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Delegation's Landless Legislation Rectifies 50-Year Injustice

Bill Would Provide Lands and Rights Under ANCSA to Five Southeast Native Communities

Washington, DC—U.S. Sens. Lisa Murkowski, Dan Sullivan, and Rep. Don Young, all R-Alaska, today issued statements on new legislation they introduced to allow the Alaska Native communities of Haines, Ketchikan, Wrangell, Petersburg, and Tenakee to form urban corporations and receive land entitlements under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act of 1971 (ANCSA).

The five Southeast communities were not included in ANCSA, which divided 44 million acres of land among more than 200 regional, village, and urban corporations to resolve land claims throughout Alaska. The delegation's new bill – entitled the Unrecognized Southeast Alaska Native Communities Recognition and Compensation Act – would amend ANCSA to provide each community with the right to form an Alaska Native Urban Corporation and receive 23,040 acres, or one township, of federal land—just as ANCSA granted to other Southeast Native communities 50 years ago.

“The identity of Alaska’s first people is inextricably tied to the land they have inhabited for centuries,” Murkowski said. “For five decades, these five landless communities have sought the same benefits ANCSA granted to other Alaska Natives throughout Southeast. This is a matter of equity. Our new legislation will help correct this historical wrong.”

“It is simply a matter of fairness that the five ‘landless’ Alaska Native communities in Southeast have the same access to land that other communities received following the historic enactment of ANCSA,” Sullivan said. “Our legislation directs the federal government to make good on its promises to the indigenous communities that were excluded from this seminal agreement, and I look forward to working with my colleagues to help them understand the unique importance of this bill to the people of my state.”

“For too long, the so-called 'landless' Alaska Natives, from the communities of Haines, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Tenakee, and Wrangell, have been denied the land and local resources that other village and urban corporations received under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) of 1971,” Young said. “Very frankly, this was an error that should have never happened, and I have always fought to secure the recognition that these communities deserve. Access to land is crucial, and will help bring economic opportunity and upward mobility to the Alaska Natives in Southeast. I am very proud to introduce the Unrecognized Southeast Alaska Native Communities Recognition and Compensation Act. Just as we have with Alaska Native communities across our state, this bill would finally amend ANCSA to provide each landless community with the right to form an Alaska Native Urban Corporation, making them eligible to receive 23,040 acres of federal land. I am grateful to have Senators Murkowski and Sullivan as partners in this important initiative, and I sincerely appreciate the extensive input and engagement from stakeholders in Southeast. Securing a better tomorrow for Alaska Natives starts with ensuring fair treatment under law, and Alaskans can count on me to work hard to get this bill across the finish line.”

“We are at a unique time in our history, as the United States comes to a collective reckoning of its past, while socially and institutionally reforming to rebuild its present,” said Cecilia Tavoriero, Petersburg landless shareholder and president of the Southeast Alaska Landless Corporation, the nonprofit coalition of the five landless communities fighting for recognition. “As we rebuild, Alaska Natives Without Land is fighting for Indigenous land rights for the descendants of the ancient villages of the Southeast Alaskan communities known today as Haines, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Tenakee Springs and Wrangell.”

Sullivan and Murkowski filed the measure in the Senate earlier today, and Young will introduce it Thursday, when the House is back in session.

There is no consensus on why the five communities were left out of ANCSA, but a congressionally-directed 1994 [study](#) by the University of Alaska’s Institute of Social and Economic Research found that the examined history of the five communities showed strong similarities to other communities in the region that were granted corporations under ANCSA.

The new legislation is the result of extensive and ongoing outreach to stakeholders in Southeast Alaska. Unlike previous measures, it identifies specific parcels of land that would be conveyed to the new urban corporations, which are depicted on official maps produced by the U.S. Forest Service. The legislation also includes detailed terms to protect many existing uses of those lands and to ensure that reasonable public access can continue.

To read the legislation, click [here](#). To see the Forest Service’s maps, click [here](#).

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