

Sponsor Statement for HB 205

Resource Development: BD./Grants/Fund

An Act relating to resource development and to grants for the purpose of promoting resource development from appropriations of a portion of the revenue derived from the extraction of certain state natural resources.

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House Bill 205 will establish the Resource Development Board, which will be tasked with the primary duties of facilitating public education and promoting responsible resource development. The board will have the authority to award grants to private nonprofit corporations for projects such as conducting marketing research, advertising, publishing, and distributing information related to responsible resource extraction. The Board will establish standards for reviewing proposals and setting terms and conditions for the use of the grants. Grants will be awarded from the Resource Development Fund, which will be created within the general fund and will be subject to legislative appropriation from revenues received from the extraction of the state's natural resources.

In his annual address to the Legislature, Senator Frank Murkowski advised that "The State must do its part to promote economic development of its own lands, irrespective of the prevailing federal attitude and political landscape at the federal level."

House Bill 205 represents an investment in Alaska's future. Alaska has been, and will be, dependent on natural resource extraction to fuel our economic engine for the foreseeable future. We need to continue to promote responsible development of our resources while protecting the environment. The best way to protect Alaska's environment is to have a strong, diversified economy. The majority of the environmental groups, apparently, do not agree with this concept as they continue to oppose nearly all development while offering no alternative economic plan. Alaska's environmental protection laws are among the strongest in the world, yet, by opposing development of Alaska's natural resources, environmentalists push development offshore to third world countries assuring exploitative development in the absence of adequate environmental protection laws.

There are now more than 90 environmental groups with offices in Alaska and the vast majority of their money comes from the lower 48. These organizations spend millions of dollars in Alaska attempting to sway public opinion, drive public policy, and inhibit the development of our natural resources. Because of the virtually unlimited funds available to these environmental groups, Alaska based resource development advocates are unable to compete effectively in presenting a balanced message to the public and are overwhelmed by a one-sided message. House Bill 205 will provide assistance in disseminating a balanced message regarding responsible resource development.

Alaska invests in marketing our tourism and seafood industries and in supporting the opening of ANWR to petroleum exploration in order to benefit our economy. We also need to invest in the promotion of our diverse mineral resource, timber, and oil and gas development.

Creating the Resource Development Board will promote responsible resource development in Alaska and assist us in meeting our constitutional mandate of developing our resources by making them available for maximum use consistent with the public interest.