**PROBLEM***:* (Potentially the most) **Prime public recreation land in Alaska is proposed to be transferred to a private enterprise.**  The State has recently conditionally relinquished approximately 1,260 acres of some of most popular public recreation land in Thompson Pass for transfer to a private Native Corporation.

Against the Federal guiding doctrine. BLM’s East Alaska Resource Management Plan clearly states that **these land sections are not available**.

Against the State guiding doctrine. The Copper River Basin Area Plan clearly states, *“The management unit (Unit 15: Thompson Pass)* ***should be retained in state ownership*** *. . . with an emphasis on expanding recreation opportunities (3-103)”.* Thompson Pass was one of three areas *“recommended for legislative designation (for) hav(ing)e very high recreation value and receiv(ing)e the most public use (A-5).” “The potential for conflict between minerals and other resources is high in these areas. The relative values of fish habitat or recreation are higher than potential mineral values and therefore warrant a closure (A-4).” “Due to land conveyances under the ANSCA and state land disposals, the primary trail issue is to retain and designate existing access to state land (A-6).”*

Against Public (the landowner’s) opinion. The public and the (now “abandoned” by the State) Citizen’s Advisory Board has, for many years, unanimously opposed commercial development in Thompson Pass. Example - On 10/1/04 the Citizens Advisory Board (chosen by the Director of the Division of Parks and Recreation to ensure that a broad spectrum of public interest would be represented), sent a (yet another) letter to the DNR stating *“For the better part of the last decade the Citizens Advisory Board has had numerous instances to hear public comment about development in the Thompson Pass area.* ***The board can state unequivocally that the overwhelming majority of public comments have been against permanent year-round commercial development of the Thompson Pass area.****”*

***WHY IS IT A PROBLEM****?: “Outdoor recreation is essential to the American economy. Every year, Americans spend* ***$788 billion*** *on outdoor recreation . . .. This creates jobs, supports communities, generates tax revenue and helps drive the economy.* ***Throughout America, people recognize that outdoor recreation and open spaces attract and sustain families and businesses, create healthy communities and foster a high quality of life.****”* - Outdoor Industry Association

Outdoor recreation in Alaska is an economic powerhouse providing *72,000 direct jobs, $7.3 billion in consumer spending, $2.3 billion in wages and salary, and $337 million in state and local tax revenue.*  -2019 U.S. Bureau of Economic Analysis

We must also be especially cognizant of the current precarious state of mental health (suicide, addiction, covid etc.) and the extraordinary preventative and therapeutic efficacy of the outdoors. **“*We need the tonic of wildness*.”** – Thoreau

Arguably the most scenic land with the highest public use is being targeted. And it has 2 bisecting historic trails. Additionally, Thompson Pass has hosted skiing, kiteskiing, snowboarding, snowmachining, ice climbing, rock climbing, biking, kayaking and mulit-sport events. It’s been a destination classroom for students of all ages and a training ground for Olympians and the military. The Department of Transportation has developed an increasing number of turnouts for tourists, recreationalists and hunters. A new parking area was completed this last fall to accommodate hikers using the recently cleared historic 1899 pack trail. The State Division of Outdoor Parks and Recreation invested over a million dollars to upgrade Copper River Valley’s #1 tourist attraction, the Worthington Glacier. And even today, 1/2/21, with below zero temperatures, every parking area in the Thompson Pass corridor was full of vehicles. Powder, subsistence and most importantly “wildness” are legitimate resources. And so is **energy security**, the 28 daily fuel tanker trucks, and **national security,** the off-loaded barge ( from America’s northernmost ice-free port on the road system) trucks heading to the military bases (or other industry), which both depend on the Richardson transportation corridor. **But this public wonderland and critical transportation artery is at risk of disenchantment and congestion.**

**WHY HAS THIS HAPPENED?** Senator Lisa Murkowski sponsored (and Senator Dan Sullivan co-sponsored) the Dingell Act that President Trump signed last year which allows native corporations to undo the settlement of aboriginal land rights. 46 years ago the Alaska Native Settlement Claims Act, ANSCA, allowed the native corporations to select 44 million acres of land and the U.S. then payed them an additional nearly 1 billion dollars as compensation for the rest of the (unselected) land. And now, nearly 50 years later, the 2019 Dingell Act is allowing the native corporations to (change their mind and) exchange that land for what has become the most popular recreation land, including two sections (Sections 5 & 6, Township 9 South, Range 2 West, Copper River Meridian) totaling 2 square miles, roughly 1,260 acres, at the Thompson Pass hairpin turn on the south side of Odyssey mountain.

