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U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Natural Resources
Washington, DC 20515

Opening Statement of Chairman Don Young
Subcommittee on Indian and Alaska Native Affairs
Legislative Hearing on H.R. 4027 and H.R. 4194
Tuesday, March 20, 2012

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H.R. 4194 would recognize Alexander Creek as a Native Village pursuant to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). This would enable Alexander Creek to organize as a Village Corporation, and facilitate negotiations with the Secretary of the Interior to bring Alexander Creek's land claims settlement entitlement in approximate parity with the other Alaska Native Village Corporations. Though this is a different approach than used in past years, I trust that, together, Alexander Creek and the Secretary will work cooperatively to mold a solution that guarantees a bright future for the Native people of Alexander Creek.

For years, I have watched as this village has worked to fix a grave injustice. In the early 1970's, Alexander Creek counted more than 25 Native residents, which exceed the number required to be recognized as a Native Village under Section 11 of the land claims Act. While the Department of the Interior refused to recognize that Alexander Creek had more than 25 residents, its refusal stemmed from a technicality. In essence, it was a mistake, one which Congress must fix.

Today we'll hear the testimony of one of my constituents, the President of Alexander Creek, Stephanie Thompson. I admire her tenacity in her quest to see Alexander Creek receive Native Village status, and that of her ancestors, who rebuilt the community following a series of epidemics in the early 20th Century.

The elders of Alexander Creek, those who saw their Village status stripped away in the 1970's, are growing older by the day, and I hope we can correct this wrong soon, so that they can see a positive conclusion to this issue.

I now turn to H.R. 4027, sponsored by Jim Matheson of Utah, and cosponsored by our Committee Colleague, Rob Bishop. H.R. 4027 resolves a long-running split-estate problem in the "Hill Creek Extension" of the Indian Reservation for the Ute Tribe of Utah. Under the exchange authorized in this bill, the State of Utah School and Institutional Trust Land Administration, also known as "SITLA," will relinquish to the Ute Tribe subsurface mineral estate to culturally sensitive and sacred lands in the southern part of the Hill Creek Extension. To replace the relinquished mineral estate, SITLA will acquire subsurface rights in the northern part of the Hill Creek Extension. This area is much more suitable for oil and gas development, where substantial oil and gas production is currently underway.

Because the Tribe will partner with the State in the development of oil and gas resources, the legislation increases the potential for new energy production benefiting the Tribe, Utah's public schools, and the nation's consumers.

I look forward to hearing the testimony of all of today's witnesses.