

**OPTIONS FOR ADDRESSING THE CONTINUING
LACK OF RELIABLE EMERGENCY MEDICAL
TRANSPORTATION FOR THE ISOLATED COMMU-
NITY OF KING COVE, ALASKA**

HEARING
BEFORE THE
COMMITTEE ON
ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES
UNITED STATES SENATE
ONE HUNDRED FOURTEENTH CONGRESS
SECOND SESSION

APRIL 14, 2016



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**OPTIONS FOR ADDRESSING THE CONTINUING
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COMMUNITY OF KING COVE, ALASKA**

THURSDAY, APRIL 14, 2016

U.S. SENATE,
COMMITTEE ON ENERGY AND NATURAL RESOURCES,
Washington, DC.

The Committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:08 a.m. in Room SD-366, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Lisa Murkowski, Chairman of the Committee, presiding.

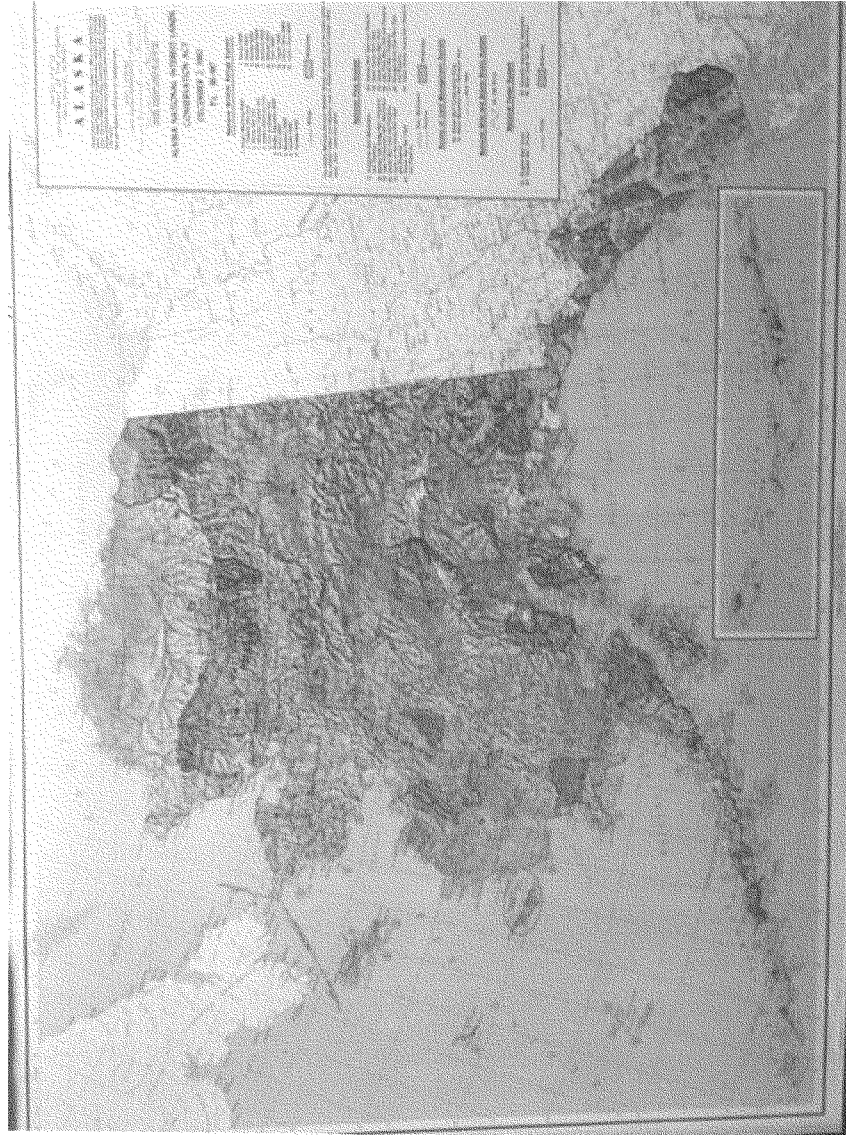
**OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. LISA MURKOWSKI, U.S.
SENATOR FROM ALASKA**

The CHAIRMAN. Good morning, everyone. The Committee will come to order so we can consider an issue that is, I think it is fair to say, near and dear to this Senator's heart and an issue that is very important and critical to, not only the people of King Cove, but many throughout the State of Alaska.

Today we are going to be taking up the matter of the continuing lack of reliable emergency medical transportation for the community of King Cove, Alaska and how we can work together to protect the health and safety of these people.

For those who are not familiar with King Cove, I would ask that the Alaska map be held up for a second, just for situational awareness. Bring it over here, please.

[The information referred to follows:]



Okay, so you have the community of Anchorage that is sitting right here. King Cove sits right here, at the end of the peninsula, just at the beginning of the Aleutian Islands. King Cove is situated about 625 miles southwest of Anchorage, to put it into context. It is about 250 miles from Kodiak where our Coast Guard air station is located.

When you think about proximity, 625 miles is one way to look at it, but given that there are no roads that connect it to anywhere else, the way that you get to somewhere else is to fly. However, the cost of a roundtrip ticket to Anchorage is \$1,036, so if you are going to town, which is how we refer to Anchorage, for medical treatment or for groceries or whatever the need may be, it is a \$1,036 round trip ticket. King Cove is far away, isolated, and expensive.

Eighty-five percent of the King Cove residents are Alaska Native, Aleut, members of the Federally-recognized Agdaagux. I always mispronounce that Della, so you will have to correct me, but as I mentioned, as with so many of our communities, it is reachable only by plane or by boat.

It is a beautiful place, and I want to show a few pictures now, just to put the community in context.

[The information referred to follows:]



It is actually the same as we have over here, but as you can see, it is located right at sea level there, surrounded by two volcanic mountains. You approach the community of King Cove from the water side, but you come into a funnel situation with high mountains on both sides of you. It is incredibly scenic on a beautiful day, as you can see in the picture, but the region is prone to quickly moving weather, high winds, low clouds, dense fog, and other conditions that can make flying and boating extremely dangerous.

Planes can land at King Cove's gravel airstrip. It is a 3,500 foot strip, so only small planes can come in and out. However, as these small planes come in, they are dealing with low visibility, strong turbulence, as the wind comes down off the top of the mountain, literally pushing an aircraft down, and notorious gale force cross winds. And that is just in the air.

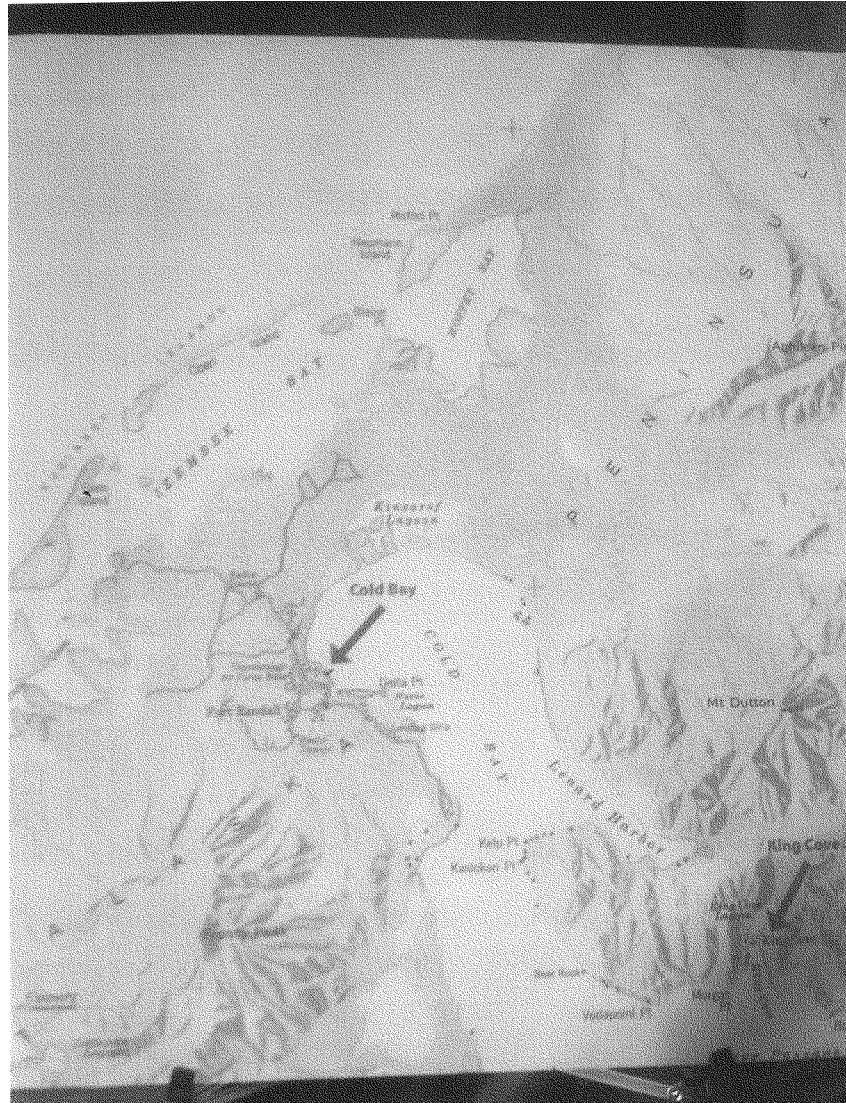
If you are on the sea, mariners can be looking at extremely inhospitable conditions, such as 12-foot-high seas.

If you are a local resident, most of the time you do not have any desire to be flying when these weather conditions are so ugly and severe, but there are times when you cannot avoid traveling. When you have a medical emergency, you have no choice but to try to get to a hospital, and that hospital would be located in Anchorage.

There is a clinic in King Cove, and they do a phenomenal job, I might add. However, there are certain things that you cannot do in a clinic. There is not an anesthesiologist anywhere in the region; therefore, if you are a trauma victim, or if you are a woman in early stages of labor, or if you have any major illness, the clinic is not where you can receive the care you need. So what do you do?

Well, the first step is to transport those who are sick or injured or in need of other medical care to the community of Cold Bay. You say, wait a minute, you just said transport them to Anchorage. Well, Anchorage is 625 miles away. The way to get them to safety is to take them to Cold Bay, where there is a 10,000-plus foot runway, one of the longest runways in the State of Alaska, which is located just across the bay. So you have King Cove that sits down here, and across the bay is Cold Bay, where you have your 10,000-plus foot runway.

[The information referred to follows:]



This is not only a runway that is accessible with better weather conditions. When I say that the weather is down in King Cove, it is down in King Cove over one-third of the year. Not that there is just bad weather, but the airport is not accessible. Over 100 days a year the King Cove airport is not accessible.

The alternative in Cold Bay, just across the bay, it is much less. It is only around ten days a year that their airport is shut down and the runway is inaccessible, making it so dramatically, dramatically different in terms of its access.

Since the 1940s the Alaska Native people of King Cove have sought safe, reliable access to reach Cold Bay during medical emergencies. Cold Bay is a community that came about in World War II for air traffic in and out as we accessed the Aleutians. It was literally built for its airport. Today, there are less than 100 people that live in Cold Bay; they are mostly Federal or State employees.

The community of King Cove, a community of close to 1,000 people, somewhere between 900 and 1,000 people, has been there for maybe 4,000 years or so. King Cove is where the native people have been for a millennia.

So again, as we are searching for those avenues to provide for a safe route to medical care or just to access the rest of the state, the answer is not to build a longer runway in King Cove. You will still be faced with the geography and the weather around you. A longer runway would simply expose both pilots and their passengers to some of the worst flying conditions in the country, and I think you will hear some of that testimony this morning.

The answer is not to buy a large ferry and construct new docks at both King Cove and Cold Bay because it is not appropriate to expect injured patients and their doctors to suffer through a multi-hour long trip in rough seas or perhaps to be shut out by the ice that comes into the bay. The answer is not a new helicopter, which would be too dangerous to fly in most conditions and too expensive to operate. The answer is also not a hovercraft. This has been tried, and it has failed. It could not operate when needed most when the weather was most foul and simply cost too much to maintain. Lastly, the answer is not the U.S. Coast Guard. As much as we love and support our Coast Guard, being a medevac to a community is not part of their overall mission, although they will come when called, and they have.

You will again hear testimony to that fact that we continue to have our Coast Guard men and women put their lives on the line and do so willingly, but these rescues are not part of their core mission and are not safe for anyone. They are also enormously expensive for the U.S. taxpayer. When the Coast Guard has to come in for a medevac, it can be \$200,000 to 250,000, which is not an efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

The right answer is to do what virtually every other community in America would do, and that is to build a simple, lifesaving road, a connector road. In this case, it is building an 11-mile, one lane, gravel, non-commercial use road. I say that so many times, I can say it in my sleep—an 11 mile, one lane, gravel, non-commercial use road to connect the existing road from King Cove through the Izembek area to the connector road that allows access into Cold Bay.

We already have about 19 miles of existing roads that have been built outside King Cove and Cold Bay. You will often hear that the area within the refuge is untrammelled wilderness. Well, it may have been untrammelled wilderness prior to World War II, but during the war, there were roads built. There are over 50 miles of roads that are contained within the refuge area currently. Currently.

You might ask if those roads are being used at all? Well, they are being used by our Fish and Wildlife folks, and they are being used by hunters. So the question is, why haven't we been able to get this simple road built?

The reason is that we cannot get permission from our own Federal Government to do so because this lifesaving road will cross a small corner of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge that is designated as Federal wilderness; however, we have routinely allowed for what they call "cherry stem" roads to enable transit to move through these wilderness areas. We have done it before. The only difference here is that cherry stemming would actually cure an injustice, which is keeping these people from accessing Cold Bay, rather than preventing one, as we often try to do when we are designating wilderness.

We have, within this Committee, passed legislation, which was overwhelmingly approved by Congress. President Obama signed it into law back in 2009, and it would have allowed the Department of Interior to approve a road for King Cove.

At a 300 to 1 exchange, it was not the best deal for the State of Alaska or for the people of King Cove. The Federal Government was going to get 300 times more than the State of Alaska was giving up. To obtain this road, the native people were willing to give up a portion of their lands that they received in a settlement under ANCSA. The exchange was going to be 206 acres that we would need for the corridor in exchange for 61,000 acres of state lands and native lands; however, 300 to 1 was still not good enough, and Secretary Jewell rejected that offer. She did so on the day before Christmas Eve. I do not forget that Christmas.

She decided that using just .07 percent of the refuge as a cherry stem to help save the lives of people who live there, while simultaneously expanding the refuge by tens of thousands of acres somehow was not worth it. It just was not worth it, she said.

