

**How to reach us**

**FRANK GERJEVIC**  
Editorial Writer  
257-4308,  
fgerjevic@adn.com

**LETTERS**  
Fax: 258-2157  
letters@adn.com

Letters, ADN  
Box 149001  
Anchorage 99514

# Daily News Opinion

**COMPASS:** *Points of view from the community*

## Sealaska land claim threatens Tongass guide businesses

By **SCOTT NEWMAN**

For 22 years I have been guiding hunters on the Tongass National Forest. My entire adult life has been spent working in the woods and on the waters of Southeast Alaska. The forest puts the food on my family's table, clothes on their backs, and the roof over their heads.

It is a point of pride for me to say that I was born and raised in Southeast Alaska and have made a suitable living in the only place I have ever called home. The Tongass is a place I care about deeply and want to see protected for the sake of my four children.

Guides and outfitters provide visitors to the Tongass with their most intimate opportunity to experience one of the rarest places on earth first hand. I have taken visitors from all 50 states on once-in-a-lifetime adventures deep into pristine places, experiences they simply would not have without a guide who is familiar with the landscape. Hundreds of guides



like me all across Southeast fill this important role.

Guides and outfitters have been the agents of positive economic change in Southeast. Where once the timber industry was king, many factors have led to the rise of a more sustainable and diverse economic model — a model based in large part on the incredible beauty and astounding wildlife of the Tongass. People from all over the world are willing to spend their hard-earned money to experience a wild

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Tongass, and with the proper management and oversight, we can continue to ensure that their expectations of scenery and solitude are met.

With 235 guides and outfitters providing similar services all across the region, our economic impact is significant and increasing. Nature-based tourism in Southeast Alaska had revenues of \$15.5 million and attracted 42,000 visitors in just the summer of 2005, according to a report by the University of Alaska.

Our businesses also provide an important stream of revenues for the U.S. Forest Service, through the various permits each guide and outfitter is required to have. In 2008, Forest Service revenues from those permits reached nearly \$1 million.

However, legislation in Congress jeopardizes this promising new economic future in Southeast Alaska. By allowing the Sealaska Corporation to scatter private developments in important recreational areas across the forest, these lands cease to be public, giving Sealaska Corporation virtual control of the nature-based tourism industry in Southeast.

If Sealaska develops each of the "futures" sites it seeks in this legislation, the entire fabric of the Tongass would be altered permanently. Places where guides like myself have operated for years would belong exclusively to Sealaska Corporation, to do with as they please. That valuable solitude that people are willing

to pay to enjoy could evaporate overnight if this legislation passed. The very future of the nature-based tourism industry as we know it would be in question, and it is likely that some guides and outfitters would be crowded off the Tongass National Forest altogether.

There is no doubt the legislation represents a great opportunity for Sealaska Corporation, but it comes at great cost to the region as a whole. As we have seen in recent weeks, this legislation has proven incredibly divisive in Southeast Alaska.

Instead of passing legislation that serves only one stakeholder and alienates many others, I urge Congress to support a more holistic approach that brings people together around a common solution that works for Southeast Alaska and for the Tongass National Forest.

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Scott Newman is a hunting guide who lives in Petersburg.