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SENATOR PAUL TSONGAS
Speech to the Senate
May 8, 1980

National Interest
Lands

ALASKA LANDS: THE CONSERVATION ISSUE OF THE 20th CENTURY

Mr. President, today I am introducing my amendments to H.R. 39, the Alaska lands conservation ^{Act} bill. This action marks a turning point in the long battle over what has been rightly called the conservation issue of the century.

much?

As you know, although the House has twice passed legislation to protect ~~many~~ ^{much} of Alaska's most spectacular federal wildlands by overwhelming margins, the Senate has yet to act on this historic issue. The settlement of a time agreement last February and the introduction of these amendments today sets the stage for the floor debate that is scheduled to follow the recess for the Republican convention on July 21.

Mr. President, the opportunity to bring this issue to this chamber for discussion and to a vote is one that has long been sought by myself and by many of my distinguished colleagues. In the waning hours of the 95th Congress, the Senate was denied the chance to vote on this monumental legislation. The interim protection for these federal wildlands was due to expire at that time, therefore, President Carter stepped in and

used his executive powers in November and December of 1978 to designate national monuments and to make executive withdrawals to protect ~~the most~~ ~~critical areas~~ in Alaska until Congress exercised its prerogative.

these areas of national interest

Those actions by the President in 1978, as well as Interior Secretary Andrus' move this February to designate 40 million acres in Alaska as wildlife refuges, are among the most courageous and historic acts on behalf of conservation in this century. They have been widely applauded by the public.

It is my privilege to be a member of the Energy and Natural Resources Committee and to have participated actively in the markup of this bill under the very able leadership of the Senator from Washington, Mr.

Jackson. ~~Through~~ ^{and Mr. Graves} ^{of Texas} his efforts, and those of the Senators from Alaska, Mr. Stevens, and those on the Committee, we were able to work out a series of important compromises on some of the most crucial issues involved,

which the Committee subsequently adopted. Despite the significance of those compromises, the overall deficiencies of the Committee's bill were such that I felt it simply was not the best underlying vehicle upon

which the Senate should build its final Alaska lands bill. Consequently, together with my distinguished colleague from Delaware, Sen. Roth, I submitted to the Senate a substitute bill which reflects much more

closely the approach used in the bill ^{that} which passed the House 360 to 65 last May. I felt that ^{this} ~~his~~ substitute gave my colleagues a clear choice between a strong conservation measure and the more development-oriented Committee bill.

all the stuff from Alaska, Stevens and

The amendments I place before you today would, if adopted, improve the Committee bill substantially. Such an amended bill would not be as

strong as the House-passed bill. It would not be as strong as a Tsongas-Roth substitute, which, under the time agreement, will be in order during the floor debate. Senators Roth and I, along with other concerned senators, will continue to consider the option of offering such a substitute on the floor. Passage of the full substitute on the floor in July might prevent what otherwise could be a very difficult and heated conference on this issue.

These amendments are designed to clear up the most glaring weaknesses of the Committee bill. For example, the wildlife refuge amendment offered by Senator Hart will guarantee that the incomparable wildlife habitat of Alaska will be managed by the Fish and Wildlife Service in logical and cohesive units, rather than splintering it into various areas under the multiple-use management of the Bureau of Land Management, the Forest Service, and the State of Alaska as the Committee bill does.

Senator Nelson's wilderness amendment adds wilderness overlay to certain sensitive areas where the Committee failed to do so. In particular, the 8.9 million acre William O. Douglas Arctic Wildlife Range would be fully protected as a wilderness area, the only stretch of the arctic coastline that would have that designation. In addition, the mandatory oil and gas exploration program for the Range would be deleted.

The amendment offered by Senator Proxmire would provide increased protection for wild and scenic rivers and create a more balanced transportation process than would the Committee bill.

National Forest Amendment

I am joined today by the Senator from Delaware, Mr. Roth, and the Senator from South Dakota, Mr. McGovern, in introducing an amendment concerning the national forest in Alaska.

The 16 million acre Tongass National Forest is our nation's largest forest unit, with some of the most spectacular and pristine areas in the world, yet it does not contain a single acre of wilderness. I listened with interest to the principal arguments of those opposed to wilderness in the Tongass National Forest in southeast Alaska while I was on the House Interior and Insular Affairs Committee during the 95th Congress. Those arguments were that Congress should wait on designating wilderness there until the Tongass Management Plan was completed by the U.S. Forest Service, and that the existing timber industry needed at least a 520 million board feet allowable cut annually to support existing jobs.

The Tongass Land Management Plan was completed in April, 1979. Some of its major findings were that 520 million board feet is not needed to support existing jobs, that regional employment will increase significantly with a national forest harvest of 450 million board feet and could be maintained at a level of only 412 million board feet. Further, the forest cannot support a cut of 520 million board feet without massive subsidies. With only token wilderness, it would cost over \$17 million annually in added subsidies to cut 520 million board feet.