**MAP**:<https://eplanning.blm.gov/public_projects/2003781/200470312/20031510/250037709/EARMP_Amend_ThompsonPassArea_landstatus.pdf>). The sections are attached to both an additional 4 square miles of already native owned land to the east and 22 more square miles of native selected land to the south/southeast, extending out between Bench Glacier and Marshall Glacier including Heiden Glacier and most of the Deserted Glacier (recreationalists know that access to “The Books” is otherworldly but they did not know that it could become history). The conveyance of these 22 square miles simply requires the submittal of a request to BLM for transfer; no public input included. *“The proposed amendment will also analyze making additional lands near Thompson Pass available for potential exchanges”*. - A 11/24/20 Notice by the [Land Management Bureau](https://www.federalregister.gov/agencies/land-management-bureau)

Furthermore Section 910 of ANILCA prevents the Federal agencies, like BLM, from doing any environmental reviews under the National Environmental Protection Act (NEPA) on anything that leads to conveyances of land, including exchanges, with any ANCSA corporation. BLM cannot look at the effect on the environment but **they can and should look at the effect on the public and our use of our public lands**. Once an exchange is complete, the corporation is free to do anything (a mini nuclear power plant to run a mine or logging operation? ) on the land. There will be no restrictions. The corporation will own the surface and subsurface rights.

Not only does the Dingell Act require a study, within one year (it has been nearly 2 years), but then BLM is also obligated to make Federal lands (not lands that the State has quietly relinquished in a deal with a private corporation) available and to recommend a land exchange. Someone needs to call an *“All Systems Stop!”* until the Dingell Act’s required study is complete. BLM cannot proceed with action based on a plan that has yet to be submitted. Step 2 of the Act is being pushed forward before Step 1 is complete. And when the study is complete, BLM should look at the full scope of the “*Chugach Region*” (not being foreclosed to just this one option) as dictated by the Act.

Unlike when BLM conveys lands to the State and we all get to continue using them, once the lands are conveyed to an ANCSA corporation they become private lands and only their shareholders can use the lands.

**CONCLUSION**: A private for profit enterprise, the Chugach Alaska Corporation, is “selecting” the highest public use land to essentially renegotiate ANCSA. 300 million Americans own this land. And our elected officials and political appointees are supporting this new land give-away process. In the midst of both a widespread mental health crisis and a national insecurity, our representatives are giving our public land, our healing grounds (and potentially both our energy and national security), to a private corporation. If ANSCA is to be renegotiated, it should happen on land that is not both a **critical public recreation habitat and** (on the most fatal hairpin turn of ) a **critical transportation artery.**

After 3 decades of listening to both tourists and locals, I am certain that it is the endangered unspoiled vastness more than any single activity that draws folks to this area. Nestled between Thompson Pass and Prince William Sound, Valdez has the opportunity not only to become Alaska’s recreation hub but to become North America’s recreation hub. The Valdez gold rush went bust. The oil will eventually run dry. And even the fishing has, at times, become more . . . well . . . like fishing. But thankfully Americans spend $788 billionannually on outdoor recreation. Thompson Pass, if responsibly managed, is THE **precious renewable resource**, the ASSET, capable of sustaining Valdez’s long-term health and economy. **It is poor public policy to give up unique-in-all-the-world public land for private profit** (and perhaps pillage?) particularly with the public investment that has gone into this area.

**WHAT YOU CAN DO**: Politics are forcing the feds to protect the Native Corps. against the letter of the law. But BLM is an agency that works for the public, *all* of the public, not just ANCSA corporations. Therefore we should have a say *if* lands are going to be exchanged with an ANCSA corporation, *which* lands are exchanged and *what* access rights we, as the public landowners, should be able to keep. It is our job to let elected officials, political appointees and the BLM know what our rights, interests and concerns are. As the current interim land manager, BLM is being pressured (by our political appointees) to amend the East Alaska Resource Management Plan which clearly dictates that these 2 sections are not available. **And you are invited to help guide them or redirect them through this amendment. Public scoping comments are due on January 4th, 2021** (late comments may? be considered due to holiday/covid timing)**.**

**Comment:** [**https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2003781/570/8001860/comment**](https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2003781/570/8001860/comment)or by mail to: Bureau of Land Management East Alaska RMP Amendment/EA 222 W. 7th Ave., Stop 13 Anchorage, Alaska 99513

And then in late January or early February BLM will release a draft analysis (based on your public comments) and post (<https://eplanning.blm.gov/eplanning-ui/project/2003781/550>) a 15-day notice prior to a public virtual meeting. There will then be 30 days to comments on BLM’s proposed draft.

For a more detailed explanation: <https://drive.google.com/file/d/1jGR5CeVHJ0eK6tE8kunpYsx9d9Vrg6dL/view?usp=sharing>