

PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

January 24, 2012

FOR MORE INFORMATION

Bob Shavelson, Inletkeeper 907.299.3277
Vicki Clark, Trustees for Alaska 907.350.2955

Parnell Rollbacks Threaten Alaska's Fish & Water Resources *Trampling Alaskans' Rights in the Process*

ANCHORAGE, AK – Conservation groups today called on Alaskans to push back against several proposed Parnell Administration bills that will undermine democracy and threaten fish and water resources.

This past week, Governor Parnell introduced a suite of bills that will rollback basic safeguards that have long-protected Alaska's resources, and provided Alaskans with a meaningful role in natural resource decisions. Considered together, these bills are an obvious attempt by Governor Parnell to ensure Alaskans don't have a say in how their resources are managed. These rollbacks include:

- Cruise Ship Pollution: In 2006, Alaskans passed an initiative requiring cruise ships to meet water quality standards when they discharge pollutants to Alaskan waters. Relying on various findings made by an industry-dominated task force, Governor Parnell's proposal will reverse the 2006 statewide vote, and allow cruise ships to dump sewage and other wastes in Alaska's marine waters.
- Attack on Salmon Habitat: Fish need water to survive and current law allows Alaskans to secure "in stream flow" rights to ensure there is enough water in streams for fish. Governor Parnell's proposal will strip Alaskans of the right to protect water quantity in salmon streams.
- Less Access to Government: Governor Parnell's proposal will make it considerably harder for Alaskans affected by certain DNR decisions to appeal those decisions.
- Water Rights for Corporations, Not Alaskans: Governor Parnell's proposal will give corporations unlimited access to significant quantities of water through "temporary" water use permits, and severely limit Alaskans' right to challenge such permits.
- Not in Alaskans' Best Interest: To comply with the Alaska Constitution, DNR must conduct a "best interest finding" (BIF) before it leases lands or gives other interests in state resources. Under current law, Alaskans have an opportunity to comment on the possible impacts a proposal may have on water, fish, and human health. Governor Parnell's proposed changes will remove the requirement for public review and comment on BIFs, letting agencies and corporations dictate the scope and impacts of development throughout the state.
- Out of Sight, Out of Mind: Governor Parnell's proposal will allow a number of development projects to hide behind so-called "general permits," which do not require public notice and comment for specific projects. These permits will be issued to projects "unlikely to result in significant and irreparable harm to state land or resources," but the meaning of the term "significant and irreparable harm" remains undefined.

- Wetlands Permitting: Despite the fact almost all wetlands dredge and fill permits are currently granted by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Governor Parnell's bill authorizes DNR and DEC to apply for delegation of this extremely expensive regulatory program for which only two other states (Michigan and New Jersey) have oversight — and Michigan is trying to give the program back. Despite the fact Alaska is tightening its belt and is dealing with a permit backlog, Governor Parnell is proposing that the state take over issuing wetlands permits.

These rollbacks, combined with other efforts, restrict citizen access to the judicial branch. For example, Alaska is the only state in the nation with a “loser pays” rule for its courts. The legislature is also considering legislation reintroduced by Representative Eric Feige from last session that will require Alaskans to post a significant bond prior to challenging a decision in court. This bill will effectively prevent all but the wealthiest corporations and individuals from being able to challenge resource permitting decisions in the state. Feige's bill was introduced last session, but failed to pass in the Senate before the end of the session.

This is just one more example of Governor Parnell opening new gateways for Outside corporations to exploit Alaskan resources, while trampling on the rights of Alaskans to protect their fish and water resources. Another example is Governor Parnell's efforts to systematically dismantle the Alaska Coastal Management Program (ACMP). The ACMP was the only program that provided Alaskans with a meaningful seat at the table for influencing federal land and water use decisions. With the end of that program, Alaskans no longer have a voice in those decisions.

The House and Senate Resources Committees are conducting hearings on the Cruise Ship bills this week, and the House Resources Committee is scheduled to take up the DNR Rollback Bill on January 30 and the Wetlands Bill on February 1. The House Judiciary Committee plans to take up the Alaskan Court Bonding Bill on January 30.

The DNR Rollback Bills are HB 77 and SB 26:

http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=28&bill=HB77

http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=28&bill=SB26

The Cruise Ship Pollution Bills are HB 80 and SB 29:

http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=28&bill=HB80

http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=28&bill=SB29

The Wetlands Bills are HB 78 and SB 27:

http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=28&bill=HB78

http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?session=28&bill=SB27

The Alaskan Court Bonding Bill is HB 47:

http://www.legis.state.ak.us/basis/get_bill.asp?bill=HB%20%2047&session=28