The Committee chose not to consider seriously the findings of the Forest Service planners and economists. Instead, the Committee chose a very questionable course of action that treats the timber industry in the Tongass National Forest in an unusually special and favored manner.

For instance, the Committee bill statutorily designates the 1970-1976 average harvest as a permanent goal, even though the average annual allowable cut for the last five years has been only 438 million board feet. The Forest Service predicts that the demand for Tongass National Forest timber will not exceed 450 million board feet, as timber

active lands from Native lands will make up any forestable market growth. Senators Roth, McGee

With the mandated high harvest level, the protection that can be given to other resources on areas committed to timber harvest will be

far below the standards of good forestry practices. The Committee bill sacrifices other resource values of the forest for timber production which is principally exported for use abroad.

There are two basic problems --

the mandated, excessive timber harvest level and substandard protection of other resources on areas committed to harvest. These flaws put the Committee bill squarely at odds with the laws that control the management of the National Forest system.

Our amendment is supported by the land planning process, and has the backing of the Forest Service and the President. It is an improvement over the House bill in several aspects. It balances timber production with protection for commercial fisheries and tourism. It balances sensible wilderness proposals with reasonable protection for other

resources in areas that must be cut to maintain the timber industry. It protects existing jobs and allows the newly acquired timberlands of the Natives to play a meaningful role in the regional economy.

National Park System Amendment

I am also introducing today a National Park System amendment. There are two preeminent reasons. First, the Committee's bill would open the most spectacular parklands in the United States to mining, roadbuilding, industrial rights-of-way, and a host of other nonpark uses. Second, in order to facilitate such development, the Committee bill would recklessly alter boundaries, dismember and subdivide parks. Then it would reclassify the subunits arbitrarily -- undermining the NPS land classification system now used throughout the country.

In fact, the most disturbing aspect of the Committee's bill is this patchwork of management categories assigned solely for the purpose of accommodating development interests, in complete disregard for the nature of the resources that the areas supposedly were designed to protect and for the legislative history of this issue.

Mr. President, the amendment that I am introducing does not significantly increase the acreage to be included in the National Park System or lock up needed resources. Fortunately, there is a general consensus about how much acreage should be set aside. The President has established 40 million acres of national park monuments, and the Committee bill and House-passed legislation both recommended about 43 million acres for the park system in Alaska. Where the Committee bill breaks

sharply with the House and the Administration is on the crucial question of what activities will be permitted within that acreage.

In the Committee bill, only about half of the NPS acreage -- 22 million acres -- would be protected as national parks and monuments proper. The rest would be designated as national recreation areas -- in which mining and industrial rights-of-way would be allowed -- and as national preserves -- placed in some places so that inappropriate sport hunting would be permitted. By splitting parks into weaker and contradictory management categories, the bill could not only damage resources but also create costly administrative nightmares and bureaucratic confusions. The treatment of two of the most outstanding park areas, Wrangell-St. Elias and the Gates of the Arctic, is particularly revealing.

The Committee bill would split the Gates of the Arctic park into five separate management areas, including two national recreation areas created to allow mineral leasing and transportation corridors. My amendment is based on the assertion that the nation's preeminent wilderness should be managed in its entirety as a 8.22-million-acre national park.

The Committee has also carved a national recreation area out of the north side of Wrangell-St. Elias Park/Preserve. My amendment would delete the 1.24 million-acre national recreation area and restore the balance between park and preserve found in the House bill. ^{This would} ~~in order to~~ benefit both nonhunters and hunters and preserve the park's wildlife. Other parts of the amendment would revise the Committee bill's mineral assessment program to preclude core and test drilling in the National Park System.

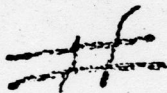
the tax burden is one of the highest in the nation, I find it impossible to swallow the notion that Alaska will in any way be mistreated by passage of a strong lands bill. The State of Alaska enjoys a particularly enviable economic position at this time, and will for a long time to come, due in great part to the land grant of the federal government. And while all of the state's land entitlement has not been conveyed to Alaska, the vast majority of such land has been or is now in the process of being conveyed.

For All Americans, Forever

Let me say in concluding today that I have the greatest respect for the deliberations of the Congress to date with regard to Alaska lands legislation has seen more study, more hearings, more markups, more commitment of time and energy by citizens, lobbyists, executive branch personnel, congressional staff and members of the House and Senate, than most of the major legislation of this decade. It is fitting that a conservation measure of this magnitude should receive such thorough and careful evaluation.

The time is approaching when the Senate can express its will on the management of the federally-owned wildlands in Alaska. Having dealt so generously with the people of Alaska, it is now time to consider the long-term national interest -- the present and future interests of all Americans now and to come -- by designating portions of these federal lands for conservation purposes. There is no question that this is the single most important conservation issue of this century for our country. How we finally resolve the issues involved will weigh heavily on the future course of this nation.

Mr. President, the amendments we are introducing represent the framework for a fair, comprehensive, compromise solution to remaining Alaska lands issues. I submit them for your consideration with the hope that the Senate will meet the challenge of this most historic legislation.

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