She traveled out with me to King Cove, and she listened to the people of King Cove. I was there and I heard the exchanges back and forth. I heard what the people said to her. I heard what the children said at the school assembly when they told her they were frightened to fly because their auntie had died or their grandma had died or they had a neighbor who had been in a crash.

The Secretary stated that she had listened to their stories, but she also needed to listen to the animals. That is what drives me with this because we have a responsibility to the people that we represent. We have a responsibility for the land as well, a responsibility we do not take lightly, but think about the people that live out there. You will hear testimony from Stanley Mack and Della Trumble whose families have lived there forever. Ask them about how they care for the land, how they care for the animals, and how they have been stewards, as the Aleut people, of the land. I am not

too worried about making sure the animals are taken care of because I know that the native people have done that for generations.

The other irony here is, again, this decision was made despite the fact that there are roads existing within the refuge. They have been there since World War II, and no lasting impacts on any species that lives there has occurred as a consequence of those roads.

Additionally, if the decision was made to protect the birds, it is a little bit ironic that on Fish and Wildlife's website they boast about the recreational hunting for the area's water fowl. The Brant that we are supposedly protecting are also available for hunting. It is one of those issues that you look at and you say there are so many ironies here that it just is not right.

This decision was made despite the fact that there are already countless roads in refuges across the country. The State of Alaska has pointed out that we have roads in refuges in Florida, Maryland, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Arizona, Montana, Missouri, Illinois, New Mexico, Nevada and Washington; so this is not unprecedented.

Again, you will hear testimony from the folks here today that Interior's decision ignored the fact that human lives have been lost in King Cove. Nineteen people have died since 1980, either in plane crashes or because the sick and injured could not get out in time.

The decision that Interior has made is cynical and callous. It devastated the people of King Cove, who truly believed that help was finally on its way. It shattered the trust responsibility that the Federal Government is supposed to have to our nation's native people. It has left the people of King Cove in essentially the same position that they have been for decades, which is at the mercy of the elements, left to suffer pain, anxiety and sometimes even death in the event of a medical emergency.

King Cove has now seen 42 medevacs since the Secretary rejected this proposal back in December of 2013. The U.S. Coast Guard has been called in on 16 of those medevacs, risking the lives of their crew and others, and patients have suffered terrible pain and trauma. There was a man, a fisherman, who dislocated both hips when a 600-pound crab pot fell on him. We have seen elderly residents who have struggled with internal bleeding or sepsis or heart attacks and an infant boy who could not breathe. The stories just go on and on and on.

We are holding this hearing this morning to ensure that the people of King Cove finally have an opportunity to again state their case on the record as to why they need reliable access to emergency medical transportation, something that virtually every other American community has without ever stopping to think how important, how valuable it is.

I will remind people, King Cove is a long, long way away, and most people in this country will never have an opportunity to go there. However, as remote as they are, as far away as they are, and as small as this community is, it is still an American community, and they are not asking for much.

This is an opportunity to hear directly from those in need, to let them make their case in their own words to those who hold the power to help them. While we will be respectful of everyone's viewpoint expressed today, it is clear that the best answer, the only an-

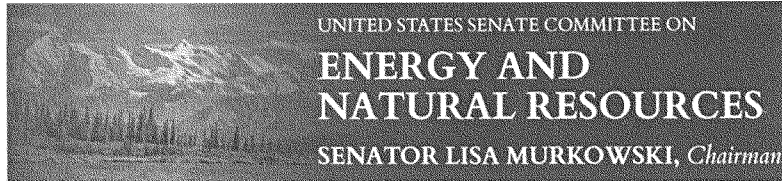
swer, the answer that should have been chosen a long time ago, is a lifesaving road.

For the people of King Cove, this issue has gone on for decades. It may be new to some colleagues here, and I thank you for listening and for your concern. I think you would share my concern if people in your states were faced with an issue such as this, despite the presence of an alternative. You will hear the argument that well, Alaska is difficult. There is weather all over and stuff happens, and because it happens in other places, King Cove should be no different. However, the difference with King Cove is that there is an answer that lies just miles away, one of the longest runways in the State of Alaska, and they can get there if they have an 11-mile connector road. That is the difference between the situation in King Cove and some of the other places where it is tough. I am not going to sit back and just hope that we do not have any more emergencies during bad weather because hope is not a policy. I am going to make sure that the people of King Cove are heard.

So again, I thank you for enduring my longer opening statement. As you can tell, when it comes to helping protect human lives and preventing needless human suffering, I am going to do what I can.

With that, I will ask my colleague, Senator Cantwell, to make her comments. I appreciate her being here this morning. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Chairman Murkowski follows:]



Opening Statement: King Cove Hearing
Chairman Lisa Murkowski
April 14, 2016

Good morning, everyone. The Committee will come to order so that we can consider an issue that deserves to be at the very top of our legislative agenda: protecting the health and safety of the people of King Cove, Alaska.

For those who are not familiar with King Cove, it is an isolated fishing community located 625 miles southwest of Anchorage, near the end of the Alaska Peninsula. Eighty-five percent of its residents are Alaska Native, including many who are Aleut and members of the federally recognized Agdaagux [Ah-Ga-Dowough] tribe. As with so many of our rural communities, it can only be reached by boat or by plane.

King Cove is a beautiful place, but it is also located in the midst of some very difficult terrain. The community is nestled on a small spit that is surrounded by the ocean and volcanic mountains. The region is prone to high winds, low clouds, dense fog, and other conditions that can make both flying and boating extremely dangerous. The small planes that can land at King Cove's gravel airstrip regularly grapple with low visibility, strong turbulence, and gale-force crosswinds. If you are on the sea, mariners can be looking at 12-foot high seas.

Most of the time, local residents have no desire to travel when weather conditions are severe. Yet, there are also times when travel cannot be avoided. When a medical emergency occurs, there is no choice but to try to reach safety and care. There is a clinic in King Cove—and they do a phenomenal job—but there are certain things that you cannot do in a clinic. You don't have an anesthesiologist anywhere in the region. And so if you are a trauma victim, if you are a woman in early stages of labor, if you have a major illness, the clinic is not where you can receive your care.

So what do you do? The first step is to transport those who are sick, injured, or in need of other medical care to the community of Cold Bay. You say well wait a minute; you just said transport them to Anchorage. Well Anchorage is 625 miles away. The way to get them to safety is to take them to Cold Bay where there is a 10,000+ foot runway; the second longest runway in the state of Alaska is located just across the bay.

This is not only a runway that is accessible with better weather conditions, when I say that the weather is down in King Cove it is down over one third of the year. Over 100 days a year the King Cove airport is not accessible. Not that it is just bad weather—it's not accessible. On the alternative, in Cold Bay it is

around 10 days a year that that airport is shutdown. So this is dramatically different in terms of its accesses.

Since the 1940s, the Alaska Native people of King Cove have sought a reliable route to reach Cold Bay during medical emergencies. Cold Bay is a community that came about in WWII as that airport, basically, for air traffic in and out as we accessed the Aleutians. It was literally built for its airport. Today there are less than 100 people that live in Cold Bay; they are mostly federal or state employees. In the community of King Cove, a community of close to 1000 people, this is a community that has been there for maybe 4,000 years or so. This is where the native people have been for millennia.

So again as we are searching for those avenues to provide for a safe route to medical care, the answer is not to build a longer runway or a new airport near King Cove – you will still be faced with the geography around you--and the weather around you. A longer runway would simply expose both pilots and passengers to some of the worst flying conditions in the country.

The answer is not to buy a large ferry and construct new docks in both King Cove and Cold Bay – because it is not appropriate to expect injured patients and their doctors to suffer through a multi-hour trip in extremely rough seas or perhaps be shut out by the ice that comes into the bay.

The answer is not a new helicopter, which would be too dangerous to fly in most conditions and too expensive for such a small community to support.

The answer is not a hovercraft. That has been tried – and failed – because it could not operate when it was needed most, when the weather was most foul, and cost too much to maintain.

The answer is not the U.S. Coast Guard, either. As much as we love and support our Coast Guard, being an emergency medevac to a community is not part of their overall mission, although they will come when called. And they have. You will hear testimony to that fact. That we continue to have our Coast Guard men and women put their lives on the line, and do so willingly, but these rescues are not part of their core mission, they are not safe for anyone, and they are enormously expensive for U.S. taxpayers. It is estimated that one of these medevacs \$250,000—that is not an efficient use of taxpayer dollars.

The right answer is to do what virtually every other community in America would do. And that's to build a life-saving road—a connector road. In this case, it is to build an 11-mile, gravel, one-lane road that is reserved only for non-commercial use road. To connect the exiting road from King Cove through the Izembek area and to the connector road that allows access into Cold Bay. We already have about 19 miles of existing roads that have been built outside of King Cove and Cold Bay.

Now you might say and you will hear that the area within the Refuge is untrammeled wilderness. It may have been untrammeled wilderness before WWII, but during the war there were roads built. There are over 50 miles of roads contained within the Refuge area. Currently. You might ask, well are those roads being used at all? Well they are being used by our Fish and Wildlife folks. They are being used by hunters.

Anyone listening must be wondering: why haven't Alaskans just built the road, already? And the reason is that we cannot get permission from our own federal government to do so, because this life-saving road

would cross a small corner of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge that is designated as federal wilderness. I will tell you that Congress routinely allows “cherry-stem” road, effectively to allow for a transit to move through these wilderness areas. The only difference here is that the cherry-stemming would cure an injustice, rather than prevent one as we try to do when we designate wilderness.

We have within this committee passed legislation, overwhelmingly approved by Congress, and that President Obama signed into law in 2009, the Department of the Interior recently had the ability to approve a road for King Cove. It was an admittedly lopsided deal: Alaskans offered a 300-to-1 land exchange in the federal government’s favor, asking for just 206 acres for a road corridor in exchange for 61,000 acres of our state lands and native lands.

Against all odds, Secretary Jewell rejected that offer on the day before Christmas Eve in 2013. She decided that using just 0.07 percent of the refuge as a “cherry stem” to help save the lives of the people who live there, while simultaneously expanding the refuge by tens of thousands of acres, was somehow not worth it. It just wasn’t worth it she said. And she came out with me to King Cove and she listened to the people of King Cove. I heard the exchanges back and forth, what the people said to her. I heard what the children said to her at the school assembly, when they told her that they were frightened to fly because their auntie had died, or their grandmother had died, or they had a neighbor who had been in a crash. And the Secretary stated that she had listened to the stories, but that she also needed to listen to the animals.

And that is what drives me with this, because we have a responsibility to the people that we represent. And we have a responsibility for the land as well and we don’t take that lightly. But think about the people that live out there. You will hear testimony from Stanley Mack and Della Trumble, whose families have lived out there forever. You ask them about how they care for the land, how they care for the animals, how they have been stewards, as the Aleut people, of these lands. I am not too worried that the animals will be taken care of, because I know that the Native people have done that for generations.

The other irony here is this decision was made despite the fact that dozens of miles of roads were built in the refuge area during World War II, with no lasting impacts on any species that lives there.

If that decision was made to protect the birds, it is a little ironic that the Fish and Wildlife Service’s website boasts about the recreational hunting for the waterfowl that is in the area. And the black brant, that we are supposedly protecting, are available for hunting. It is one of those issues that you look at and there are so many ironies.

That decision was made despite the fact that there are already countless roads in refuges across the country: as the State of Alaska has pointed out, there are roads in refuges in Florida, Maryland, Texas, Louisiana, North Carolina, Arizona, Montana, Missouri, Illinois, New Mexico, Nevada, and Washington state.

Interior’s decision ignored the fact that human lives have been lost in King Cove – with a total of 19 dead since 1980, either in plane crashes or because the sick and injured could not reach the help they so desperately needed in time.

Interior's decision was cynical. It was callous. It devastated the people of King Cove, who believed that help was finally on the way. It shattered the trust responsibility that the federal government is supposed to have to our nation's Native peoples. And it has left the people of King Cove in the same situation they have been in for decades: at the mercy of the elements, left to suffer needless pain, and perhaps even death, should they ever have a medical emergency.

King Cove has now endured a total of 42 medevacs since December 2013. The U.S. Coast Guard has carried out 16 of those medevacs, risking their own crews to rescue others. The patients have suffered terrible pain and trauma, including a man who dislocated both hips when a 600-pound crab pot fell on him; elderly residents suffering from internal bleeding or sepsis or apparent heart attacks; and an infant boy who was struggling to breathe.

We are holding this hearing because it is time to ensure that King Cove finally has reliable access to emergency medical transportation – something that virtually every other American takes for granted, without ever stopping to think about how important and valuable it is.

And I will remind people, that King Cove is a long ways away. Most people in this country will never have an opportunity to get there. But as remote as they are and as far away they are and as small as this community is, it is still an American community. And they are not asking for much.

This is an opportunity to hear directly from those in need – to let them make their case, in their own words, to those who hold the power to help them. And while we will be respectful of every viewpoint expressed today, it is clear: the best answer, the only answer, and the answer that should have been chosen a long time ago is a life-saving road.

This issue has gone on for decades, yet it might be new to some colleagues here. I thank you for listening and for your concern. I think you would share my concern that if people in your states were faced with an issue such as this, where there was an alternative. You will hear the arguments: "Well Alaska is difficult and there is weather all over; and stuff happens. And so because it happens in other places that King Cove should be no different." But the difference with King Cove is that there is an answer that lies eleven miles away—the second longest runway in the state of Alaska. And they can get there if they have an eleven mile connector road. That is the difference between the situation in King Cove and some of the other places.

I am not going to sit back and hope that we do not have any emergencies in bad weather, because hope is not a policy. I am going to make sure that the people of King Cove are heard. So again, I thank you for enduring my longer opening statement, but as you can tell when it comes to helping protect human lives and preventing needless human suffering, I am going to do what I can.

With that I am going to ask my colleague Senator Cantwell to make her comments. I appreciate her being here this morning.

###

**STATEMENT OF HON. MARIA CANTWELL, U.S. SENATOR FROM
WASHINGTON**

Senator CANTWELL. Well thank you, Madam Chair. I welcome the witnesses here today, including your Lieutenant Governor and many of the people I've seen in Alaska. My best wishes to the Governor of Alaska, and I would like to thank him for this sweatshirt from Cantwell, Alaska, which I mentioned I want to visit someday, so thank you so much for that.

I know this question is something the Chairman has felt strongly about, and I know this issue has been debated for many years. It is the subject of longstanding concern, and I think that's why so many of you are here today.

Over the years a number of options have been proposed for addressing the health and safety of King Cove's population, as the Chairwoman mentioned, including a hovercraft, new marine transport, an aluminum landing craft, a passenger ferry, upgrading the medical clinics, upgrading the airstrip, providing a heliport, and of course, most of the attention has been focused on building a road through the National Wildlife Refuge.

