



# THE HOUSE MAJORITY

REPRESENTATIVE CHARISSE MILLETT R-ANCHORAGE, 30



PRESS RELEASE

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

## **HJR 40 PASSES HOUSE, ADVANCES TO SENATE** *Resolution opposes designation of critical habitat for beluga whales*

**Monday, March 1, 2010, Juneau, Alaska** – The Alaska State House today passed House Joint Resolution 40, which opposes the National Marine Fisheries Service’s designation of a critical habitat for beluga whales.

HJR 40 sponsor Rep. Charisse Millett, R-Anchorage, put the resolution in motion in order to protect the economy of the entire Cook Inlet region from what she says is an unnecessary critical habitat designation for beluga whales. Population numbers rebounded after a cooperative harvest management plan was instituted, with the beluga population going from 278 in 2005 to 321 in 2009, a total increase of four percent per year.

The Endangered Species Act requires economic effects to be taken into account for critical habitat designations. Areas may be excluded from critical habitat if it is determined that the benefit of such exclusion outweighs the benefit to the region. While the National Marine Fisheries Service considers the designation as a way to protect wildlife in the region, the move could cripple economic development in the region, affecting all of Alaska. “All activities in and around Cook Inlet from the Port of Anchorage, to military operations, to sport and commercial fishing could be slapped with new restrictions if a critical habitat designation is issued,” Millett said.

The National Marine Fisheries Service has stated that the additional regulatory oversight for the proposed critical habitat would cost an additional \$600,000 over the next decade, not even considering the extra costs that existing and future operations will have to pay to meet the restrictions unfurled by the proposal. “The conservation benefits, which are entirely uncertain and speculative,” Millett said, “are outweighed by the costs and impediments posed by designation of critical habitat in this instance in most, if not all, of the proposed designation area.”

HJR 40 now advances to the Alaska State Senate for consideration. The House-passed resolution will accompany legislators visiting Energy Council in Washington, D.C., this week.

# # #

To contact Rep. Millett’s office, please call 907-465-3879.