January 5, 2024

To Ivy Spohnholz, State Director, TNC Alaska

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I am a 40 year resident of Gustavus, Alaska, and writing today to state my strong interest in retaining the TNC lands within the city of Gustavus under the control of TNC.

As you know it has recently become public knowledge that the Hoonah Indian Association (HIA) requested the transfer of all TNC lands in Gustavus to them. This request apparently happened almost 2 years ago, and I have several concerns about HIA request and the response by TNC. I view HIA requesting these lands is a hostile act toward a neighbor community, compounded by the fact that neither HIA or TCN felt compelled to contact the community which would be impacted by this transfer of land.

I believe context is important here. TNC lands at issue here are nestled directly within this community, not scattered miles away. The reason this tiny community (approximately 350 adults and children at that time) were motivated to raise $120,000.00 is because these State of Alaska Mental Health Trust lands were extremely important to us. We wanted these lands protected from the Mental Health Trust mandate to sell or develop their lands to provide revenue for the Trust. These lands, especially the Gustavus forelands are our traditional subsistence areas, hunting, berry picking, harvesting of natural plants and recreation. Development of these lands would be devastating to us. You might wonder why these lands are so critical to us, having close access to Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve (GBNP). Again, understanding context here is very important. Gustavus is closely bounded by the GBNP on three sides, north, west and east. To the south is Icy Strait. The City of Hoonah has applied to the Alaska Boundary Commission to establish a borough which Gustavus declined to join, but would border the city on our entire southern boundary, completing a land locked situation for Gustavus. Transfer of TNC lands would give HIA access to lands within the city of Gustavus to tax, restrict or develop. You can understand why we wish to protect these lands.

While the State of Alaska owns the rights to development of these TNC lands, the state can sell those rights at any time. Again, look at context and history. Sealaska Corporation in partnership with HIA have logged the majority of their tribal lands. More recently, Huna Totem Corporation in partnership with Norwegian Cruise Lines has developed an old cannery site just north of town, which includes two cruise ship docks (one for “mega’ ships), a mall, restaurants, shops and a zip line. Disney Land North. With the completion of the second pier at Icy Strait Point they will have the capacity for more than 250 ships a year! I am not criticizing Sealaska, HIA or the Indian Association, they have made decisions based on the needs of their community, the point here is these entities do not reflect the same conservation and low level development values of most Gustavus residents. We have so little land that we feel a strong need to protect what we have from industrial development.

I realize we do not own the TNC land, and do not control the TNC. However, I ask that in the future the fact that we gave our hard-earned dollars to help purchase these lands from the State of Alaska and our ongoing active interest, would be considered a demonstration of our commitment to the conservation of the TNC lands within the city of Gustavus.

Thank You,

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