

# Wrangell Sentinel

## Trust Land Office offers explanation to recent confusion

*by Lisa Phu*

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A community calendar announcement by Silver Bay, which was first read on KSTK February 27 prior to the radio station's 5 p.m. news broadcast, caused a stir within the community. What resulted was the mayor calling an emergency city council meeting on March 1 to consider a resolution that would protest the logging taking place on Mental Health Trust Land south of Zimovia Highway to the Pat's Lake drainage area.

The community calendar announcement read, "Silver Bay Logging will be beginning road building and logging activities beginning March 1, 2007 (weather permitting) and continuing through the 2007 season in the location between the 9.5 mile rock pit and the Pat's Lake Turnoff, specifically 9.5 Mile and 10.3 Mile. Drivers should be aware of truck activity; signs will be posted near each side of the road entrances and should use extreme caution at these areas. Silver Bay Logging thanks you for your patience."

At the emergency meeting, the city expressed concerns outlined in the resolution, such as, "there is community concern over previous logging activity on Mental Health Trust land within Wrangell City Limits," "the City has become aware that additional logging has been approved at this time and is moving forward today," "there are public concerns in regards to watershed impacts, habitat corridors, recreational view sheds and water drainage patterns," "community comment and transparent process is both desired and considered valued by the City Council," and ends with, "this Council protests the Mental Health Trust approval of logging without due public input and calls for them to stop present and further logging until addressed through public process."

Community members indicated a lack of trust in the Mental Health Trust Land Office (TLO) during Persons to be Heard. In reference to the most recent timber sale done on Trust land, Marlene Clarke said, "I don't feel it was done safely or with any regard to what the citizens in this community want." She continued, "I don't have any faith in Mental Health or Silver Bay Logging practices after what happened out the road here, after the devastation, after the down timber was falling across the highway taking out guardrails, blocking traffic, taking a car."

Community member Stephen Todd echoed this sentiment, “I lost complete faith in the Trust and Silver Bay Logging taking the public’s safety into consideration.”

The council moved to approve the resolution. However, it was noted that any action which took place during an emergency meeting had to be ratified by the council at the next regular or special city council meeting.

Since the emergency council meeting, the TLO has given the city and the community notice of a town hall meeting taking place on Monday, March 12 at 7 p.m. TLO will discuss with the public their current and future management plans for all Trust land in Wrangell.

Present at the meeting will be Wendy Woolf, acting executive director of TLO as of December 2006; Doug Campbell, senior resource manager for TLO; Clare Doig, timber consultant to TLO; Paul Slenkamp, southeast area forester for the Alaskan Division of Forestry; Pat Taylor, Wrangell maintenance supervisor for the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities (DOT/PF); and Jim Nelson, former superintendent of Wrangell Light and Power. The TLO also invited a representative from the DOT/PF highway safety division.

Although Woolf, through teleconference at the emergency meeting, admitted to having little knowledge of the issue, she was better informed the following week. In regards to the town hall meeting, Woolf emphasized, “It’s an informational meeting; it’s not a public comment meeting. It’s allowing people to voice their concerns on the area and what’s going on. It’s not a public meeting from the perspective of our process – I do want to clarify that. It’s an information meeting to share with the community what we’re doing and to listen to people’s concerns.”

While Woolf made a commitment to listen to the public’s concerns, she was clear in saying she had no responsibility to answer to them. According to Woolf, the process involving the public took place in 2004, “When we had originally noticed the sale in 2004, we had noticed that the entire area was being disposed of for logging and that our first sale was for a portion of it. Now this sale is amending that sale, which allowed us to add additional areas to it, so it’s not an additional sale. We had done our process back in 2004. That was our process to actually dispose of all the timber in Wrangell.”

A March 6 letter written by Woolf to the mayor and council members elaborated on this, “On June 30, 2004, the TLO completed a Best Interest Decision (BID) for the sale of 40 million board feet of Trust timber in Wrangell, which constitutes all of the Trust owned

timber in the community. Notice of the BID was sent to the City and published in the Wrangell Sentinel on July 8, 15, and 22, 2004. There were no objections to the proposal and thus, the BID was affirmed on August 10, 2004.” This was described as the administrative process.

Woolf claimed that the announcement of the March 12 town meeting was not in reaction to the emergency city council meeting. “Actually it was a miscommunication between our office and the city because they had requested a meeting previously and we had mis-hoped that some steps could take place before the meeting. There were four areas that are being proposed and there were two areas that we thought were good to go and the other two needed to have further discussion on. So what we’re doing is backing off and doing the whole thing at once, so we can talk about all four areas at the same time. It was a misunderstanding on our part as to what the city was requesting,” Woolf said.

According to Woolf, the TLO contacted Silver Bay Logging after the emergency meeting and “told them to postpone the activities until we get this finalized,” said Woolf. What needs to get finalized is a document called ‘A decision to proceed,’ which is crucial when a contract is being amended.

During the fall of 2006, Silver Bay Logging had requested that the TLO amend their existing timber sale contract to include additional Trust lands in Wrangell. “That document had not been signed,” explained Woolf. “We had signed an amendment for the two southern pieces so Silver Bay thought they had the authority to proceed and we had, inadvertently on our end, not done our process. We hadn’t completed our process. We had started it – we had the decision written – but we hadn’t finalized it so we got ahead of ourselves.”

‘A decision to proceed’ document will deal with all four areas in the amendment – two southern parcels and two northern parcels – so that only one amendment to the contract will be necessary. As a result, the town meeting being held by the TLO will address all four areas.

While the TLO does seem to take responsibility for the recent misunderstanding between itself, Silver Bay and the city, it does not appear to take responsibility for the safety issues that took place out at 8 mile where the recent timber sale took place. According to Woolf, Taylor and Nelson will vouch for the safety added due to the timber sale, “They will be there to address the safety issues and how from their perspective we’ve actually improved the safety along the highway as a result of that logging.”

At Tuesday night’s special council meeting, against the TLO’s request to table the issue,

the resolution to protest Mental Health approval of additional logging by Silver Bay Logging, Inc. was passed and ratified.