

State of Alaska Department of Natural Resources



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State opposes BLM use of unproven technology for state land entitlement

(Anchorage, AK) – A decision issued today by the federal Bureau of Land Management to terminate a critical agreement with the State of Alaska and abandon the proven method for surveying the State of Alaska’s land entitlement reneges on promises made in the Alaska Statehood Act, according to Natural Resources Commissioner Andy Mack.

The BLM and the Department of Natural Resources have worked together for 53 years under a memorandum of understanding that guides the transfer of federal lands to the State of Alaska under the statehood act. Recently the BLM pressured the State to agree to adopt satellite-based technology and abandon the placement of physical monuments to identify land ownership. Unfortunately, BLM cannot demonstrate that this technology works.

DNR agrees with BLM that this new technology has potential and is committed to testing and potentially adopting it in the future. However, the technology has technical problems and is not ready to be deployed. Given those technical issues, there is no evidence to back up BLM’s assertions that this technology will cut the time and cost of land transfers, or increase the quality of land surveys.

“We will work with our Congressional delegation and the incoming administration on a resolution to the survey method that works for all parties,” Mack said.

The State is concerned that implementing this technology before it is fully tested or developed will delay surveys required under the statehood act and ultimately transfer the cost of conducting legally-defensible surveys from the federal government to Alaska citizens.

DNR participated in one field test of the satellite-based technology with BLM this year and has agreed to further tests next summer. A recent independent review conducted by the National Society of Professional Surveyors indicated that the technology still needs more work, and reinforced the State’s concerns that it is not ready to be implemented.

“We are disappointed that the BLM has chosen to unilaterally deploy this technology before it is ready,” Mack said.

Mack noted that BLM land that is transferred to the State does not have to be surveyed before it can be used by the state for economic development activities. The single largest obstacle to speedy fulfillment of Alaska’s land entitlement is the outdated federal land withdrawals preventing Alaska from exploring and prioritizing some of the most valuable land in the state, Mack said.

“Until those obsolete withdrawals are lifted, Alaska is simply hamstrung in our efforts to get our full land entitlement. And all the new survey technology in the world won’t help us there,” Mack said.

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