

2/28/24

Hello to the Alaska Local Boundary Commission;

As a year-round resident of Pelican, I am opposed to the existing proposal by the City of Hoonah for Incorporation of the Xunaa Borough as a Home Rule Borough. I strongly urge the LBC to consider their own Borough Incorporation Standards when reviewing this petition, as the Xunaa proposal in general, does not.

I view the proposal as a semi-blind land grab, lacking accurate research or representation regarding the effects or the necessity. This borough formation will not benefit the areas in the proposal in any way. Hoonah cannot provide services or support as suggested by LBC for borough formations, to all areas in the proposal, especially Lisianski Inlet, Lisianski Strait, Stag Bay, Tenakee Inlet, Gustavus, Elfin Cove, and the outer coast of Yakobi Island. Nor does the proposal offer clear solutions to existing economic or transportation issues in the areas. This is simply an attempt to collect monies generated by other entities.

While still in its very early stages - the City of Pelican has plans to propose its own borough boundaries, which strongly conflict with the existing Xunaa Borough proposal, and make much more sense for the local economics, industry, and residents.

The majority of residents in Gustavus, Elfin Cove and Tenakee Springs also oppose this proposal, which can be deemed by reading existing comments, and from intergovernmental meetings between the communities. In fact, was the community of Elfin Cove even notified by Hoonah before this proposal went out?

How does Hoonah receive millions of dollars each season in tourism yet cannot find a way to fund its own school district? It needs to grasp out to the areas around Lisianski Inlet and Strait and the rest of the proposed area for fish taxes and forestry receipts to fund its own school? That sounds like severe mismanagement. If Hoonah wants to be in control of a much larger area - they need to figure things out on their home ground first.

Regarding Hoonah's claim about being a regional hub - that's ridiculous. There are NO transportation routes that go directly from Hoonah to Pelican, Gustavus, Elfin Cove, or Tenakee Springs. This entire area Hoonah is attempting to grab has no reliance or relation to Hoonah, its transportation services, emergency services, telecommunications, utilities, or commerce. These isolated communities are self-reliant for those services, or go directly to the ACTUAL regional hub - Juneau.

Even the people of Hoonah go elsewhere for groceries, medical care, sports, and travel. This is based on facts discovered from the AMHS Long term survey.

I am a manager at Yakobi Fisheries in Pelican. We buy fish from fishermen that utilize the areas in Lisianski, Yakobi Island, Cape Cross to Cross Sound, Homeshore, Inian Passages, and Port Frederick. The fishermen come here to sell fish to support a small business that pays more for their fish, to buy ice, to utilize our harbor and laundry facilities, the library, and our grocery store. Pelican is a closer run than Hoonah for most of the boats. The opportunity for this industry to continue growing is real, and Hoonah has nothing to do with it.

Kelp industry is growing in this area. The folks involved got their start at the fish house in Pelican, not Hoonah. They want to keep this place as their home base, and not confuse regulations, boundaries, or taxes between the two.

Sport and charter fishing are also growing in this area. In my opinion, they should all go to Hoonah, but since they are here to stay, and because they utilize Pelican as their central hub for the comings and goings, any services provided in the Lisianski Inlet; telecommunications, airline services, garbage, water, emergency response, are not going to be provided by Hoonah. This is a localized industry. Any lodges built outside of the town of Pelican have the potential to provide economic benefits right here, which is where it should stay, not in a town on the other side of the island that neither has plans to provide or OFFER services here.

I am a member of the emergency response team based out of Pelican. If there is an emergency in Lisianski Inlet or Straits, Stag Bay, on the outer coast of Yakobi Island, or even across to Cape Spencer, we have the means to respond. It's completely impractical to think responders from Hoonah are going to come to the call, nor have they suggested it.

