

December 13, 2023



The Honorable Joe Manchin
Chairman
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

The Honorable John Barrasso
Ranking Member
Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee
Washington, D.C. 20515

Dear Chairman Manchin, Ranking Member Barrasso, and members of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee:

We thank the committee for considering S. 1889, the *Unrecognized Southeast Alaska Native Communities Recognition and Compensation Act*. We write to share our perspective on this legislation.

The Nature Conservancy (TNC) is a non-profit organization whose mission is to conserve the lands and waters on which all life depends. Our on-the-ground and in-the-water conservation work is carried out across the states and territories of the United States and in 70+ countries around the world. We are known for our science-based, collaborative approach to developing creative solutions to conservation challenges. For over three decades, TNC has undertaken work in Southeast Alaska – in and around the Tongass National Forest – in partnership with various Tribes and Alaska Native regional and village corporations.

When the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) settled land claims in 1971, five communities in Southeast Alaska were excluded from this agreement. Research by the Institute of Social and Economic Research (ISER) at the University of Alaska shows there is no clear reason as to why these five communities were excluded. Emil Notti, an Alaska Native leader who was critical to the land claims agreement, has stated ANCSA will “remain unfinished until the five landless communities are recognized.”

The Nature Conservancy supports efforts to right the injustice of exclusion for the five landless Alaska Native communities in Southeast Alaska. We see S. 1889, sponsored by Senator Lisa Murkowski, as an opportunity to correct for this inequity.

The Nature Conservancy recognizes Indigenous Peoples as vital leaders in the pursuit of lasting solutions to the world’s most pressing environmental and human well-being challenges. As a conservation organization, we are keenly aware that the conservation movement has not always taken this perspective. Too often, advocacy in the United States has intentionally sought to undermine the rights of Indigenous Peoples in the name of conservation. This has caused tremendous harm – to Alaska Native peoples and their traditional homelands – and the legacy of this power dynamic continues to this day. With this history in mind, TNC publicly affirms our

support for resolution for the landless communities in Southeast Alaska. In assessing this legislation, we hope the voices that are most important to this committee are not those of conservation groups, but rather, those of the sovereign nations in Southeast Alaska for whom this has been a generation-long injustice.

Thank you for the opportunity to weigh in on this critical issue.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script, reading "Ivy Spohnholz". The signature is written in black ink and is positioned above the printed name and title.

Ivy Spohnholz
Alaska State Director