Some of these proposals have received federal attention, including the \$37 million that was appropriated in 1999 for a number of upgrades, including a hovercraft which has been discontinued, road construction for King Cove to a new dock facility, improvements to the airstrip and significant upgrades to the medical clinic. All of the transportation options have drawbacks, and all involve significant funding requirements, so I think the record is clear that there are no simple solutions here for addressing the real issues at King Cove.

When a land exchange in the National Wildlife Refuge was first proposed several years ago as a means of allowing construction of the road through the refuge, there was considerable debate about the relative environmental importance of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and the effect the road would have on the wildlife population and the wilderness character of the area.

In an effort to better understand the significance and potential effects of a road, Congress passed the Omnibus Public Lands bill in 2009 which authorized the Secretary of the Interior to enter into a land exchange that would have allowed for construction of a non-commercial gravel road through the refuge, but only if the Secretary of the Interior first conducted an environmental review and determined that the exchange would be in the public's interest.

After a four-year process of developing the environmental impact record for the proposed exchange, a process begun with the former Secretary Salazar was completed by Secretary Jewell. The Department of the Interior issued a record of decision in December 2013. The Interior Department's environmental impact statement found that the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is globally significant and that the landscape supports an abundance and diversity of wildlife resources. I'm sure we're going to hear about that from Ms. Evans today.

That wildlife is unique to the refuge, and years of analysis shows us that it would be irretrievably damaged by construction and operation of the proposed road. The record of decision noted that the refuge provides invaluable and potentially irreplaceable nesting

and feeding areas for shore birds and water fowl, including important habitat for 98 percent of the world's Pacific Black Brant population and the only non-migratory population of Tundra Swans in the world.

The record of decision also noted that the Interior Department would continue to work with the State of Alaska and local officials on viable alternatives to the road to ensure continued transportation improvements for the residents of King Cove.

Last year, the Army Corps of Engineers issued a report assessing non-road alternatives for emergency access, including the use of ice-capable marine vessels, airport upgrades, and the development of a heliport. I understand that many in the local community do not support these proposals. I'm sure we are going to hear these concerns as part of our discussion, but hopefully this report furthers our discussion about possible options. That is why I think we're here today.

We have a panel of witnesses, most of whom traveled a long way to come testify, so I look forward to hearing their testimony and talking about various transportation options during this morning's hearing.

And with that, I thank the Chairwoman for the hearing.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Senator Cantwell.

Let's begin the panel here this morning. I recognize that we have a vote scheduled at 10:30, so it is my intent to try to compress everything so that we can conclude this hearing by 10:30 or in about an hour.

The panel will be led off this morning by the Honorable Byron Mallott, Lieutenant Governor for the State of Alaska. Lieutenant Governor, I so appreciate you making the long trek. I know you just came in last night and it is a quick turnaround for you, so the fact that you have traveled to join us here this morning on behalf of the Governor and the State of Alaska is greatly appreciated.

After the Lieutenant Governor speaks, we will hear from the Honorable Stanley Mack, who is the Mayor of the Aleutians East Borough, the borough where King Cove sits, and a longtime leader within the region.

He will be followed by Denise Desiderio, who is the Policy and Legislative Director for the National Congress of American Indians and has been long active and very helpful on this issue and many others.

Della Trumble is also with us today. Della is no stranger to the community or to the Committee as she has been here in the past. I appreciate you making this long trip. Della is on the Agdaagux, and I am going to have you correct me with the pronunciation, Tribal Council and King Cove Corporation. Thank you, Della, for being here.

Next we will hear testimony from Commander John Whiddon, who is retired from the United States Coast Guard. We thank you for your service and for being here this morning.

We also have Nicole Whittington-Evans, who is the Alaska Regional Director of The Wilderness Society. Thank you for joining us as well.

With that, Lieutenant Governor, you can lead the panel off. And again, thank you.

**STATEMENT OF HON. BYRON MALLOTT, LIEUTENANT
GOVERNOR, STATE OF ALASKA**

Mr. MALLOTT. Thank you very much, Senator Murkowski, Senator Cantwell, members of the Committee. I have a reading copy here. We have submitted testimony for the record, but I'm not going to follow it.

Stanley Mack and I went to school together during the days of required boarding school attendance in Alaska by Alaska's native children. We still call ourselves kids when we spend time together. He went to Mount Edgecumbe. I went to Sheldon Jackson.

Sheldon Jackson was a Presbyterian boarding school. Mount Edgecumbe was a government boarding school. We kid one another that one of the things we at Sheldon Jackson had to do was to pray for those heathens at Mount Edgecumbe in order to make sure that they would lead good lives. And of course, if Stanley Mack is any example, they certainly have done that.

I was at breakfast this morning at my hotel. A group of Wyoming ranchers were at that hotel, and we had a brief breakfast conversation. To sum it up, they could have given my testimony here, and I could have given theirs at their event somewhere else in the Capitol.

First of all, I want to be very clear that the State of Alaska supports the road, that it was a party to the trade. It has been involved in every effort to be responsive to the need for the road and the reasons therefore and will continue to maintain that urgent support.

I want to talk a little bit about what is contained in my testimony. I grew up, was born and raised, in the small village of Yakutat on the Gulf Coast of Alaska. As opposed to King Cove, we were blessed during World War II with the construction of an all-weather airport within very close driving distance to our town, and we remain blessed today. Yakutat is, I believe, the smallest municipality in the United States that has full size jet aircraft service every single day. We do not take it for granted. We still, every day, thank God for that reality. We are among a very few communities in Alaska so blessed.

King Cove, and my son spent a summer out there working for the Bureau of Indian Affairs, is a place that requires that road, without question.

I want to talk a little bit about my growing up in Yakutat. We are, on one side, surrounded by Glacier Bay National Park, on the other, by the Wrangell St. Elias National Park. We are also within the Tongass National Forest.

The leadership in my community was among those that fought hard for the creation of many of the federal land classifications in our state. We did it with the clear assurance, at the time, that our way of life would be protected, and that we, as residents of the forest, being surrounded by these federal land classifications, would have our way of life protected.

We fought hard to create what are now routinely called in the Act preserves within those federal classifications. The preserves were those areas in which local people could continue to practice their lifestyles, could continue to have access to resources that had sustained them for thousands of years, in most instances for local

native peoples, but also to allow an emerging Alaskan lifestyle that embraced anyone who came to our communities and wanted to make a life. Those preserves contained hunting camps, fishing camps, and, in some instances, grandfathered small commercial operations.

Today, they're all gone after explicit promises that they would be maintained. They're all gone in the public policy rationale of these preserves. These national classifications are required to meet the needs of all Americans. They are required to meet the continuing need for habitat of species. They are required for their intrinsic value to our nation for all of the reasons that we typically know, and we agree with that. We agree with that 100 percent, but one of the things that I found, Senator, in my entire life in Alaska, my entire working life in Alaska of almost now 50 plus years, it is very easy to forget human beings.

In dealing with issues in the Tongass National Forest, that the easiest way to create a public policy recognition, to create a public policy tenant that something is in the national interest is to completely ignore the local human interest. And we live there. We die there. Our bones, our ancestral home for thousands of years, are in that place. Our reality is often completely ignored, and other proxies for the national interest are posed.

We don't talk about the Tongass National Forest anymore as a place for jobs, as a place for economic opportunity for those who live there. We talk about the Tongass National Forest in the context of salmon. We reduce or we take away the human face of a place.

In this nation, in order to preserve the beauty of our land which we in Alaska, which we who live there, which we who know it intimately, wish to maintain also. In order to preserve something that is called the greater good our lives are minimized, marginalized and in many ways, consciously, consciously, determined to be unimportant to the point where we become faceless. We are ignored by establishing something else as the critical factor in the importance of that place. That's the case in King Cove. It's the case in my community. It's the case across Alaska.

We have to, somehow, create the dialogue, create a circumstance in which the face, the voice, the reality of the existence and the desire, the aspiration of Alaska's people on their own lands become an essential element of the public policy debate about the utilization and future of public lands in Alaska. It is that simple.

So others will tell you about the details. You have articulated them, Senator, so eloquently. I'm sorry I moved away from the details of the discussion that we're having here.

I also want to state, just very quickly, that I've seen the healing power of the land. We have in my community places where 50 years ago, 60 years ago, even in my lifetime, places are built and go away and the land reclaims. And those that were displaced are back.

The notion that somehow the land is so extremely fragile, so incapable of healing itself, the arrogance that somehow we have to make judgements about the reality of the lives and the strength of the existence of plants and animals, that they are so fragile that

they never recover, that they never accommodate. We live it every single day. We see that accommodation. We see that change.

Certainly we need appropriate and timely public policy to frame our ability to manage Alaska's lands and other lands, but we also need to recognize that we are as important on this land as anything else. We probably are the most fragile, the least capable of being able to accommodate the kinds of changes that are before us without the assistance of the Federal Government, the Congress of the United States and the work of the State of Alaska on our behalf.

The point I want to make is that, particularly, those who live in rural and remote Alaska, that those living, breathing human beings, who have been there for generations and those who have arrived yesterday and choose to live and desire to live for continuing generations, that their reality, their importance, their aspirations, their desire for their ability to live on that land, needs somehow to be recognized and brought into a proper balance that does not exist today.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Mallott follows:]

Testimony of Lieutenant Governor Byron Mallott, State of Alaska
Hearing to Conduct Oversight on Options for Addressing the Continuing Lack of Reliable
Emergency Medical Transportation for the Isolated Community of King Cove, Alaska
U.S. Senate Committee on Energy & Natural Resources
Thursday, April 14, 2016
Washington, DC

Chairwoman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell and members of the committee, thank you for inviting me to testify today on the critically important issue of connecting the Alaska community of King Cove to the nearby community of Cold Bay, so that residents of King Cove may access necessary medical care.

Over the past three decades, scores of King Cove residents have been medically evacuated from King Cove to the nearby community of Cold Bay and, regrettably, more than a dozen individuals have passed away – either due to weather-related aircraft accidents or the inability to obtain timely medical treatment. I am here today to discuss why it is critical to build a road link through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge to connect both communities to ensure that King Cove residents are able to access necessary medical care in Anchorage or elsewhere.

I am an Alaska Native and was born in the southeast Alaska community of Yakutat, the ancestral home of my mother's Tlingit clan. I also had the honor of serving as mayor of my home town. Yakutat – by lower 48 standards – is a remote community, as it is not connected to the state's road system and is primarily served via air and the Alaska Marine Highway System. Yakutat is fortunate enough to have an airport with two paved runways and is served on a regular basis by a major commercial air carrier with jet aircraft.

However, King Cove – along with numerous remote, off-the-road system communities in Alaska – only has a gravel runway that is 3,500 feet long. Such an airport can only be served by small propeller-driven aircraft under Visual Flight Rules – when the airport is actually open. The airport is closed approximately 100 days each year due to extremely high winds and bad weather. Even when it is open, many residents do not want to fly out of the airport due to various reasons, including unpredictable weather and turbulence.

Those who oppose the construction of this critical road argue that most small, remote communities in Alaska have similar types of airports that frequently face bad weather, as well. However, King Cove is fortunate enough to be a relatively short distance away from a paved, all-weather airport in Cold Bay that features a runway in excess of 10,000 feet, instrument approach capabilities and a crosswind runway. In fact, the airport features one of the longest runways in Alaska and also serves as an emergency diversion airport for large commercial and military aircraft crossing the Pacific Ocean.

Beginning in 2007, a hovercraft provided transportation service between King Cove and Cold Bay. However, in 2010, this service ended. The Aleutians East Borough was no longer able to shoulder the high cost – \$1 million per year – to operate the service. Even when the hovercraft was in service, it was not able to operate 30 percent of the time due to severe ocean weather in

the area. Even disembarking a marine vessel in Cold Bay can be precarious – particularly in severe weather. In one case, an Alaska Native elder with a severe heart condition evacuated from King Cove to Cold Bay via marine vessel was not able to climb the ladder at the dock in Cold Bay due to high waves. Ultimately, he had to be lifted in a crab pot from the vessel to the dock. This would never be acceptable in the lower 48 and it should not be acceptable in Alaska, either.

At this time, Coast Guard rescue helicopter services are often used for medical evacuations out of King Cove. I heartily commend Coast Guard personnel – including my fellow witness retired Commander John Whiddon – for providing this critically important service throughout Alaska. However, technically speaking, providing emergency evacuations from communities on land is not part of the Coast Guard’s search and rescue mission. Even though Coast Guard personnel have a well-earned reputation for braving extreme weather conditions to rescue individuals in distress, there are situations where the weather is severe enough that even Coast Guard aircraft need to be grounded. Of course, this is for the safety of the patient and the Coast Guard personnel themselves. This is also a costly operation. It is estimated that it costs the Coast Guard up to \$250,000 per medical evacuation. In a number of cases, the Coast Guard has to dispatch aircraft from Kodiak Island – a trip of hundreds of miles.

The only reasonable option in the long term is a road – a road that will only be used when King Cove residents need to access necessary medical care. According to the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s own Record of Decision (ROD) on the proposed State/Alaska Native Corporation and federal government land exchange to allow for road construction, the road would only be closed an estimated two percent of the time due to weather conditions. This is compared to the 60-70 percent of the time when there is “no safe, reliable and affordable means of transportation,” according to the community of King Cove.

Unfortunately, as you know, the Fish and Wildlife Service concluded in the aforementioned Record of Decision that a road is not an appropriate option. Specifically, they noted their concern that a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge would be disruptive to wildlife, particularly the black brant species of goose. This is rather ironic, as the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge’s own website promotes hunting of various waterfowl, including the black brant. One hunter may take home up to two black brant per day during the hunting season.

There is also a precedent for road access through this National Wildlife Refuge. In the case of Izembek, there are almost 70 miles of U.S. Military-constructed roads – some of which are in legally-designated wilderness areas. The Fish and Wildlife Service continues to maintain and use approximately 50 miles of these World War II-era roads.

Also, the proposed land exchange would have added over 2,000 acres of eelgrass – habitat for the black brant – to the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. This is more than 20 times the amount that would have been transferred to the State of Alaska pursuant to the proposed land exchange.

Finally, I want to dispel one particular rumor about commercial use of the road. Some critics of the road – including former Secretary of the Interior Bruce Babbitt – have claimed that

constructing this road is really about transporting employees and seafood between a seafood processing facility in King Cove and the all-weather airport in Cold Bay. Nothing could be further from the truth. According to a March 21, 2014 open letter from Mr. Dale Schwarzmiller, Vice President of Alaska Production for Peter Pan Seafoods, Inc., the company who owns the seafood processing facility in question, states "Thus our only legal use of this road could be for prompt safe access to the airstrip at Cold Bay for our employees in the case of a medical emergency, just as the community at large is seeking."

