, a 52 foot vessel that was built right in Petersburg. We also use a 27 foot landing craft built just south of Petersburg in Wrangell. Maintenance of these vessels can reach more than \$20,000 per year, all of which is performed by local businesses. I also spend \$20,000 per year on groceries and supplies for my client's trips, and my clients themselves typically spend \$1000 each while they are in Petersburg; this in addition to the cost of the trip itself.

With 235 guides and outfitters providing similar services all across the region, the economic impact of our activity is significant and increasing. In fact, according to a report conducted by the University of Alaska, in the summer of 2005 alone, nature-based tourism in Southeast Alaska had revenues of \$15.5 million, and attracted 42,000 visitors to the region. The secondary economic benefits of this activity are astounding.

In addition to these positive impacts on the local economy, our businesses represent an important stream of revenues for the US Forest Service, through the various permits each

guide and outfitter is required to maintain. In 2008, revenues to the Forest Service from these permits reached nearly \$1 million.

However, HR 2099 jeopardizes this promising new economic future in Southeast Alaska. By allowing the Sealaska Corporation to scatter private developments in important recreational areas across the forest, these lands cease to be public, giving the Sealaska Corporation virtual control of the nature-based tourism industry in Southeast.

If, as expected, each of the proposed Futures Sites included in HR 2099 were developed, the entire fabric of the Tongass would be altered permanently. Places where guides like myself have operated for years would exclusively belong to Sealaska Corporation, to do with as they please. Wilderness values could be negatively impacted. That valuable solitude that people are willing to pay to enjoy could evaporate overnight with the passage of this legislation. The very future of the nature-based tourism industry as we know it would be in question, and it is likely that some guides and outfitters would be crowded off of the Tongass National Forest altogether.

There is no doubt that HR 2099 represents a great opportunity for Sealaska, but it is my belief that it comes at great cost to the region as a whole. As we have seen in recent weeks, this legislation has proven incredibly divisive in Southeast Alaska, and those tensions would be exacerbated if HR 2099 were indeed passed in its current form. Instead of passing legislation that serves only one stakeholder and alienates many others, I would urge Congress to support a more holistic approach that can serve to bring people together around a common solution, that works for Southeast Alaska and for the Tongass National Forest.

I thank you for the opportunity to share my thoughts with you today, and I look forward to answering any questions you may have.