

# Sponsor Statement for HB 299

## Alaska Place Names

### *An Act providing for the naming and renaming of Alaska geographic features*

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The names of Alaska's geographical features come from a variety of sources, many of which have no connection or relevance to Alaska or its peoples.

This legislation will allow the State Place Names Commission to begin to substitute relevant Alaskan names that are local Alaskan Native names, honor a local citizen, honor a famous Alaskan, uniquely describe an identifying feature, or describe a local event.

A companion resolution will encourage the US Geological Bureau to follow the lead of the State Agency in renaming the features on Federal maps and documents.

"Many of Alaska's geographical names were given by European explorers to honor a benefactor or curry favor with some powerful politician or ruler. Some of these people never saw Alaska or made any contribution to it. Most of the European explorers had no concept of recognizing the contributions and names used by Alaska's Native people who had been here for at least 10,000 years. Some of the American, Asian, Canadian, and European settlers who later came to Alaska made profound contributions to Alaska. It is far more fitting that our geographical place names should honor its people instead of the Alma Mater of some rich tourist on a quasi scientific expedition. HB 299 encourages the Alaska Naming Commission to do the research and suggest more appropriate ALASKAN names.

Alaskans tend to give rivers, bays, glaciers, mountains and lakes far more descriptive names than did the Europeans. "Purgatory Creek" and "Murder lake", are descriptive of conditions and events. "Looks like a Neck" is far more apropos than "Bainbridge Passage". "Place of the Last Great Battle" is much more colorful than "Green Lake".

Under the Alaska Native Lands Claim Act, Section H, a group under the US Department of the Interior, has done extensive work researching Native place names. The Native Language School at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks also has a large amount of similar information.

HB 299 will begin a public process that will hopefully result in more appropriate Alaska place names and the honoring of the native and non-native people who actually lived here or made a contribution to Alaska. We have too long a history of people from somewhere else coming here and taking our furs, gold, timber, fish, and oil and going back south. At least, with this legislation, we have a chance to take back some of our geographical names.