As an Alaska Native, hunter, fisherman, a former chair of the Nature Conservancy of Alaska and Lieutenant Governor, I know that constructing a road between King Cove and Cold Bay is the only viable, long-term and responsible thing to do to ensure the health and safety of those who are privileged enough to call the community of King Cove home.

Thank you for the opportunity to address you today. I will be happy to answer any questions you may have.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Lieutenant Governor, this is why we are here today, to give a voice to these people.

Thank you.

Mayor Mack, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF HON. STANLEY MACK, MAYOR, ALEUTIANS
EAST BOROUGH, ALASKA**

Mr. MACK. Good morning, Senator and Chairman Murkowski and members of the Committee. My name is Stanley Mack, and I'm an Aleut. I was born and raised in King Cove. I've been the Mayor of the Aleutians East Borough for the last 14 years.

King Cove is the second largest community in the borough with a population of 900. It's my privilege and responsibility this morning to address this Committee on behalf of all of King Cove and the Aleutians East residents and to say thank you, Senator Murkowski, for being such an incredible champion on this issue and this cause.

Simply stated, the residents of King Cove continue to desperately need a dependable, safe and affordable means of transportation access to Cold Bay airport which is our lifeline to the outside world, particularly for medical and health needs. The only logical form of transportation access is a one lane, 11-mile, gravel road that will connect King Cove to the Cold Bay airport.

Those of you who don't know, Cold Bay's airport is an anomaly in rural Alaska. It's an all-weather airport, as the Senator has spoken about, having a ten-foot main runway, a 6,500-foot cross wind runway. It was built by the U.S. military as the one in Yakutat in 1942 as part of the Aleutian campaign in World War II. It's one of the most accessible all-weather airports in Alaska and open on a 24/7 basis 365 days a year.

Contrast this airport to the King Cove airstrip which is 18 air miles away and has a 3,000 foot gravel runway available only during the daylight hours.

The King Cove airstrip, and I use the term airstrip because that's all it is, is precariously located between two mountain peaks. And as you can see the peaks that we have to fly through here on some of the pictures. Flights are subject to extreme weather including turbulence throughout the year, high winds, thick fog and snow squalls resulting in cancellations or delays of flights for 100 days a year.

Many King Cove residents have a fear of flying because of these conditions. We'll show you pictures of reasons why. Our weather is some of the most treacherous in the world with 15 foot seas in winter and winds well over 50 miles an hour throughout most of the year. We're known as the place where storms are born.

We tried to make the hovercraft work which is going to be a topic of discussion, I'm sure, to link King Cove and Cold Bay, but after three hours of operations we realized our weather and operational problems and a required annual subsidy of more than a million dollars made it an unacceptable option. As the Borough Mayor I had the fiduciary responsibility to suspend the unsustainable operations.

As I considered all my options and responsibilities, I sincerely believed the passage of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act would fi-

nally resolve our transportation access problem to getting to Cold Bay airport. But after Secretary Jewell's decision in December of 2013 to not authorize the road, we continue to find ourselves at the mercy of our high volatile wind and marine conditions and topographic constraints.

I'm also very disappointed and frustrated that the Secretary's decision was based on a very biased and scientifically flawed EIS process completed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It eventually became very clear to me that our local knowledge of the environment did not matter to the Federal Government. It also became very clear to me that any trust responsibility for indigenous Americans for government-to-government relationships were just a bunch of fancy words.

I'm also very frustrated that critics still continue to talk about other forms of marine infrastructure and vessels that they believe will adequately address our problems. These are suggestions that are not viable. We cannot mitigate the forces of nature in our marine environment. I have been a fisherman for over 60 years in this area and I know about the never ending challenges of the oceans, bays, vessels and the weather.

I have a number of photos to show the Committee that illustrate some of the challenges and weather conditions and when to contend to dealing with marine medevacs out of King Cove to the Cold Bay dock.

Here's a picture of a 125-foot crab vessel trying to get near the dock in Cold Bay. It was unable to do that because of the weather conditions. The wind was too high and the seas were too rough.

[The information referred to follows:]



Here's a picture of the icy conditions that no one seems to want to put on the forefront to show you that this dock is a quarter of a mile from the beach and the ice pack is nearly a half a mile off there. If you were to put any kind of infrastructure in the front of that dock it would stop the flow of the tidal action to where that ice will remain there for a long period of time.

[The information referred to follows:]



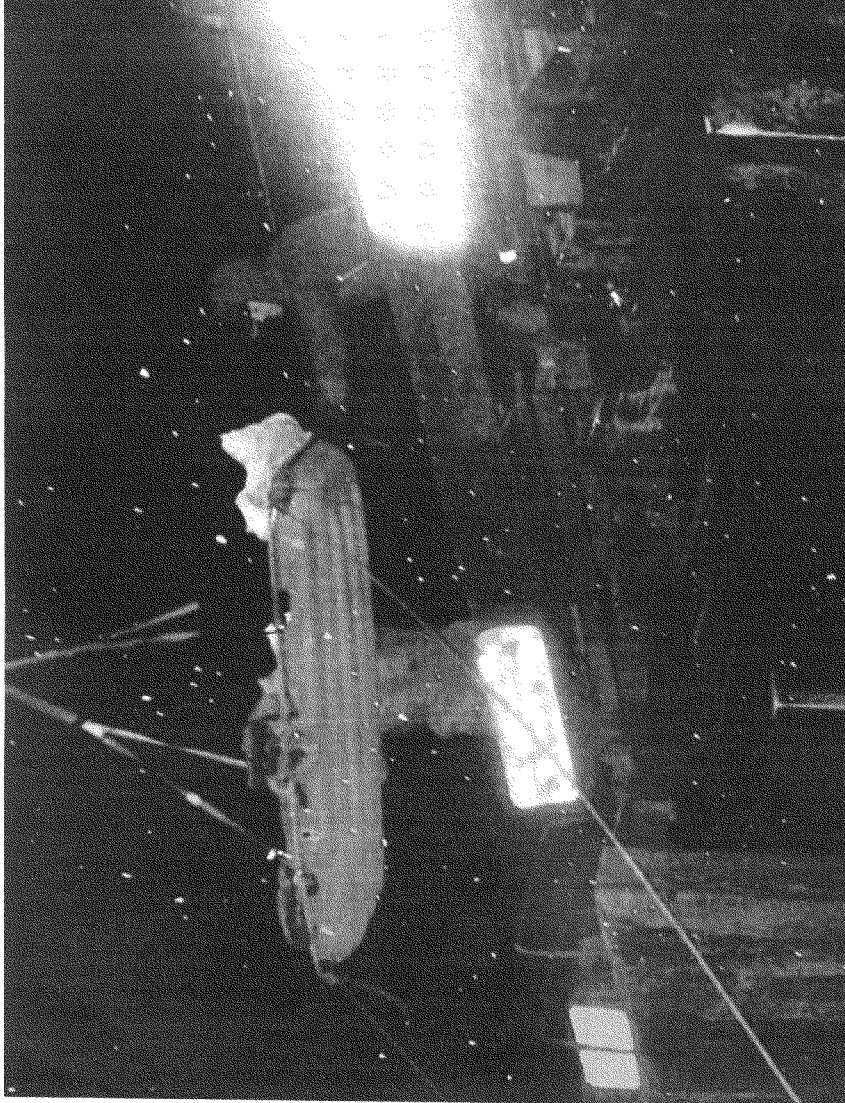
The dock is at least 20 feet high, and strapping an injured patient in a gurney and hoisting them up from the dock, up to the dock of the boat it can be as much as 25 feet.

[The information referred to follows:]



It's always a scary situation. This is basically what we have to do or putting elders in a crab pot and using a crane to hoist them to the top of the dock is frightening.

[The information referred to follows:]



Most people don't realize that both the high winds and ice can prevent us from using boats or barges or large efficient vessels from accessing the Cold Bay dock. We must, I emphasize must, have this modest one lane, gravel road for transportation.

I respectfully ask this Committee to support our road alternative and allow us the dignity and respect to have what most American citizens simply take for granted.

In closing I want to say thank you, Senator Murkowski, for caring so much about our lives and working with conviction and passion in helping us to achieve this needed road to access the Cold Bay airport.

I respectfully ask all the Committee members to support Senator Murkowski's effort to authorize this road and significantly enhance the quality of our lives. Our lives matter.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Mack follows:]

Testimony of Stanley Mack
Mayor of the Aleutians East Borough

Testifying Before
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Regarding
The Need and for Reliable Emergency Medical Transportation for the Isolated
Community of King Cove, Alaska

April 14, 2016

Good Morning Senator and Chair Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee. My name is Stanley Mack. I am an Aleut and was born and raised in King Cove. I have been the Mayor of the Aleutians East Borough for the last fourteen years. King Cove is the second largest community in the Borough with a population of 900.

It is my privilege and responsibility this morning to address the Committee on behalf of all King Cove and Aleutians East Borough residents, and to say thank you, Senator Murkowski, for being an incredible champion for our cause.

Simply stated, the residents of King Cove continue to desperately need a dependable, safe, and affordable means of transportation access to the Cold Bay Airport, which is our lifeline to the outside world, particularly for medical and health needs. The only logical form of transportation access is a one-lane, 11-mile gravel road that will connect King Cove's existing road system to the Cold Bay Airport.

The Cold Bay Airport is an anomaly in rural Alaska. It is an all-weather airport having a 10,000' main runway and a 6,500' crosswind runway. It was built by the US military in 1942 as part of the Aleutian campaign in World War II.

It is one of the most accessible, all-weather airports in Alaska and open on a 24-7 basis 365 days a year. Contrast this airport to the King Cove airstrip, which is 18 air miles away and has a 3,000' gravel runway available only during daylight hours.

The King Cove airstrip is precariously located between two mountain peaks. Flights are subject to extreme weather, including turbulence, throughout the year. High winds, thick fog, and snow squalls result in canceled or delayed flights about 100 days a year. Many King Cove residents have a fear of flying because of these conditions.

Our weather is some of the most treacherous in the world with 15-foot seas in winter and winds well over 50 miles per hour throughout most of the year. We tried to make a hovercraft option work to link King Cove with Cold Bay. But after three years of operations, we realized our weather, operational problems, and a required annual subsidy of more than \$1.0 million made this an unacceptable option. As the Borough Mayor, I had a fiduciary responsible to suspend these unsustainable operations.

As I considered all of my options and responsibilities, I sincerely believed the passage of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act would finally resolve our transportation access problem getting to the Cold Bay Airport. But after Secretary Jewell's decision in December 2013 to not authorize the road, we continue to find ourselves at the mercy of our highly volatile weather, marine conditions, and topographic constraints.

I am also very disappointed and frustrated that the Secretary's decision was based on a very biased and scientifically flawed EIS process completed by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. It eventually became very clear to me that our local knowledge of the environment does not matter to the federal government. It also became very clear to me that any trust responsibility for indigenous Americans or government-to-government relations are just a bunch of fancy words.

I am also very frustrated that critics still continue to talk about other forms of marine infrastructure and vessels that they believe will adequately address our problems. Those suggestions are simply not viable. We cannot mitigate the forces of nature in our marine environment. I have been a fisherman for over 60 years in this area and I know about the never-ending challenges of the oceans, bays, vessels, and the weather. I have a number of photos to show the Committee that illustrates some of the challenges and weather conditions that we must contend with in dealing with in marine medevacs out of King Cove to the Cold Bay Dock.

Strapping injured or sick patients into a gurney and hoisting them up from the deck of a boat, which can be as much as 20-25 feet below the Cold Bay dock, is always a scary situation. Or, putting elders inside a crab pot and using a crane to hoist up to the top of the dock is frightening. And, most people do not realize that both high winds and ice can prevent us using boats as large as 125' from accessing the Cold Bay dock that extends out from shore a quarter of a mile. The trauma and high risk that these marine medevacs require is very frightening to all of us.

We must have this modest, one-lane gravel road to mitigate these very high-risk air and marine transportation options for transporting our sick and injured residents. Our proposed road is the most logical, safe, and affordable alternative. I respectfully ask the Committee to support our road alternative and allow us the dignity and respect to have what most American citizens simply take for granted.

In closing, I want to again say, Thank You, Senator Murkowski for caring so much about our lives and working with conviction and passion in helping us to achieve this needed road access to the Cold Bay Airport. I respectfully ask all committee members to support Senator Murkowski's efforts to authorize this road and significantly enhance the quality of our lives. Our lives do matter.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Mayor.
Ms. Desiderio.

**STATEMENT OF DENISE DESIDERIO, POLICY DIRECTOR,
NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS**

Ms. DESIDERIO. Good morning, Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell. It's a pleasure to sit before you today and testify on behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI).

This is an important issue, not just for the residents of King Cove, Alaska but for all of Indian Country. NCAI is in full support of providing a solution to the Agdaagux Tribe and the residents of King Cove in providing them a safe, reliable and consistent access to medical treatment. The reason is simple. NCAI views this as, first and foremost, a matter of public safety.

As long standing members of the Indian Affairs Committee, you know full well the needs of health care in Indian Country. It's not unusual for tribal communities to be so isolated and rural as to make health care, that we take for granted here in DC and in other parts of the country, almost impossible for tribes to obtain. But even with that, the situation stands out in Indian Country. There's no place else in Indian Country where tribal members need to fly over 600 miles to receive full health care. There's no place else where weather conditions will shut down complete access to health care for tribal members.

You've stated the statistics very well, but I think what I want to focus on is something that Governor, or Lieutenant Governor, I've already elected you, that the Lieutenant Governor brought up in that these are conditions where tribal members and the residents of King Cove suffer from broken bones, they're in childbirth, there's internal bleeding. When weather conditions shut down these airports they may wait hours or even days to receive health care. Even in Indian Country this is an extreme situation that we don't feel can be ignored and that we think has to be fixed.

NCAI's membership has long supported road access for King Cove. As early as 2007 we passed a resolution supporting the land exchange legislation to build a road, and following that in 2009 Congress overwhelmingly supported that legislation.

Unfortunately, we're still waiting for the road to be built in King Cove and mostly due to concerns with the disruption that building a road through the Izembek National Refuge would cause. The 2013 decision by the Secretary of the Interior to deny the road was based on a NEPA process that focused solely on the natural environment but failed to take into account the health and safety needs of the residents of King Cove.

Following that decision NCAI's members spoke again. In March of 2014 we passed legislation again supporting land exchange legislation, and I want to point out that in March of 2014 was an emergency resolution. It's not often that NCAI acts on resolutions at our Executive Council winter session because we usually pass those resolutions during our membership meetings. But our board, NCAI's board, felt so strongly that this was a resolution that was emergency in nature and national in scope that we passed in

March 2014 a resolution supporting the residents and the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove.

