

Debra Thompson

From: Bill Tremblay <brtrembla@gmail.com>
Sent: Friday, January 17, 2020 9:29 AM
To: Assembly
Cc: Stephen Giesbrecht; Debra Thompson
Subject: Kake Access Road Information

Dear Assembly Members;

I won't be in town for your meeting on Tuesday but I wanted to provide some information/comments about the Kake Access Road. Some of the history goes back 16 years ago but I think it's worth mentioning. My information comes from State of Alaska documents or from articles I pulled up on Google. It's a long message but I hope it's worth your time.

Kake Access Road Information

In 2004, the State of Alaska prepared a Transportation Plan that identified a need to improve access between Petersburg and Kake. If you look at the map associated with this plan (Map #24), you'd see that Gov. Murkowski's administration proposed a series of new roads and ferry terminals across southeast Alaska. Their idea was to increase the number of shuttle ferries between islands and connect them with roads. They reasoned that more roads would also open more opportunities for resource development. Part of the discussion with the Petersburg to Kake road under this new system was whether people from Kake would drive to Petersburg to catch a ferry or if people from Petersburg would drive to Kake to catch the ferry? The costs for the roads and new ferries was huge and many of the ideas eventually died (Although; the ferry terminal at the south end of Mitkof Island was one of the projects that was built)

The idea for the Kake Access road lingered but was revised a number of times whether it was talking about access or the Kake Intertie. For the last couple of decades there was ideas and conversations regarding a power grid in southeast Alaska that would connect more communities together to strengthen or improve power to communities. Having a road to Kake could have helped reduce the cost for a power line but, over time, analysis for both the road and intertie made it clear that these projects WERE NOT CONNECTED and should remain separate since the purpose for each project was different. Which makes it interesting that the current Kake Access Road site posted on the State of Alaska Department of Transportation includes the Kake to Petersburg Transmission Line Intertie Project: Final Environmental Impact Statement - Jene 2016 as one of their support documents.

Using the Kake to Petersburg Transmission Line document as a supporting document is very interesting (some may say misleading, dishonest, or arbitrary) for several reasons. First, in April 2016, the Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) decided to quit working on their environmental analysis for the Kake Access Road Project because they found the road project doesn't meet a purpose or need for the communities of Kake or Petersburg. This document was being done with the cooperation of the State of Alaska Dept. of Transportation. FHWA started working on the analysis for the project in 2013. After an initial go around with communities they revised the purpose and need and came back to the communities in 2015 but decided there wasn't the support for the project. There was also a huge question on the part of the State for how or if the road could be maintained once it was built?

The Public Information Officer for State of Alaska Department of Transportation said; "Right now the department is having its operating funds scaled back and so adding additional costs, especially this much (estimated maintenance costs of \$510,000 annually) would be a burden to the department that really couldn't handle it in this financial picture."

So, if the federal and state agencies both agree that the Kake Access Road Project doesn't serve the communities and is affordable to maintain, how and why is this moving forward?

Why? - During all of the budget cuts for the 2019/2020 budget, we were told that the project was "still on the list" of State projects to complete.

How? - The State has the easement cross federal lands for the purpose of connecting communities. On June 11, 2019, the Federal District Court of Alaska resolved an ongoing dispute between the State of Alaska and the U.S. Forest Service regarding the State's rights to develop transportation and utility infrastructure across the Tongass National Forest. Judge Beistline's order declares the property rights held by the State of Alaska in what have come to be known as Section 4407 easements. These easements were created pursuant to a land exchange ratified by Congress in Section 4407 of a 2005 federal transportation funding bill. The State and federal governments' easement exchange in 2005 was designed to preserve the State's infrastructure development rights, if the Roadless Rule were to become applicable to the Tongass National Forest, by establishing easements for transportation and utility corridors to connect the communities of Southeast Alaska. In exchange, the Forest Service received easements over state-owned tidelands for hundreds of federal-owned facilities—docks, floats, boat ramps, breakwaters, log transfer facilities.

The State of Alaska has the right to build the Kake Access Road but maybe the question should come back to WHY?

Discussion Points for the Kake Access Road

Concerns for maintaining the road - as pointed out by ADOT, money for road maintenance was on the decline in 2016 and it hasn't gotten any better. When discussing the road maintenance at the public meetings, the ADOT representative noted that they anticipated the road would be maintained by the Petersburg State DOT crews. Let's remember that the road would be built to a terminal at 12 Mile Creek on Kupreanof Island; the State would provide no access to that terminal but leave it to "private enterprise" to provide for that transportation; there was no mention of where the road maintenance equipment for the road might be stored; and no consideration given to the existing priorities here on Mitkof Island (Keeping runways open for the airport, plowing snow on the highway for school buses, plowing to the end of the road to access Banana Point for transportation shuttles to Wrangell or subsistence fishing.)

Concerns about safety along the road - Petersburg Search and Rescue has responded several times to emergencies in outlying areas on Kupreanof but what about stranded cars? Emergency medical needs? The State easement is for building and maintaining a road; there is nothing in this that speaks to providing other services that would be necessary for public safety between the Federal and State governments.

False justification of support - The Kake/Petersburg Transmission Line EIS specifically notes that there is NO connection between the transmission line project and the road. There are other intertie projects that have been built in southeast Alaska where no road is used to support it (Tyee Lake to Ketchikan for example). The State is grasping at straws to justify this project and using the wrong justification as its basis just makes this project look worst.

The road will "open areas for timber sales" - Do yourselves a favor and look at the map of where the road is proposed and then pull up that same area on Google Earth. What you'll find is that most of the area that could be cut HAS BEEN CUT from 12 Mile Creek to Kake. There is timber between some units but many remain in place to allow for wildlife corridors or for the protection of streams. Let's also acknowledge that by turning this section of road into a State road, the costs of doing a timber sale will INCREASE since the State will require additional payments by a contractor to use and maintain the road that will be built to a higher standard than currently exists.

The road will give Kake access to medical facilities - Really? To how many, when, and why? Most of the residents are eligible for native health services that are provided in Sitka. Serious medical emergencies would still require an air ambulance; as we do in Petersburg. Does anyone really think someone with a medical emergency in Kake will venture out on a one lane road in the winter, to drive across to 12 Mile Creek to hope someone with a boat could get them to Petersburg in Fredrick Sound? (Let's not forget my questions about maintaining the road.)

In conclusion;

Despite Sen. Steadman's insistence that he thinks this road is needed; it's not. The Feds say there isn't a need, the State DOT says they can't afford it, and the most people in the communities say they don't want it. Comments from the public meeting point to wanting improvements to the ferry rather than this road.

For more than 25 years with the Forest Service, one of my jobs was to help assess priorities for the construction or reconstruction of recreation projects. The cycle of budgets meant that some things did linger on a list. However, each project was always reassessed before it was finally funded to be sure it still made sense. This project doesn't make sense and this money needs to go where it will do some good.

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