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REPRESENTATIVE MIKE CHENAULT HOUSE DISTRICT 29

SPONSOR STATEMENT

HOUSE CONCURRENT RESOLUTION 7: COOPER LANDING BYPASS

As noted in the title, House Concurrent Resolution 7 has three main objectives:

1. Urges the Governor to oppose the selection of the "G" alternative for the Sterling Highway Milepost 45-60 project, otherwise known as the Cooper Landing Bypass, and to support the Juneau Creek alternative;
2. Urges the Governor to request of the United States Secretary of Interior to initiate a land exchange under the Russian River Land Act; and
3. Urges the Governor to request the Commissioner of the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT/PF) and the division administrator of the Federal Highway Administration (FHA) to reevaluate the selection of the "G" alternative.

The Cooper Landing Bypass has been under consideration by DOT/PF and the FHA for decades having begun on June 29, 1982. The environmental impact statement (EIS) for this project has the distinction of being the longest running EIS in the nation.

In April and May of 2015, a draft EIS and Draft Section 4(f) evaluation were released for public review. On December 11, 2015, DOT/PF and the FHA announced that the "G" alternative was the preferred route and a final EIS and Record of Decision (ROD) are expected this year.

Both DOT/PF and the FHA recognized the importance of protection of the Kenai River corridor, however, the Draft 4(f) evaluation did not adequately consider negative effects on fish and riparian habitats, long term environmental threats to fish and wildlife of the Kenai River nor did it consider the degradation of irreplaceable cultural resources of Alaska Native heritage upon selection of the "G" alternative. In addition, the "G" alternative will require an additional crossing of the Kenai River and replacement of an existing bridge.

The Juneau Creek alternative bypasses all crossings of the Kenai River. A substantial portion of the "G" alternative would be built along the existing alignment near the Kenai River and 45% is located within 500 feet of the river or another Tier 1 stream. The Juneau Creek alternative has 25% of the route located within 500 feet of the river or another Tier 1 stream. The Juneau Creek alternative is estimated to be \$50 million less than the "G" alternative.

A small portion of the congressionally designated Mystery Creek unit within the Kenai Wildlife Refuge would be affected by the Juneau Creek alternative. The U.S. Secretary of the Interior has congressional approval to initiate and conduct a land exchange with Cook Inlet Region Incorporated (CIRI) that could include portions of the Mystery Creek unit.

Long term protection of the Kenai River, the opportunity to prevent a major chemical spill and the opportunity to significantly decrease traffic adjacent to the Kenai River needs to take priority in the selection of an alternative.

This resolution is supported by the Kenai Peninsula Borough, the Kenaitze Indian Tribe and the cities of Kenai and Soldotna.