Again, in 2015 we passed a subsequent resolution supporting the need for a road, and the reason we wanted an additional resolution was because we wanted our general membership to speak on it too. This is an issue that has been brought up by our board, by our members of our board from Alaska, and by our membership throughout Indian Country as one of an injustice that needs to be fixed.

I want to make sure that the Committee understands NCAI does support and respect the Secretary's responsibility to maintain the refuge. The refuge is a diverse and natural habitat that does deserve the highest protections; however, the Aleut people were the first stewards of this land and they've lived on and off of these lands for over 4,000 years. They were here before the establishment of the refuge, and they have the most at stake in protecting the environment and the wildlife.

You've mentioned the great concessions that the tribe and the State of Alaska have made to make this road a reality. And you know, 206 acres in exchange for over 60,000 acres, it's a great concession by the state, by the tribe. And yet, we still don't have a road that will provide the basic healthcare needs of the citizens of King Cove. I think that's all we're asking for here.

I want to make sure that this Committee understands that NCAI is in full support of a road to King Cove and that we consider this a matter for the trust responsibility.

What we're asking is the Secretary of Interior to uphold her trust responsibility to tribal governments and provide the health care that is required as part of that trust responsibility for the residents of King Cove.

Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Desiderio follows:]



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS
**TESTIMONY BEFORE THE SENATE ENERGY AND NATURAL
 RESOURCES COMMITTEE OVERSIGHT HEARING ON THE NEED FOR
 RELIABLE EMERGENCY MEDICAL TRANSPORTATION FOR THE
 ISOLATED COMMUNITY OF KING COVE, ALASKA**

Denise Desiderio, Policy Director

April 14, 2016

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Good Morning Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee. My name is Denise Desiderio and I am the Policy Director for the National Congress of American Indians.

On behalf of the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI), the oldest, largest, and most representative American Indian and Alaska Native organization serving the broad interests of tribal governments and communities, I'd like to thank you for holding this important hearing on the lack of reliable emergency medical transportation for the isolated community of King Cove in Alaska.

Formed in 1944 as a response to termination and assimilation policies that threatened the existence of American Indian and Alaska Native tribes, NCAI has fought to preserve the treaty rights and sovereign status of tribal governments, while improving the quality of life for Native communities and peoples.

NCAI fully supports the need for a safe and dependable road connection between King Cove and the Cold Bay Airport for the Agdaagux Tribe for emergency and routine medical and health care access for its tribal members.

Twice a year NCAI's membership comes together to meet on issues of importance to all of Indian Country. At those meetings, members submit, review, and pass resolutions that become the voice of NCAI on issues of national importance. These resolutions are passed much like legislation passes in Congress – through subcommittees, committees and ultimately by the full body. This process ensures that NCAI's resolutions are thoroughly vetted and become the consensus position of Indian Country.

NCAI's members have shown consistent and long-standing support for road access to King Cove. In 2007, recognizing the nearly 25 year struggle to build a road, our membership passed a resolution supporting land exchange legislation to build a road for the community of King Cove to improve their access to emergency and routine health care access #DEN-07-036 - *The Izembek and Alaska Peninsula Refuge and Wilderness Enhancement and King Cove Safe Access Act*.

Following the Secretary of the Interior's December 2013 decision denying road access to King Cove, NCAI's membership renewed its support for road access by passing resolutions in 2014 and 2015, recognizing the need for this life saving road. #ECWS-14-010 - *Supporting Legislation for a Land Exchange between and among*

the King Cove Corporation, State of Alaska, and United States of America for a Permanent Road between the King Cove and Cold Bay, #MSP-15-033 – Support for Road Access for the Aleut People of King Cove, Alaska to Cold Bay All Weather Airport.

This is first and foremost an issue of public safety. Access to emergency medical assistance is one of the most basic rights afforded to American citizens. Nowhere is this more relevant than in American Indian and Alaska Native communities who ceded millions of acres of land to form the United States. In exchange, Native communities expect the United States to uphold its federal trust responsibility in areas such as education, land management and health care.

In order for the residents of King Cove to receive high level medical services, they must fly more than 600 miles to Anchorage. This already inconvenient trip becomes impossible when weather conditions close the local airport which occurs an average of 100 days per year. Even when the airport is open, 40 percent of flights are cancelled due to weather conditions.

However, this situation changes from inconvenient to life threatening when serious medical emergencies occur and the residents lack any access to reliable medical transport to health facilities. In these cases, the only options for evacuation of residents becomes medevac airlifts to Anchorage. And oftentimes, those services are not immediately available to residents and take hours or days for evacuations.

For the most serious medical emergencies, including heart attack, childbirth, internal bleeding, dislocated joints and other emergencies, the residents of King Cove are not assured the same access to medical facilities that we all take for granted. In addition, when evacuations must occur, those who are conducting the medical rescue are also putting their lives in danger.

Since Secretary Jewell's decision in December 2013 to deny road access to the airport from King Cove, 23 medevacs have been needed for medical emergencies. That is an average of 1.5 evacuations per month.

The major reason the road has not been approved yet is concern for the beautiful, diverse, and natural habitat that exists in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. When the Department of the Interior completed the required NEPA process to support this authorization, it focused solely on the natural environment of the Izembek Refuge and not the health and safety needs of the residents of King Cove.

However, there is no other group that has more at stake regarding the protection of the environment than the Aleut Native population which has inhabited the King Cove area for more than 4,000 years. Since time immemorial, the Aleut have hunted, fished, and subsisted off the land and continue to rely on the practice of their traditional and customary lifeways.

This area is their homeland, it's where their ancestors are buried, and it's where their children learn their language and culture from their elders. Respect and reliance on the natural environment is paramount in Indian Country and especially here in King Cove. While the road will have a financial cost and some impact to the natural environment, we must ask: what's the cost of human life?

While this would be the first road built following designation as a wildlife refuge, having a road in a national wildlife refuge is not something unique or out of the ordinary, especially when considering protecting the health, safety, and welfare of the people who live in the area. Many

federal lands including Forest Service, Bureau of Land Management, Fish & Wildlife, and others have small access roads built to reach citizens who might be in need or to prevent fires from spreading to vulnerable areas. This is the exact same concept here: providing a 10 mile, gravel, single-lane non-commercial access road would allow the citizens of King Cove the ability to always access medical services in all types of weather.

The Tribe and residents of King Cove have also made great concessions to meet the federal government more than half-way to build this road. This includes transferring more than 56,000 acres of land owned by the State of Alaska and the King Cove Native Corporation in exchange for only 206 acres to build the 13 foot wide gravel road.

In 2009, this Congress passed the Omnibus Public Land Management Act authorizing this land transfer and sanctioning the building of the road connecting King Cove to Cold Bay. The President signed this bill into law but the subsequent Environmental Impact Study led to rejection of Congress' intent.

NCAI is simply asking the Department of the Interior to fully implement that Act and provide for the health and safety of the residents of King Cove, Alaska.

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The National Congress of American Indians
Resolution #DEN-07-036

**TITLE: "The Izembek and Alaska Peninsula Refuge and Wilderness
Enhancement and King Cove Safe Access Act" H.R. 2801 and S. 1680**

WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove, Alaska have lived on the Alaska Peninsula for over 4,000 years and have fished, hunted and subsisted throughout this area the entire time; and

WHEREAS, the King Cove-Cold Bay area at the western end of the Alaska Peninsula is one of the most isolated areas in the State of Alaska and because of this isolation, the indigenous people of this area have lived relatively undisturbed until the last 50-60 years; and

WHEREAS, this relative isolation was abruptly interrupted by the invasion of the Aleutians in World War II and has continued unabated including the construction of one of the largest airports in the State of Alaska at Cold Bay by the US Army in the 1940's; and

WHEREAS, the Cold Bay Airport is the lifeline for the King Cove residents to the outside world, particularly for the life, health and safety needs of these indigenous residents, but there is currently no surface access to this airport despite the Cold Bay Airport being only 25 miles from King Cove and its residents; and

WHEREAS, the Agdaagux Tribe has been struggling for the past 25 years for permission from the federal government for the construction of a road between the village of King Cove and Cold Bay Airport, but until now the federal government has not agreed to this road construction; and

WHEREAS, the *Izembek and Peninsula Refuge and Wilderness Enhancement and King Cove Safe Access Act* has now been introduced in the 110th Congress (S. 1680 and HR. 2801) to authorize a land exchange between the federal government and the King Cove Corporation (ANSCA-village corporation) and State of Alaska in order to obtain the necessary road right-of-way to construct a 9 mile, gravel, single-lane road to complete the missing road link between King Cove and the Cold Bay Airport; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, State of Alaska, King Cove Corporation and all other interested tribes support this legislation; and

WHEREAS, all supporters of this legislation acknowledge that the eelgrass beds of the Izembek Lagoon are of vital importance for migratory waterfowl but that the road will not impact the migratory waterfowl.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, because of public health and safety concerns, the NCAI does hereby support the passage of legislation by the US Congress and the Alaska Legislature to endorse this proposed land exchange between and among the King Cove Corporation, State of Alaska, and United States of America which will ultimately result in the establishment of a permanent road between the King Cove and Cold Bay; and

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the road planning process will provide for consultation with all interested parties; and

BE IT FINALLY RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until the final adjournment of the 110th Congress.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2007 Annual Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Hyatt Regency Denver at the Colorado Convention Center in Denver, Colorado on November 11-16, 2007, with a quorum present.



President

ATTEST:



Recording Secretary



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

The National Congress of American Indians Resolution #ECWS-14-010

TITLE: Supporting Legislation for a Land Exchange between and among the King Cove Corporation, State of Alaska, and United States of America for a Permanent Road between the King Cove and Cold Bay

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WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove, Alaska have lived on the Alaska Peninsula for over 4,000 years and have fished, hunted and subsisted throughout this area the entire time; and

WHEREAS, the King Cove-Cold Bay area at the western end of the Alaska Peninsula is one of the most isolated areas in the State of Alaska and because of this isolation, the indigenous people of this area have lived relatively undisturbed until the last 50-60 years; and

WHEREAS, this relative isolation was abruptly interrupted by the invasion of the Aleutians in World War II and has continued unabated including the construction of one of the largest airports in the State of Alaska at Cold Bay by the US Army in the 1940's; and

WHEREAS, the Cold Bay Airport is the lifeline for the King Cove residents to the outside world, particularly for the life, health and safety needs of these indigenous residents, but there is currently no surface access to this airport despite the Cold Bay Airport being only 25 miles from King Cove and its residents; and

WHEREAS, the Agdaagux Tribe has been struggling for the past 25 years for permission from the federal government for the construction of a road between the village of King Cove and Cold Bay Airport, but until now the federal government has not agreed to this road construction; and

WHEREAS, the *Izembek and Peninsula Refuge and Wilderness Enhancement and King Cove Safe Access Act* was introduced in the 110th Congress to authorize a land exchange between the federal government and the King Cove Corporation (ANSCA-village corporation) and State of Alaska in order to obtain the necessary road right-of-way to construct a 9 mile, gravel, single-lane road to complete the missing road link between King Cove and the Cold Bay Airport; and

WHEREAS, the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service, State of Alaska, King Cove Corporation and all other interested tribes support this legislation; and

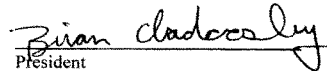
WHEREAS, all supporters of this legislation acknowledge that the eelgrass beds of the Izembek Lagoon are of vital importance for migratory waterfowl but that the road will not impact the migratory waterfowl.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, because of public health and safety concerns, the NCAI does hereby support the passage of legislation by the US Congress and the Alaska Legislature to endorse this proposed land exchange between and among the King Cove Corporation, State of Alaska, and United States of America which will ultimately result in the establishment of a permanent road between the King Cove and Cold Bay.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the road planning process will provide for consultation with all interested parties.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2007 Annual Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Hyatt Regency Denver at the Colorado Convention Center in Denver, Colorado on November 11-16, 2007, with a quorum present and was amended at the 2014 Executive Council Winter Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the Westin Washington City Center March 11 -13, 2014, in Washington, DC with a quorum present.


President

ATTEST:


Recording Secretary



NATIONAL CONGRESS OF AMERICAN INDIANS

The National Congress of American Indians Resolution #MSP-15-033

TITLE: Support for Road Access for the Aleut People of King Cove, Alaska to Cold Bay All-Weather Airport

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WHEREAS, we, the members of the National Congress of American Indians of the United States, invoking the divine blessing of the Creator upon our efforts and purposes, in order to preserve for ourselves and our descendants the inherent sovereign rights of our Indian nations, rights secured under Indian treaties and agreements with the United States, and all other rights and benefits to which we are entitled under the laws and Constitution of the United States, to enlighten the public toward a better understanding of the Indian people, to preserve Indian cultural values, and otherwise promote the health, safety and welfare of the Indian people, do hereby establish and submit the following resolution; and

WHEREAS, the National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) was established in 1944 and is the oldest and largest national organization of American Indian and Alaska Native tribal governments; and

WHEREAS, the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove, Alaska have lived on the western end of the Alaska Peninsula, contemporarily known as the Izembek area, for over 4,000 years and have fished, hunted and subsisted throughout this area the entire time; and

WHEREAS, the Izembek area is one of the most isolated areas in the State of Alaska and because of this isolation, the indigenous people of this area lived relatively undisturbed until the invasion of the Aleutian Islands in World War II and has continued unabated with the construction of one of the largest all-weather airports in the State at Cold Bay by the US Army in the 1940's; and

WHEREAS, the all-weather Cold Bay Airport is the lifeline for the Aleut residents of King Cove to the outside world, particularly for medical and health reasons, however, residents can only safely and dependably access the Cold Bay Airport about 60-70% of the time (see resolution attachment); and

WHEREAS, the Agdaagux Tribe has been struggling for the past 25 years for permission from the federal government for the construction of a road between the village of King Cove and Cold Bay Airport, but until 2009 the federal government had not agreed to consider approving this road connection; and

WHEREAS, the NCAI has supported the Aleut people's need for a safe and dependable road connection between King Cove and the Cold Bay Airport for the primary purpose of timely access for emergency and routine medical and health care at the Alaska Native Medical Center in Anchorage, Alaska; and

WHEREAS, the NCAI passed Resolution #Den-07-036 which supported the *Izembek and Peninsula Refuge and Wilderness Enhancement and King Cove Safe Access Act*, in which Congress authorized a land exchange to construct a 9-mile, single-lane, gravel road connecting King Cove to the Cold Bay Airport; and

WHEREAS, the Aleuts of King Cove were further encouraged that the land exchange and road approval would be forthcoming with President Obama's 2013 Executive Order, which stated "it is the policy of the United States to promote the development of prosperous and resilient tribal communities in providing greater access to, and control over, nutrition and healthcare, including special efforts to confront historic health disparities;" and

WHEREAS, on December 23, 2013, Secretary of Interior, Sally Jewell, rejected the land exchange and road authorized by Congress, and after many requests for reconsideration, the Aleut people, along with the State of Alaska, were left with no choice but to sue the Department of Interior over this arbitrary and capricious decision; and

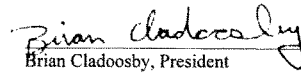
WHEREAS, the Aleut people of King Cove are continuing to seek justice for this basic right to safe and dependable transportation access for emergency and routine medical and health, which is an expectation that most Americans, Indian and non-Indian, take for granted.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, because of public health, safety, and quality of life factors, the NCAI does hereby support the rights of the Aleut people of King Cove for this basic expectation of dependable transportation access, and calls upon Congress to immediately pass new legislation approving a land corridor for the construction of a permanent lifesaving road linking the community of King Cove to the Cold Bay Airport; and

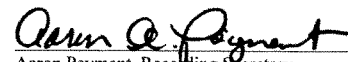
BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution shall be the policy of NCAI until it is withdrawn or modified by subsequent resolution.

