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Coastal Zone Initiative Could Set Records

Sponsors launch energetic campaign to gather signatures in record time

Juneau—Today, the grassroots Alaska Sea Party launched what it hopes will be the fastest, most effective petition signature gathering drive in Alaska's history. Its citizens' initiative is the culmination of community efforts to restore Alaskans' voice in managing their coastal resources after the legislature allowed Alaska's coastal management program to lapse this summer.

"We've been planning for months for this day, and now that we have the booklets, we're ready to make history and get back Alaskans' voice in managing our coastlines," Bruce Botelho, a lead sponsor of the initiative, said.

The sponsors' goal is to gather 26,000 signatures statewide before the start of the upcoming legislative session to ensure that Alaskans can vote to restore the program at the next statewide election. Collecting that many signatures in such short time would be unprecedented, but with so many Alaskans affected by the loss of the program, sponsors say that it is not only possible, but necessary.

"We have more coastline than any other state, yet now Alaska is the only state whose citizens don't have a say in how their coastal resources are managed," said Mako Haggerty, a Kenai Peninsula Borough Assemblyman and sponsor of the initiative. "That has to change. We're making every effort to restore Alaskans voice as soon as possible."

Sponsors hope that getting the signatures before the session begins in January might inspire the legislature to break its gridlock and revive Alaska's coastal plan this session, so Alaskans' can regain their seat at the table even sooner.

"Anyone who lives or works along the coast, or enjoys our incredible coastal resources, should care about bringing back this program," said Beth Kerttula. "It's the only program that gives Alaskans and coastal communities a seat at the table."

The group has both volunteer and paid signature gatherers ready across the state anxiously awaiting the petition booklets. Sponsors say they have broad support from all the communities from Barrow to Ketchikan.

"It's going to be a challenge," Botelho said. "But this is a cause all Alaskans can and should support—with a strong coastal program, Alaskans get it all - healthy coasts and healthy development."

The public can track the group's progress on the Alaska Sea Party website:
www.alaskacoastalmanagement.org