

## Chiniak Residents Pack Meeting, Say 'Hell No' To Logging

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Brianna Gibbs/KMXT

It was probably a quiet night in Chiniak last night as most of the community's residents were packed into the borough assembly chambers, voicing concerns over a logging proposal close to their hearts and homes. On a stormy evening with less than ideal driving conditions, more than four dozen people made the trek into town, flooded the borough conference room and nearby hallway, forcing the entire meeting to be moved upstairs into the spacious assembly chambers. Still, it was standing room only as representatives from A-1 Timber Consultants, Inc., made a case for purchasing 800 acres of forested borough land in Chiniak.

"We would like to urge the assembly to make a motion to pursue a timber sale."

That's A-1 Timber Resource Manager David Nesheim, who was joined by other A-1 representatives last night, including President Tom Loushin, Operations Manager Kent Cross and Forestry Consultant Neal Hart. The foursome detailed the company's intent to clear cut the purchased land, bringing \$2 million in revenue to the Kodiak Island Borough. The plans included buffer zones around residential areas and streams, and the intent to replant seedlings following the harvest.

But even those seemingly good intentions met intense opposition from the Chiniak residents, who were brimming with anguish, fresh from the past three years of logging on Leisnoi, Inc., lands surrounding the community. Roughly 2,000 acres of Chiniak have already been logged, and Chiniak resident Peter Hanley said he didn't think the community or the environment could handle much more.

"So far I've heard two things totally omitted from this equation. The impact on the residents of Chiniak and the impacts on the eco system, the environment of this beautiful forest that's been decimated by logging the last three years."

Hanley said the 800 acres of borough land is the only remaining substantial acreage of public forested land in the area. He added that the recent logging of Leisnoi lands have taken a huge toll on the community.

"The residents of Chiniak have suffered over three years of clear cut logging right up to residential property lines, and heavy industrial traffic 12-15 hours a day starting at 4 a.m., six days a week. The Chiniak Highway has been torn up. Despite A-1's rosy presentation of the merits and environmental consequences of clear cut logging of thousands of acres in Chiniak, the environmental impacts have been significant, as they have been on Afognak Island, where I have fished many years. The assembly should also consider the failure of reforestation on the Leisnoi lands that were logged in the 1990s."

Theresa Bonney read directly from borough land management code in her defense of preserving those 800 acres.

"To the extent its capacity permits, forest land shall be administered so as to provide for the continuation of business activities and lifestyles that are dependant upon or derived from forest resources. Well, to me, A-1 is not dependent on Chiniak's forest, or at least this 800 acres. We have no choice of what's done with Leisnoi's, but we do with this. But, we do. Our businesses have closed down in Chiniak, our property values have gone down, our lifestyles have definitely changed. Like I said I don't hunt anymore, I love to do it. It's up to us to protect what we have left and I hope that you will help us do that."

The comments rolled in for almost an hour. While all of them opposed the logging, not all of them took issue directly with A-1. Virginia Adams applauded the company, but disagreed with the plan to log more land.

"Tom at A-1 does a great job. He's a terrific business man, it's a great company, the drivers are respectful, I can't say enough about them. They're doing a job for Leisnoi, they're doing a great job. But they don't have to do it on our borough land. They can keep their jobs, keep working, we don't owe them another year on our borough land. So, I don't know. It's all been said. I say hell no. I hope you do too."

Many of the audience's comments were mirrored by Borough Assemblyman Dave Kaplan, who voiced similar opposition to the proposed logging.

"I will not support this proposed timber sale. No. Preservation and conservation of this forest ecosystem is paramount. I can't see putting a price tag on this 800 acres. A timber sale is definitely not the will of the people. You have spoke, we have heard, and I would like to close this, not waste anymore staff time and keep this pristine canopy going and a healthy ecosystem."

No formal decisions were made, but most assembly members echoed Kaplan's opinion that a timber sale with A-1 should not move forward.

The work session last night was the first chaired by newly elected Mayor Jerrol Friend, who thanked folks for making the trip in from Chiniak to speak up on the matter.

"Well guys, everybody, thank you very much for coming in. I hope that it shows that community involvement matters. And I tell you what, this is probably going to be the best train going to Chiniak that I've ever seen. Everybody drive really safe going home tonight."

The borough assembly will hold its next regular meeting on November 7.