CERTIFICATION

The foregoing resolution was adopted by the General Assembly at the 2015 Midyear Session of the National Congress of American Indians, held at the St. Paul River Centre, St. Paul, MN, June 28 to July 1, 2015, with a quorum present.


Brian Cladoosby, President

ATTEST:


Aaron Payment, Recording Secretary

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Not only do we appreciate your comments, but that of the full NCAI. So thank you very much for that. Della Trumble, welcome back.

STATEMENT OF DELLA TRUMBLE, SPOKESWOMAN, AGDAAGUX TRIBAL COUNCIL AND KING COVE CORPORATION

Ms. TRUMBLE. Thank you.

Good morning, Senator and Chair Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell and members of the Committee. My name is Della Trumble. I am an Aleut. I was born and raised in King Cove, and I continue to live there.

The residents of King Cove love our community. It is our home, and we have a special place in our hearts for you, Senator, for your continued support. We very much appreciate it.

Today I'm speaking on behalf of all the shareholders of the King Cove Corporation and as a member of the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove and for all other residents in King Cove. I'm also here speaking as a mother, an Alaskan and a citizen of the United States.

I'm deeply connected to the land you know as the Izembek Refuge through my ancestors who've lived and fed themselves on this wilderness for over 4,000 years. It's a part of who we are today. Our culture and our respect for our natural environment will never allow us to damage the refuge. We were born and raised to only take what you need, to always have a renewable resource.

I've lived this road issue now for 35 years of my life. I was a young lady at one time when I first came back here for this. I will confess to being a bit tired to keep coming back for this battle, but I will not stop until it is resolved.

This is at least my 25th trip to Washington to testify, lobby and advocate for this road to allow for a safe, dependable and affordable transportation access from King Cove to the all-weather airport in Cold Bay. Our need for this very modest road connection to Cold Bay airport is essential for medical and health needs, for a sustainable future and just the piece of mind of safe transportation.

We sincerely thought the passage of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act was a final decision needed to authorize this road. The community remains stunned by Secretary Jewell's decision to deny us the road; however, her decision did not totally surprise us because when she visited King Cove in August of 2013 she informed us that she was there to speak on behalf of the Izembek birds and animals which have no voice.

In response to that comment, our Police Chief and lifelong resident, Robert Gould, politely told the Secretary it was his responsibility to speak on behalf of all King Cove residents and those who have lost their lives and those that continue to endure medical and health challenges because of the community's transportation access problem.

How much more do we need to endure, particularly when there is such a reasonable, dependable and affordable solution to our transportation access problem to the Cold Bay airport?

We desperately need the ten mile, one lane, gravel road to connect the two communities for us to get to the Cold Bay airport. This road connection will drastically improve our ability for emergency and routine medical and health care and significantly up-

grade our overall quality of life. Why is this simple concept so difficult for some people to accept?

Since December 23rd, 2013 when Secretary Jewell said no to our road, we have had 42 medevacs out of King Cove to the Cold Bay airport. And this is a period of over 28 months, 42 medevacs. Thank God for the U.S. Coast Guard being available to help out for 16 of those medevacs when no other option could work.

But we never take the help and availability of the Coast Guard for granted. We are very thankful for them to be able to help us. We know that it's not their mission or responsibility to risk their lives to make these heroic rescues, and trust me when I say, we pray that they make it to Cold Bay.

No mother should ever have to witness their own precious daughter crash land at the King Cove airstrip due to our highly unpredictable turbulence and down drafts from the volcanic mountainous terrain. That picture of that young lady is my daughter with the blue coat.

[The information referred to follows:]



It was the scariest few minutes of my life as I sat there watching the plane being pushed toward the runway, and hitting the runway, and it's not something any parent should ever have to witness or ever have to do. And there really, in my mind, is no reason for it. The plane was basically pushed downward by the wind and crashed into the runway without the landing gear down, as you can well see. It basically looks like someone took the props with the curling iron, and it was very frightening.

Similar experiences, both from flying and on the water, people have continued to encounter every day, and this must stop. Truly there is no reason for this. We know we continue to live on borrowed time with our transportation access, and every time people get on an airplane we fear that something is going to happen and more people will die or be harmed.

Please know we will never quit until we are successful in our quest to achieve a safe, dependable and affordable transportation to our solution for our residents. We know the only logical solution is a modest, non-invasive, one lane, gravel road.

Finally, we are fortunate to have Senator Murkowski's commitment, common sense and passion to help us achieve this solution.

On behalf of all of King Cove, Aleuts and all other community residents, we respectfully ask Congress to authorize the road and to do so without the involvement of the Department of Interior.

If I may also state that a couple days ago we were at the Interior building, and we had a meeting over there. As you go in through security there's a plaque on the wall that shows former Secretary Udall and I pointed out to Stan, Stanley Mack, when you read that it basically says to protect the land, the waters and the wilderness. The very next line says to empower American Indians and Alaska natives.

We are a part. They need to help protect us also and to help us work out a solution to this problem. We very much would appreciate it. Thank you.

[The prepared statement of Ms. Trumble follows:]

Testimony of Della Trumble

Lifelong Aleut Resident of King Cove & Community Spokesperson

Testifying Before

Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee

Regarding

The Need and for Reliable Emergency Medical Transportation for the Isolated
Community of King Cove, Alaska

April 14, 2016

Good Morning Senator and Chair Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell, and Members of the Committee. My name is Della Trumble. I am an Aleut and was born and raised and still live in King Cove, Alaska. The residents of King Cove love our community and we have a special place in our hearts for, you, Senator Murkowski.

Today I am speaking on behalf of all the shareholders of the King Cove Corporation and as a member of the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove and for all other residents of King Cove. I am also speaking as a mother, an Alaskan, and citizen of the United States.

I am deeply connected to the land that you know as the Izembek Refuge through my ancestors, who lived and fed themselves on this wilderness for 4,000 years. Our culture and respect for our natural environment will never allow us to damage the refuge.

I have lived this road issue now for 35 years of my life and I will confess to being tired. This is at least my 25th trip to Washington to testify, lobby, and advocate for this road to allow for a safe, dependable, and affordable transportation access from King Cove to the all-weather Cold Bay Airport. Our need for this very modest road connection to the Cold Bay Airport is essential for our medical and health needs and for our sustainable future.

We sincerely thought the passage of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act was the final decision needed to authorize the road. The community remains stunned by Secretary Jewell's decision to deny us the road. However, her decision did not totally surprise us because when she visited King Cove in August of 2013 she

informed us she was there to “speak on behalf of the Izembek birds and animals which have no voice.”

In response to that comment, our Police Chief and life-long resident, Robert Gould, politely told the Secretary it was his responsibility to “speak on behalf of all King Cove residents which have lost loved ones or must continue to endure medical and health challenges because of the community’s transportation access problem”.

How much more do we need to endure, particularly when there is such a reasonable, dependable and affordable solution to our transportation access problem to the Cold Bay Airport? We desperately need the 10-mile, one-lane gravel road connecting King Cove to the Cold Bay Airport. This road connection will drastically improve our ability for emergency and routine medical and health care and significantly upgrade our overall quality-of-life. Why is this simple concept so difficult for some people to accept?

Since December 23, 2013, when Secretary Jewell said NO to our road, we have had 42 medevacs out of King Cove to the Cold Bay Airport. And thank God, for the US Coast Guard being available to help out for 16 of those medevacs when no other option could work. But, we never take the help and availability of the Coast Guard for granted, because we know it is not their mission or responsibility to risk their lives to make these heroic rescues.

And, no mother should ever have to witness their own precious daughter crash land at the King Cove Airstrip due to our highly unpredictable turbulence and downdrafts from the volcanic mountainous terrain that surrounds the narrow valley where our 3,000’ gravel runway is located. It was the scariest few minutes of my life as I sat there watching the plane be pushed downward by the wind and crash landing on the runway without its landing gear down. Indeed, a very frightening moment in my life. Similar experiences, from both flying and on the water in the have been encountered by way too many King Cove Aleuts. It must stop. We know we are continuing to live on borrowed time with our transportation access problem.

Please know we will never quit until we are successful in our quest to achieve a safe, dependable, and affordable transportation solution for our residents. We know the only logical solution is a modest, non-evasive, one-lane gravel road.

Finally, we are so fortunate to have Senator Murkowski's commitment, common sense, and passion to help us achieve this solution. On behalf of all King Cove Aleuts and all other community residents we respectfully ask Congress to authorize the road and do so without the involvement of the Department of the Interior.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. Della, thank you.
 Twenty-five years. That is a long time to be working an issue.
 Commander Whiddon, welcome to the Committee.

**STATEMENT OF COMMANDER JOHN WHIDDON, UNITED
 STATES COAST GUARD, RETIRED**

Mr. WHIDDON. Thank you, Madam Chair and Ranking Member Cantwell.

My name is John Whiddon. I'm a retired U.S. Coast Guard Commander and a former helicopter pilot living in Kodiak. I'm also a member of the Kodiak City Council.

I want to digress for just a second, as the Lieutenant Governor did, and kind of explain why I'm here. I was at a recent SWAMC meeting, for those that don't know that, Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference, and I had an opportunity to talk to Rick Gifford and Mr. Mack. They were talking about the road.

I mentioned that 37 years ago I was involved in a rescue, actually it was a recovery of bodies for a plane that crashed. And there's a reason I mention that, not because of the road but because 37 years later, as I'll explain in my testimony, there's portions of that particular flight that are still vivid in my mind.

So during my 20-year Coast Guard career I spent at least ten years in Alaska flying in Sitka, Southeast Alaska, Kodiak and I flew throughout the Aleutian chain on both search and rescue missions and other missions for the Coast Guard. I became very familiar with the Cold Bay region as I had numerous occasions to fly in and out of Cold Bay, usually on my way to Dutch Harbor. So I appreciate the invitation to testify today before your Committee.

This statement is my recollection of the events surrounding the Pen Air crash near Cold Bay that occurred on April 13th of 1980. I need to be clear and say this statement in no way reflects the opinion or the position of the U.S. Coast Guard. I'm speaking as an individual.

In December 1980 I was a Lieutenant and an H3 pilot assigned to Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak. I had accumulated almost 2,000 hours of helicopter time and was considered an experienced Alaska pilot. Two months prior on October 4th, 1980 I participated in a rescue of 520 passengers from the sinking motor vessel, Prinsendam, near the home of the Lieutenant Governor, 120 miles offshore of Yakutat, which required a multi-national response.

Up to that point in my career I had responded to several plane crashes in Louisiana and Alaska including one, and I'll mention the name familiar to you, which is Lynyrd Skynyrd crash near Jackson, Mississippi, and we were on scene within 20 minutes and had the survivors to a hospital within 30 minutes.

This particular case involving the Pen Air crash near Cold Bay was the third plane crash that I responded to in my first year in Alaska. Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak received notice of an overdue Pen Air flight where the pilot and three passengers were en route from King Cove to Cold Bay on December 13th, 1980. The report indicated that Pen Air flew to King Cove to medevac a seriously injured fisherman with an amputated foot.

Following the overdue notice satellites picked up an emergency locator transmitter, or ELT, somewhere in the vicinity of Cold Bay.

A helo was launched from Kodiak to Cold Bay and searched all day in a heavy snow storm but was unable to locate the plane crash.

Although the ELT was still transmitting, due to the heavy snow and low visibility, the crew was just unable to locate the crash. While the ELT signal was still transmitting it was difficult to pinpoint most likely due to atmospheric conditions. And it should be noted at that time there was no GPS. There were no night vision goggles. The only navigation equipment was limited to Loran C and VOR/DME and in most cases in Alaska visual navigation complemented by local knowledge.

My crew and I were assigned to fly down to Cold Bay in a C130 to relieve the first helo crew and continue the search after they ran out of crew mission time. Upon arriving in Cold Bay we were briefed with the on-scene crew, loaded our gear, picked up a state trooper and then took off to search for the ELT.

Although it was still snowing heavily the visibility had picked up to just under a mile. And within an hour of searching we were able to pinpoint the ELT and, shortly after, spotted the plane seven miles from the end of the runway, just seven miles from the end of the runway.

We landed on the tundra, approximately 50 yards from the plane crash and the plane appeared to impact the ground in a level altitude. There was no indication of fire. The cockpit windows and side window were broken but the airplane was mostly intact. All the occupants were deceased but still sitting upright in their seats. There was no blood or visible trauma to any of the victims so their death was obviously the result of sudden stoppage and ground impact. The trooper directed us to move the bodies which proved difficult and took considerable time since they were literally frozen in the seated position. After my crew and I extracted the bodies we stacked them on the ramp of the helicopter. This is the part that stuck with me.

I recall later looking back from the cockpit at the tangle of arms and legs all pointing in different directions, and that's a memory that's lasted 37 years.

The trooper also requested we move the engine which was partly detached. My mechanic removed a few mount bolts, and we helped drag the engine to the C130 where we used the hoist to lift the engine up.

Once all the victims and the engine were on board we flew the short flight back to Cold Bay and unloaded the bodies and the engine. The snow had continued to fall all day and the weather was forecasted to deteriorate, so we quickly refueled and took off for the four-hour return trip back to Kodiak.

By the time we got to Port Heiden and I made the right turn to follow the river through the Aniakchak Pass to Shelikof Straits, it was completely dark and snowing heavily. Again, we had no night vision goggles at that time. We had no GPS.

