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The Kake Access Project is Not a Done Deal

During the recent Borough candidate's forum, the candidates were asked if they would support a Borough resolution pleading for a public hearing and an Environmental Impact Statement prior to federal issuance of a permit for constructing the Kake Access Road. The candidates' answers were based on misunderstandings that deserve correction.

A major misconception is that the road is "a done deal." In fact, so far the only work that is under contract is the re-conditioning of 42 miles of existing, poorly maintained, single lane Forest Service road that is part of the project. This maintenance should be the Forest Service's responsibility, instead of being shifted to our budget-strapped State and at an exorbitant cost of \$15.5 million just for those existing miles—or \$370 thousand per mile. This reconstruction cost far exceeds the typical cost of completely new FS roads.

There is no contract yet for building the project's 5.4 miles of new road and including a 128 foot bridge spanning Twelve Mile Creek and associated boat ramp. According to the US Army Corps of Engineers, the decision whether to issue the required permit for this activity requires preparation of an "environmental analysis".

All together, this means that spending nearly \$25 million of Stedman's 2012 \$40 million "midnight rider" budget appropriation for the project is – at least for now – blocked.

217 Kake residents signed a petition opposing the project, representing just about every adult in town. This soundly rejected a letter supporting the project that Kake's Mayor had written without authorization from Kake's City Council. The tribal government (Organized Village of Kake) and the City of Kupreanof officially oppose the road.

A recent 30-day comment period on the Corps of Engineers intent to issue the permit for constructing the new portions of road has been the only opportunity for public comment on the latest version of this road to nowhere. Because of the comments, the Corps has concluded an environmental analysis is necessary before deciding whether to issue the permit.

The State claims that the road will be open year round. Clearly, funding for doing so is imaginary. One Kake resident told me they often can't even get to their garbage dump in the winter due to poorly maintained roads. The Federal Highways Administration abandoned the Kake Petersburg road project in part due to the State's lack of \$510 thousand to maintain it annually.

The State's official purpose and need statement for the road is for "subsistence and recreation," not an electrical intertie to Kake, which was studied earlier and rejected. Subsistence and recreation users already have plenty of access to the area via Portage Bay, just beyond the road's planned Twelve-Mile Creek terminus. The State's elected and bureaucrat architects of this boondoggle should disclose their real reason for the road and quit hiding behind this clear travesty.

Finally, Senator Stedman asserts that the petition requesting a public hearing and EIS, and the 118 Borough residents who signed it over the Fourth of July weekend, are "irrelevant." As an elected public official, I find his attitude demeaning and disrespectful to his budget-conscious constituents.

Sincerely,

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