

***CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMISSION ON FEDERAL AREAS***  
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**<http://dnr.alaska.gov/commis/cacfa/>**

**PRESS RELEASE**

**FEBRUARY 12, 2015**

**RE: Article on Administration Proposal to Reduce Staff Engaged in Federal Issues**

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Members of the Citizens' Advisory Commission on Federal Areas (CACFA) were surprised and disappointed by yesterday's article in the Alaska Dispatch News regarding budget proposals to reduce staff engaged in federal issues owing to redundancy and lack of results. The Public Access Assertion and Defense Unit (PAAD), ANILCA Implementation Program, CACFA and the support of attorneys in the Department of Law provide Alaskans with a multi-disciplinary team of informed and dedicated individuals committed to preserving state sovereign interests and minimizing the potential for negative impacts from federal management actions. While united in common pursuits, our interests, missions and responsibilities are complimentary and distinct.

Each exceedingly unique program in this team has very singular objectives and maintains a separate and multifaceted institutional memory, creating a collective body of knowledge and proficient oversight to enable effective cooperation and, occasionally, push back in protecting the rights of Alaska and its citizens. The long-term effect of dismantling or undercutting this team effort is tangible. For example, PAAD is constantly examining conveyance documents and tracking historical data to ensure access is maintained to and across federal lands. When conveyances evade review, or critical witnesses to history die or relocate, a window closes for Alaskans. Work that is currently underway has taken years to research and prepare for a proper response to the incursion on state's rights and access needs.

The ANILCA Implementation Program has been a point of contact regarding state interests for multiple federal agencies for three decades, maintaining an unparalleled history of engagement and monitoring of the implementation of various federal laws, regulations and policies in Alaska. With the current federal administration in particular, the program serves to remind agencies that ANILCA is still relevant, still has the force of law, still offers the chance at social and economic opportunity, still demands recognition of the Alaska context in national policies, and was a promise and a deal that cannot be ignored to serve an executive agenda.

CACFA provides a fundamental and knowledgeable resource for Alaskans who need advice and assistance in navigating the complex regulatory regime present on federal lands throughout the state. We hold three annual meetings in a public forum to, among a number of objectives, facilitate informative presentations by federal and state agencies on current issues and provide opportunities for public testimony. Throughout the year, CACFA strategizes and develops tools to inform the public and government representatives of federal land management actions and the potential implications for a diversity of users and uses.

While our combined efforts are integrated in a common mission and largely incapable of summary, it would be accurate to say our primary distinguishable contributions include PAAD's technical expertise, skilled defense and monitoring, the ANILCA Implementation Program's coordinated representation of state agencies to ensure state interests are appropriately considered in federal actions, and CACFA's unwavering dedication to ensuring individual Alaskans have a place that will educate, empower and support them in dealing with federal management.

In CACFA's view, one of the hugest losses is the defunding of two attorney positions in the Department of Law. These positions are relatively recent and long-desired additions to the team. Alaska has extraordinarily complex and nascent statehood defense issues, operating on multiple fronts, requiring a legal support structure which can develop both a body of case law and a bevy of highly trained in-house attorneys. And while it may seem like litigation is at hand wherever litigators appear, this could not be further from the truth for these team members. Having access to seasoned legal assistance is equally paramount to successful challenges outside the courtroom. Litigation avoidance is not only an enormous cost savings, it is also the best possible outcome to preserve working relationships and cooperative management opportunities.

Often, our team's greatest successes are in what you cannot see. The management plan that includes an access study instead of a vehicle prohibition, the language regarding navigable waters that reflects prevailing law instead of acerbic disagreements, or the final regulation that removes a dangerous discretionary loophole presented in earlier drafts. And sometimes it is what you can see. The traditional access route to a private inholding, the proper maintenance of an historic public use cabin in wilderness, or a reasonable, affordable and balanced process that recognizes a user's legal rights. The State's team creates a force for positive change by being at the table, educating Alaskans and agency officials, keeping an eye on the big picture, and staying informed enough to challenge over-regulation and inappropriate exercises of discretion.

Each component of the team provides a critical function in making this unified endeavor successful – and we have been successful. CACFA fully intends to continue advancing the interests of all Alaskans and to halt the unyielding creep of unwarranted prohibitions, over-reach and over-regulation which thwart our true potential and the enjoyment of our beautiful state. While we remain steadfast in our mission, we mourn the potential loss of our present capacity, which is anything but redundant and ineffective.