I had let my co-pilot fly so I could navigate through the pass. I'd flown through the Aniakchak Pass on several occasions and was familiar with the ground terrain and the general course to the west to east transit. On this flight we had to fly through the pass at 200 feet in zero/zero visibility, and we were at 50 knots just to maintain contact with the ground.

So once we came through the Shelikof Straits after about a 25-minute transit we set a course to Sitkinak at the south end of Kodiak and then up the east side of Kodiak back to the air station in the pitch black. The rest of the flight was uneventful.

At the time of this recovery flight, and it was a recovery flight, not a rescue, I was unaware of any efforts to build a road to King Cove. But in hindsight this SAR case to recover the four crash victims obviously could have been avoided if there had been ground transportation between King Cove and Cold Bay.

And the second part that stood out to me, in addition to the needless loss of lives, is the risk to the helo crews and the C130 crew, who put their lives at risk in heavy snow, high winds to locate the crash site and the bodies.

Thank you for this opportunity.

[The prepared statement of Mr. Whiddon follows:]

Testimony of John Whiddon
Commander, USCG (retired)
1116 Baranof Street
Kodiak, AK 99615

Before the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
April 8, 2016

Madame Chair, Ranking Member Cantwell and members of the Committee. My name is John Whiddon. I am a retired US Coast Guard Commander and former helicopter pilot living in Kodiak, AK. I flew helicopters in Sitka in South East Alaska and in Kodiak and the Aleutian Chain on search and rescue and other Coast Guard missions for over 20 years. Over the course of my career, I became very familiar with the Cold Bay region as I had numerous occasions to fly in and out of the Cold Bay airport. I appreciate the invitation to testify today before your committee. Please accept this testimony for your hearing record.

I will be happy to answer any questions about this testimony and my experience as a Coast Guard pilot.

SAR case to locate Pen Air crash near Cold Bay December 13 -14, 1980.

The following statement is my recollection of the events surrounding the Pen Air crash near Cold Bay, Alaska on December 13-14, 1980. This statement in no way reflects the opinion or position of the US Coast Guard.

In December, 1980, I was a Lieutenant and HH3F helicopter pilot assigned to Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak. I had accumulated almost 2000 hours of helicopter time and was considered an experienced Alaska pilot. Two months prior on October 4, 1980, I participated in the rescue of 522 passengers from the sinking M/V Prinsendam, 120 miles offshore from Yakutat which required a multi-national response by Coast Guard, Air Force and Canadian Forces. Up to that point in my career, I had responded to several plane crashes in Louisiana and Alaska, including recovering victims from the Lynyrd Skynyrd crash near Jackson, Mississippi. This particular case involving the Pen Air plane near Cold Bay was the third plane crash that I responded to in my first year in Alaska.

Coast Guard Air Station Kodiak received notice of an overdue Pen Air flight with a pilot and three passengers who had been enroute from King Cove to Cold Bay on December 13, 1980. The report indicated that Pen Air flew to King Cove to medevac a seriously injured fishermen with an amputated foot. Following the overdue notice, satellites picked up an Emergency Locator Transmitter (ELT), somewhere in the vicinity of Cold Bay. A helo was launched to Cold Bay and searched all day in a heavy snowstorm and was unable to locate plane crash. Although the ELT was still transmitting, due to the heavy snow and low visibility, the crew was unable to locate the plane crash. The ELT signal was difficult to pinpoint most likely due to atmospheric. It should be noted that no civilian or military aircraft were equipped with GPS navigation at this time. Navigation equipment was limited to Loran C, VOR/DME or in many cases in Alaska, visual navigation based on local knowledge.

My crew and I were assigned to fly down to Cold Bay in a C-130 to relieve the first helo crew and continue the search after they ran out of crew mission time. After arriving in Cold Bay, we quickly

briefed with the on scene crew, loaded our gear, picked up a State Trooper and then took off to search for the ELT.

Although it was still snowing heavily, the visibility had picked up to just under a mile. Within an hour of searching, we were able to pin point the ELT with our Automatic Direction Finder (ADF) and shortly after spotted the plane about 7 miles from the end of the runway. We landed on the tundra approximately 50 yards from the plane crash. The plane appeared to have impacted the ground in a level attitude and there was no indication of a fire. The cockpit windows and side window were broken, but the airplane was mostly intact and it was apparent that the pilot had flown into the ground.

All the occupants were deceased, but still sitting upright in their seats. There was no blood or visible trauma to any of the victims, so their death was the result of sudden stoppage and ground impact. The Trooper directed us to remove the bodies which proved difficult and took considerable time since they were frozen in place in a seated position. After my crew and I extricated the bodies, we had stack them on the ramp at the back of the helicopter. I recall later looking back from the cockpit at the tangle of arms and legs, all pointing in different directions – a memory that has lasted 37 years. The Trooper also requested we remove the engine which was partially detached. My mechanic removed a few mount bolts and with help dragged the engine to the helo where we used the hoist to lift the engine up into the cabin.

Once all the victims and the engine were on board, we flew the short flight back to Cold Bay and unloaded the bodies and engine. The snow had continued to fall all day and the weather was forecast to deteriorate, so we quickly refueled and took off for the four hour return trip back to Kodiak. By the time we got to Port Heiden and made the right turn to follow the river through to Aniakchak Pass on the Shelikof Straits side, it was almost completely dark and snowing heavily. I had let my co-pilot fly so I could navigate through the narrow pass. I had flown through Aniakchak Pass on several occasions and was familiar with the ground terrain and general course to make the West to East transit. On this flight, we had to fly through the pass at 200 feet because of low visibility and to maintain visual contact with the ground. We also were building ice on the airframe and windows, so a higher altitude was not an option. We had on board a new (at that time) color radar, which did not operate well in snow, so we had to feel our way through the pass at fifty knots which took approximately 25 minutes of low altitude flying and careful navigation to avoid a wrong turn into dead end valleys. Once we came through into the Shelikof Straits, we set a course to Sitkinak Island at the south end of Kodiak and then followed the east coast of Kodiak back to the Air Station in the dark. The rest of the flight was uneventful.

At the time of this recovery flight, I was unaware of any efforts to build a road to King Cove. In hindsight, this SAR case to recover four crash victims could have been avoided if there had been ground transportation between King Cove and Cold Bay. In addition to the loss of lives, the two helo crews and a C-130 crew were put at risk as they flew many hours in heavy snow and high winds to locate the crash site and recover the bodies.

Thank you for this opportunity to present this statement.

John Whiddon

Kodiak, Alaska

[illegible]

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you, Commander, and again, thank you for your service.

Ms. Whittington-Evans, welcome.

**STATEMENT OF NICOLE WHITTINGTON-EVANS, ALASKA
REGIONAL DIRECTOR, THE WILDERNESS SOCIETY**

Ms. WHITTINGTON-EVANS. Good morning, Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell and members of the Committee. I am Nicole Whittington-Evans, Alaska Regional Director of the Wilderness Society. We represent more than 700 members nationwide including many Alaskans who care deeply about how the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness Area is managed.

I have worked in the Wilderness Society's Alaska office for more than 18 years and have been engaged in the Izembek Refuge issue since 1998. I appreciate the invitation to testify before the Committee today and would like to start with a short history of this incredible place.

In 1980, 20 years after Izembek had been designated a national wildlife range, Congress established the Izembek Refuge and Wilderness as part of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act to safeguard the refuge's extraordinary land and wildlife. At the center of the over 400,000 acre Izembek Refuge are two lagoons which are separated by a narrow wildlife corridor. The lagoons make up the ecological heart of the refuge and this corridor is critical for caribou, bears and wolf migration.

Most of the world's population of Pacific black brant and Emperor geese and a significant portion of the threatened Steller's eider population depend on Izembek's habitat. Izembek Refuge also contains irreplaceable wetlands of international importance as recognized in 1986 as the first wetland area in the United States to be designated a wetland of international importance under the RAMSAR Convention.

I have spent time in the Izembek Refuge, walking in the wilderness, and have seen the lagoons crowded with Pacific Black brant, geese and Steller's eider. This refuge is one of the most vital and extraordinary wildlife and wilderness areas in the world, and it must remain that way for all Americans to enjoy.

In 1980 Congress designated most of the Izembek refuge as wilderness, the highest level of protection afforded to our public lands. De-designating it would be a dangerous precedent for public lands throughout the United States. It is inappropriate to build a road that would bisect the heart of the Izembek Refuge, fragment wildlife habitat and significantly diminished the value of this wilderness area. It would also undermine the very purpose of both the refuge and wilderness systems in this country.

One of the first studies about the proposed road was the 1985 Bristol Bay Cooperative Management Plan. The findings by the Fish and Wildlife Service in that plan are similar to more recent analyses by the agency that have found that the road would be incompatible with the purposes for which the refuge was established. When assessing a proposed road, the Fish and Wildlife Service has repeatedly concluded that a road and its construction would be incompatible and extremely damaging to the refuge.

In 1998 Congress provided \$37.5 million of funding to upgrade the local medical clinic, develop dock facilities and a road to a dock and purchase, ultimately, a \$9 million, all-weather hovercraft. Thus Congress and American taxpayers have already provided a solution for King Cove.

Respected individuals and organizations have expressed their opposition to a road. The Association of Village Council Presidents representing 56 Native villages in Western Alaska formally opposed the proposed road due to the impacts it would have on subsistence resources that they depend on.

The former U.S. Indian Health Service Medical Director for the Eastern Aleutian tribes has said the extreme weather, ice and avalanche conditions experienced in the specific area make it inconceivable that the proposed 27-mile road could be passable.

And Interior officials from the Bush, Clinton, Ford and Nixon Administrations have stated their opposition to the proposed road noting it is one of the last places in the country that one would ever want to build a road.

In 2009 the Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to make a determination about whether a road and land exchange was in the public's interest. The Fish and Wildlife Service conducted a thorough four-year analysis that included more than 130 stakeholder meetings and consultation with state and local government and more than 70,000 comments. The Service ultimately rejected the proposed road and land exchange, and the Secretary of the Interior then reaffirmed their decision.

In 2015 the U.S. District Court of Alaska upheld the Secretary's decision. And recently the Army Corps of Engineers issued a study of alternative transportation options for residents of King Cove. The analysis conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers confirms what the Wilderness Society, other conservation organizations, tribal entities and medical professionals, familiar with this area, have stated for decades. A road through the heart of fragile, congressionally-designated wilderness is inappropriate.

Make no mistake, the Wilderness Society supports the needs of the residents of King Cove to have safe, reliable transportation options which can and must be achieved while protecting the international significant wildlife and wilderness values of the Izembek Refuge.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before you today.
[The prepared statement of Ms. Whittington-Evans follows:]



Statement of
Nicole Whittington-Evans
Alaska Regional Director, The Wilderness Society
before the
Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee
Hearing to conduct oversight on options for addressing the continuing lack of
reliable emergency medical transportation for the isolated community of King Cove, Alaska

April 14, 2016
Washington, DC

Good Morning Chairman Murkowski, Ranking Member Cantwell and members of the Committee. I am Nicole Whittington-Evans, Alaska Regional Director of The Wilderness Society. I appreciate the opportunity to testify before the Committee today, April 14th, 2016, regarding options for reliable transportation for the village of King Cove, Alaska and the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness Area. The Wilderness Society has been a strong advocate of the National Wildlife Refuge System and Wilderness areas, including the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. TWS supports the effort to find transportation solutions that meet the needs of King Cove while protecting the internationally significant wildlife and wilderness values of the refuge. I appreciate the opportunity to share some of our views with you here today.

I offer this testimony on behalf of The Wilderness Society (TWS), an organization with over 700,000 members and supporters, including members in Alaska who care deeply about how the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness Area is managed. I have worked for The Wilderness Society's Alaska office for over eighteen years, and have been engaged in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge issue since 1998.

Thirteen conservation organizations sent a letter to this Committee this week stating opposition to a road and land exchange for the purposes of building a road between the two small communities of King Cove and Cold Bay. The letter has been submitted for the record and is attached to this testimony. Such a road would be incompatible with the purposes for which Izembek National Wildlife Refuge was established and would fragment the ecological heart of the Refuge, violating the very foundation of its congressionally designated Wilderness and placing at risk the integrity of its internationally vital wetlands habitat.

My testimony addresses the following topics: 1) Globally significant wetlands and wilderness values of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, 2) The 1964 Wilderness Act and Izembek's Wilderness designation, 3) The impacts of a road through designated Wilderness in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, and 4) Non – Road Alternatives.

I. Globally Significant Wetlands and Wilderness Values of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge

Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is a national treasure. Hundreds of thousands of migratory birds and waterfowl, seals, sea otters, caribou, wolves and grizzly bears depend on the wetlands, tundra, streams, and tidal areas to reproduce and feed. Almost the entire world's population of Pacific Black Brant depends on the refuge during their spring and fall migrations to rest and feed on the eelgrass beds.

In 1980, Congress established the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness as part of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) to safeguard the refuge's extraordinary value. The Izembek refuge was established to protect the Pacific black brant and its habitat along with other migratory waterfowl and other birds.

At the center of the 417,533-acre Izembek National Wildlife Refuge are two lagoons, the Izembek and Kinzarof. These lagoons are separated by a narrow isthmus just three miles wide. The lagoons, their immediate watersheds, and the isthmus—the Lagoons Complex—are the ecological heart of the refuge. More than 200 species of wildlife and nine species of fish are found on the Refuge.

The Izembek/Kinzarof Lagoons Complex has been repeatedly recognized internationally for its global significance. Specifically, the refuge was:

- Identified under the RAMSAR Convention in 1986 and was the first wetlands area in North America added to the List of Wetlands of International Importance,
- Designated a Marine Protected Area in order to provide lasting protection for this Lagoon Complex,
- Recognized as an Important Bird Area (IBA) of global significance in 2001 by Birdlife International in partnership with National Audubon Society,
- Listed as a Sister Refuge with Russia's Kronotskiy State Biosphere Reserve in 1991 through a U.S. – Russian Governmental Agreement on Cooperation in Environmental Protection, and
- Celebrated as globally significant for its habitat value and role in biodiversity protection by World Wildlife Fund (WWF) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC).

The Refuge also qualifies as a Western Hemispheric Shorebird Reserve Network Site. Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is best renowned for its world-class waterfowl and shorebird habitat. The Lagoons Complex provides breeding, molting, nesting, refueling, staging and resting grounds for:

- virtually the entire world populations of Pacific black brant (~100,000) and Emperor geese (~55,000),
- a significant portion of the world's Steller's eiders (~ 80,00 – 100,000), including Alaska's population, estimated to contain 500 breeding adults (listed as threatened under the Endangered Species Act in 1997), and
- many other migratory and resident waterfowl, including Pacific golden plovers, rock sandpipers, dunlins, ruddy turnstones, semipalmated plovers, western sandpipers and Izembek tundra swans, which is the only essentially non-migratory breeding population in North America.