This proposal endangers the stability of childhood education in rural areas. The Pelican School District is in danger of losing state and federal funding from National Forest receipts and Shared Fisheries Taxes if this borough formation succeeds. The children of Pelican need a school, and it's funding. There is no realistic chance of school age children going from Pelican, Tenakee, Gustavus, or Elfin Cove to Hoonah. We all need to maintain our own schools. Hoonah has made it clear that they would not support the continuation of the Pelican School District should the proposed borough take effect.

The City of Pelican maintains the Bohemia Basin public dock in Lisianski Strait on Yakobi Island, which should be excluded from Hoonah's proposed petition. This dock and the public area it offers access to is probably utilized 90% by Lisianski residents. Should we now be expected to have that area be under the supervision of a borough entity that's even more remote?

Regarding utilities and communications; Pelican has its own hydroelectric plant. Residents of the town and throughout the inlet have Starlink for internet and phone services. Cordova is proposing a deep sea fiber optic cable to the inlet to provide further options for connectivity. How is Hoonah going to enhance any of these services we already have established?

Lisianski Inlet, Lisianski Strait, Stag Bay, and Yakobi Island are important community fish and wildlife subsistence harvest areas for Pelican area residents. Our way of life out here is pretty incompatible with the folks of Hoonah. They have logging roads to utilize for their subsistence. We have zero roads. It's all done on foot by way of water access.

Multiple mining opportunities exist in the Yakobi Island and Pelican area. These ventures would be supported by the closest community - Pelican, and should future development occur there, the financial benefits should not go to a borough entity that offers no support to the area.

The State of Alaska may extend its Department of Natural Resources land sales, by selling State lands in the Pelican area. The state holds ownership of multiple tracts of land in the Lisianski Inlet area. People who purchase these state lands will transit through Pelican, not Hoonah, utilizing city services, fuel, water, trash, and ferry services that are linked with our community.

Hoonah claims it will not implement a property tax on borough properties, however, they can do whatever they want by a majority vote once the borough is established. Any future property taxes that may be determined should go to the providing community for that area. In the case of Lisianski Inlet and Straits, or the outer coast of Yakobi Island, that means Pelican, not Hoonah.

The same argument can be made for excise tax on commercial fish landings in the proposed borough. The Hoonah petition does not propose an excise tax but if granted, the borough assembly can implement an excise tax, at that point, Pelican will have no vote or say in the taxation that may affect the Pelican/Cross Sound area.

Why should Xunaa benefit from the tourism economy based out of Gustavus that services Glacier Bay? To my knowledge there is no support from Hoonah to the community or area surrounding Gustavus in regards to that tourism, subsistence usage, or any other services provided in Glacier Bay.

In summary, I do not agree with the boundaries or proposals defined in the "*Petition by the City of Hoonah for Incorporation of the Xunaa Borough*", and urge the LBC to strongly consider their own Borough Incorporation Standards when reviewing this petition.

1. The Xunaa Borough petition boundaries should be significantly reduced. The lands and waters of the Lisianski Inlet, Lisianski Strait, Yakobi Island and Cross Sound areas must remain excluded from the Xunaa Borough petition.
2. National Forest Receipts, Payment in Lieu of Taxes, and State of Alaska Shared Fisheries Business Tax, now shared with the City of Pelican, will be redistributed to Hoonah's Xunaa Borough petition at a financial loss to the City of Pelican and its school district.
3. The proposed Xunaa Borough will significantly interfere with commercial and economic development in the area surrounding the communities of Pelican, Elfin Cove, Gustavus, and Tenakee Springs. All the natural resources included in the Hoonah petition, including the Lisianski Inlet/Strait, Yakobi Island, Glacier Bay, Idaho Inlet, and Cross Sound areas, will be included in its Xunaa Borough boundaries. Pelican must be able to access the lands or resources for the best interests of the community, and Pelican will continue to benefit from the resources from the lands and waters of the Lisianski Inlet/Straits, Yakobi Island, and Cross Sound areas.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment.

Sincerely,

*Celeste Weller*

Pelican Resident

City of Pelican City Council Member

Yakobi Fisheries, LLC. Manager

Subsistence hunter & fisher

Local Recreationalist