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Senate Resources Committee

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Legislature: Feds Should Comply with ANILCA

(JUNEAU) – The House passed a resolution on Tuesday calling on President George W. Bush to reinstate a directive that would prohibit wilderness reviews of Alaska’s federal lands.

When Congress passed the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA), it promised the people of Alaska there would be no more wilderness studies or withdrawals of federal lands for conservation. In 1981, the U.S. Secretary of the Interior issued a directive in compliance with this act prohibiting the U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM) from considering or designating any of the land it manages in Alaska as wilderness.

Interior Secretary Bruce Babbitt rescinded the directive in the final hours of the Clinton administration, acting without public comment, without consulting the State of Alaska, and with complete disregard for the “no more clause” in ANILCA. In the absence of the directive, BLM will be free to manage its roadless land in Alaska as de facto wilderness, effectively ending any economic development of those areas.

Senate Joint Resolution 7, sponsored by the Senate Resources Committee, opposes the rescission of the directive and urges the President to reinstate it.

“In rescinding this directive, Babbitt ignored a land management policy that has worked well for Alaska for almost 20 years,” said Sen. John Torgerson (R-Kasilof), chair of the Senate Resources Committee. “This blatantly defies the ‘no more clause’ in ANILCA and it is not in the best interest of Alaska. We hope that President Bush and Interior Secretary Gail Norton will work quickly to reinstate the directive.”

The resolution passed the Senate 16-3 and the House 32-3, and now goes to the governor for signature.

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An excerpt from Rep. Drew Scalzi’s floor speech in support of SJR 7 is available on the Majority Actuality Line, 800-478-6540.