



VIA EMAIL ONLY
(Senator.Cathy.Giessel@akleg.gov)

February 14, 2018

Cathy Giessel, Chair
Alaska Senate Resources Committee
State Capital Room 427
Juneau, AK 99801

Re: Senate Bill 173

Dear Madam Chair:

Please accept these brief comments on SB 173 from Cook Inletkeeper, a public interest group representing over 8000 Alaskans concerned about clean water and healthy fish habitat.

SB 173 was introduced on February 2 and referred to only one committee in the Senate, the Senate Resources Committee. It had its first hearing February 12, and today will be its second hearing, with no public testimony to be taken and with the possibility the Committee will report the bill out today.

Based on testimony heard at the February 12 hearing, there are over 250,000 utility poles treated with pentachlorophenol across Alaska. Pentachlorophenol is a highly toxic, bioaccumulative substance which has been banned in many countries across the globe.

In response to the pervasive problem of contaminated utility poles across the state, HB 173 does one thing – it absolves utilities and other potentially responsible parties from liability.

Surprisingly, SB 173 comes with a zero fiscal note, which begs the question: if SB 173 absolves responsible parties from clean-up liabilities, who will address the considerable toxic pollution left behind by more than 250,000 contaminated utility poles across the state?

Because that question remains unanswered, Inletkeeper urges the Senate Resources Committee to take a step back, and consider amendments which could address the problem of ongoing, widespread toxic pollution across the state. For example, the Committee should

Senate Resources Letter
Comments on SB 173
February 14, 2018

consider a series of Best Management Practices (BMP) – similar to BMP’s embraced by Vermont – to mitigate the possible migration of pentachlorophenol, and to explore possible less toxic alternatives.

Alaskans are increasingly concerned about wild salmon habitat, and the state government’s willingness and ability to protect it. Throughout the Cook Inlet watershed – in the Mat Su Valley, in Anchorage, and on the Kenai Peninsula – many contaminated poles are sited in or around wetlands that support our wild salmon.

When talking about the decline of our salmon habitat, we often hear about the phenomenon of the “death by a thousand cuts,” where seemingly small, individual events have largescale cumulative effects that pollute our waters and degrade our fish habitat. In the case of SB 173 as currently written, it’s more like “death by 250,000 cuts.”

We applaud the bill sponsor and the Committee for recognizing this long-standing problem. We urge you, however, to slow down, and to formulate a more thoughtful solution that does not simply leave hundreds of thousands of contaminated sites strewn across the state, with little or no potential for clean-up.

Thank you for your attention to these comments, and feel free to contact me with any questions at bob@inletkeeper.org or 907.299.3277.

Yours for Cook Inlet,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Bob Shavelson". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Bob Shavelson
Inletkeeper