The Izembek/Kinzarof Lagoons Complex is important for this large number of bird species due to the availability of some of the largest eelgrass beds in the world. More than 98 percent of all Pacific black brant converge on Izembek Lagoon each year to feed on the eelgrass in preparation for their 3,300-mile, 55-hour non-stop flight to wintering grounds in Mexico. The brant feed on eelgrass for approximately eight weeks in order to make their long flight south that usually begins in early November. Brant fly back and forth between the lagoons to forage, and they use freshwater lakes on the isthmus. Emperor geese use Izembek and Kinzarof Lagoon while foraging in the upland tundra area for crowberries, and the endangered Steller's eiders also use Kinzarof Lagoon. Emperor and Canada geese rely on the eelgrass in the lagoons for nutrients, as do invertebrates and marine mammals. The narrow isthmus between Izembek and Kinzarof Lagoons is a crucial travel corridor—the only path between the east and west sides of the refuge—for wide-ranging species such as bears, caribou, and wolves. The Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd, a population that declined from about 10,000 to fewer than 1,000 in the last 10 years and is now growing, uses the isthmus as the only migration corridor between calving and wintering grounds. The isthmus is also an important winter foraging area for these animals. Moreover, the caribou are known to spend the entire winter on the isthmus.

Some of the highest densities of brown bears on the Lower Alaska Peninsula are found in the Joshua Green River Valley of the Izembek refuge, an area within three miles of the isthmus and the proposed road corridor. Minimal human disturbance has helped maintain the high habitat value of this area for brown bears. Bears use the isthmus frequently to forage and roam in their search for food, as do other furbearers. Harbor seals, sea otters, Steller's sea lions, and whales frequent the productive waters within and surrounding the refuge. Sea otters, seals, and sea lions spend time along the coast and in the lagoons. Both sea otters and Steller's sea lions are listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

The Lagoon Complex comprises vital, high quality habitat for many species. Degradation or loss of this habitat complex cannot be mitigated by offering distant uplands or areas not used by these

species. Population declines would likely occur for many species that rely on this habitat complex. Such losses may be substantial.

As a long-time resident of Alaska, I have been fortunate to visit many of the special places that characterize the beautiful, wild landscapes and spectacular wildlife habitat of Alaska. I have been fortunate enough to spend time at the Izembek Refuge and see firsthand the lands and waters of this renowned wilderness landscape and internationally important wetland. I have walked in the wilderness and viewed the narrow peninsula where the proposed road would be constructed. From this vantage point, I have seen both the Izembek and Kinzarof Lagoons (the Lagoons Complex). Between these lagoons are rolling hills and valleys of soft, spongy and fragile tundra dotted by abundant marshes, lakes and pools of water. I also have been fortunate to fly twice over the refuge and the state and King Cove Corporation lands proposed for exchange that was analyzed in the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service 2013 Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS).

While visiting Izembek Refuge, I witnessed the Lagoons crowded with Pacific black brant, Emperor geese, and the threatened Steller's eider. I have seen caribou and other wildlife in the refuge. A local expert described to me in vivid detail how the wildlife use the isthmus as a travel corridor, foraging area, and home. I could visualize the caribou, wolves, grizzly bears, fox, and other wildlife using the isthmus as a travel corridor, hunting zone, and home during winter or summer. I testify today that the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is one of the most vital and extraordinary wildlife areas in the world.

II. The 1964 Wilderness Act and Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Designated Wilderness

The founders of The Wilderness Society came together in the 1930's because of their passion for wild landscapes and their growing concern over the potential loss of America's wildlands -- spurred on primarily by road construction and automobiles penetrating frontier country at that time. They brought together principles, credible science, bold advocacy and unswerving vision to develop conservation policy and in 1935 established a new conservation organization, The Wilderness Society. Their foresight, actions and determination launched a land protection movement that ultimately led to the passage of the 1964 Wilderness Act. Howard Zahniser, a Governing Council member of The Wilderness Society, was the principal author of the Wilderness Act. Passage of the Act designated 9 million acres of federal Wilderness and initiated a Wilderness Preservation System on federal lands that now encompasses 757 wilderness areas totaling nearly 110 million acres in 44 states.¹

¹<http://www.wilderness.net/NWPS/stateViewStatic?state=ak&map=ak>

Wilderness protected lands, as defined in the 1964 Wilderness Act, are afforded the highest level of protections of any lands in the nation, as no roads or industrial developments are allowed in designated wilderness areas. The Wilderness Act protects lands in their natural state, and the Act defines wilderness in the following way:

A wilderness, in contrast with those areas where man and his own works dominate the landscape, is hereby recognized as an area where the earth and its community of life are untrammelled by man, where man himself is a visitor who does not remain. An area of wilderness is further defined to mean in this Act an area of undeveloped Federal land retaining its primeval character and influence, without permanent improvements or human habitation, which is protected and managed so as to preserve its natural conditions and which (1) generally appears to have been affected primarily by the forces of nature, with the imprint of man's work substantially unnoticeable; (2) has outstanding opportunities for solitude or a primitive and unconfined type of recreation; (3) has at least five thousand acres of land or is of sufficient size as to make practicable its preservation and use in an unimpaired condition; and (4) may also contain ecological, geological, or other features of scientific, educational, scenic, or historical value.²

The very purpose of Wilderness designation is to ensure that important areas remain wild and intact - free of roads and industrial development.

The 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act provided some exceptions to designated Wilderness and the Wilderness Act. ANILCA allows for the continuation of human presence and certain activities within designated Wilderness Areas in Alaska, including certain structures and motorized uses, vital for Alaskan communities that practice a subsistence way of life³. With these exceptions, ANILCA Wilderness lands must comply with the Wilderness Act. Therefore, roads and other industrial development are not allowed in ANILCA Wilderness.

The Izembek National Wildlife Range, which identified the Izembek Lagoons Complex as a premier ecological reserve, was first established in 1960. In 1980, ANILCA re-designated it as the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and also designated 300,000 acres of the refuge as Wilderness. ANILCA established the following purposes of the refuge:

- (i) to conserve fish and wildlife populations and habitats in their natural diversity including, but not limited to, waterfowl, shorebirds and other migratory birds, brown bears and salmonids;
- (ii) to fulfill the international treaty obligations of the United States with respect to fish and wildlife and their habitats;

² <http://www.wilderness.net/nwps/legisact#2>, section, I.c.

³ <https://www.congress.gov/bill/96th-congress/house-bill/39>

(iii) to provide, in a manner consistent with the purposes set forth in subparagraphs (i) and (ii), the opportunity for continued subsistence uses by local residents, and

(iv) to ensure, to the maximum extent practicable and in manner consistent with the purposes set forth in paragraph (i), water quality and necessary water quantity within the refuge.” (94 Stat. 2391 P.L. 96-487 §303(3)(B))

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is required to manage the Izembek refuge to maintain the fish and wildlife populations in their natural diversity, fulfill international fish and wildlife treaty obligations, provide for the continuation of subsistence uses by local residents, and ensure water quality and quantity within the refuge.

During one of my visits to the Izembek Refuge, I read the historical files that chronicled the extensive outreach during the 1970s to State officials and policymakers, the Alaska media, and the public. I reviewed many of the comments submitted regarding what was then proposed Wilderness. The files demonstrate overwhelming support for the Wilderness, including a letter from the Governor of Alaska. In total, 10 years transpired from the time the Izembek Wilderness was proposed to the time Congress granted Wilderness designation to the Refuge. That decade-long process included town meetings, hearings, debates, numerous editorials and opinion pieces, outreach to multiple Native organizations, and state, federal, and joint governmental proposals spanning several Congressional sessions. This extensive outreach and discussion provided ample time and opportunities for public discourse and final decisions that led to the passage of ANILCA. The decade of public debate and meetings held prior to the Congressional designation of these vital lands as Wilderness, ensured that qualified lands were added to the Wilderness Preservation System, important watersheds were permanently protected, and known conflicts were addressed and resolved.

Historical Context and Background:

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has continually provided extensive, detailed information regarding a proposed road connecting the communities of King Cove and Cold Bay since the 1960’s⁴. However, throughout the decade of public discussion leading up to the passage of ANILCA, interest in a road between King Cove and Cold Bay did not surface as a significant issue. The record shows that one person posed a question about a road at the Cold Bay wilderness hearing in 1970, which was cordially addressed by an official. Throughout the many House and Senate hearings leading to the passage of ANILCA, the road issue was not raised nor was it advocated by the members of the Alaska Congressional delegation. The first time a road was substantively discussed as a possible transportation link between the two towns occurred

⁴ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Record of Decision, Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, Land Exchange/Road Corridor, Final Environmental Impact Statement December 23rd, 2013.

during the 1985 Bristol Bay Cooperative Management Plan studies and planning sessions, circa 1982-83. The detailed analyses in that plan clearly showed that such a road would be incompatible with the purposes for which Izembek NWR had been established, adding that it would cause significant, long-term irreparable damage to important fish, wildlife, habitat and wilderness values of the refuge. That analysis and discussion was authored by several U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service biologists and approved and supported by the Alaska Regional Director. The compatibility determinations, descriptions and conclusions regarding the impacts of building a road between the two towns remain essentially unchanged. On many occasions and in many published and circulated documents, the FWS has consistently declared that any such road and its construction through the refuge is incompatible with the Refuge purposes and would be extremely damaging. There has been no change in those findings and conclusions to this day.

Congress also has directed more than once that a road not be built through the Izembek Lagoons Complex. When Congress initially designated Wilderness in the Izembek Refuge, Congress directed that the area remain wild and untrammeled. When the road issue was brought before Congress in 1997 and 1998, Congress determined that the road was not in the public interest and rejected the road. Instead, Congress passed the King Cove Health and Safety Act, which addressed King Cove residents' health and safety concerns by providing \$37.5 million to upgrade King Cove's medical facilities, improve the airstrip in King Cove, purchase a hovercraft, construct marine terminals in King Cove and Cold Bay, and build an unpaved road between the town of King Cove and the connecting marine terminal.

The King Cove Health and Safety Act enacted by the Congress specifically disallowed a road through the Izembek Wilderness, and clarified this with the following language of the Act:

- (a) . . . In no instance may any part of such road pass over any land within the Congressionally-designated wilderness . . .*
- (d). . . All actions undertaken pursuant to this section must be in accordance with all other applicable laws.⁵*

III. The Impacts of a Road Through Designated Wilderness in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge

A road through Izembek's designated Wilderness is incompatible with the purposes of the Izembek Refuge. It would be contrary to the 1964 Wilderness Act; 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act; 1989 King Cove Health and Safety Act; 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act,⁶ which serves as the Organic Act for the National Wildlife Refuge System, and the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act, which required a detailed analysis and finding

⁵ 1998 King Cove Health and Safety Act, Section 353.

⁶ Public Law 105-57

of public interest by the Secretary of the Interior prior to allowing the road and land exchange to move forward. Many Administrations and Congresses have determined that a road would be incompatible with the purposes of this unique wildlife refuge and contrary to the public interest.

Impacts of the Road:

The proposed road would bisect the heart of the refuge – the Lagoons complex - bifurcate its designated Wilderness, and fragmenting habitat that is vitally important for wildlife. The proposed road would permanently diminish the value of the congressionally designated Wilderness area. Habitat that supports hundreds of thousands of migratory birds and terrestrial wildlife, such as brown bear and caribou, would be seriously harmed by a road. Impacts from the road would extend well beyond the road and affect the integrity of the entire Refuge. Huge numbers of birds and mammals that use the lagoons, isthmus wetlands, tundra, and tidal flats to nest, feed, transit, and forage would be hardest hit by road construction, maintenance, and traffic. In particular, Pacific brant, Steller's eiders, Emperor geese, caribou, tundra swans, and brown bears would be severely harmed from road-related ecological impacts and/or increased human access and traffic. Even marine life, such as sea otters, sea lions, seals, and whales could experience impacts from a road. A number of these affected species are rare, declining, and even listed as Threatened under the Endangered Species Act.

In August 1996, the FWS prepared the King Cove Briefing Report. This report affirmed of the 1980's conclusions of the USFWS in the Bristol Bay Cooperative Management Plan. It determined that the road alternative is contrary to the purposes of the Refuge and foresaw unacceptable environmental impacts if a road were constructed through the designated Wilderness area. The Service supported further study and consideration of other alternatives, such as a marine link, which would provide increased travel safety, economic growth and fewer ecological impacts. Other State and Federal studies of the same period also documented that the road is the most destructive and costly alternative and again favored the marine ferry concept.⁷

A June 2003 draft Environmental Impact Statement (EIS), conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers, examined the potential threats of the proposed road from King Cove to Cold Bay. The report stated that there is sufficient information available to conclude that the road alternative, "would not qualify as an environmentally preferable alternative."⁸ The Corps of Engineers noted that their determination was based in part on the road having the largest footprint (287.0 acres) among all of the alternatives. The report documented the potential scope of the proposed construction, noting the need for 36.7 acres of placement of fill material in U.S. waters. These included wetlands, of which 2.09 acres are below the High Tide Line, and 254 stream and drainage crossings requiring 8 bridges and 19 culverts across fish bearing streams. The document indicated direct, indirect, and cumulative impacts of a road on the lands, and on wildlife, citing caribou, swans, bears, and wolves.

⁷ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, King Cove Briefing Report, March, 1996.

⁸ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, King Cove Access Project, Draft Environmental Impact Statement, July, 2003, p. 153.

The 2003 draft EIS also noted that of all alternatives evaluated, the proposed road would have the greatest potential to adversely affect subsistence harvest due to its potential to displace wildlife and would result in competition between sport and subsistence hunters for resources. The analysis indicated that increased access could lead to distributional changes in wildlife, such as waterfowl, caribou, brown bear, and wolves, which could lead to reduced availability of subsistence resources. Specifically, the draft EIS stated regarding the road that, “. . . due to increased competition for resources and potential significant impacts to subsistence resources, the impact could be adverse and significant.”⁹ The final EIS referenced and incorporated the analysis and findings of the draft EIS.¹⁰

In 2009, the Omnibus Public Lands Act directed that the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service undertake a National Environmental Policy Act analysis of a proposed land exchange and road, and that in order for the two to move forward, the Secretary of the Interior would have to make a determination that the road and land exchange are in the public interest.¹¹ In 2013, at the culmination of a several-year Environmental Impact Statement process, the Secretary made no such determination. Rather, the Department of the Interior supported the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service’s sound science and the professional recommendations of the agency again stating that the road would be incompatible with the purposes of the Refuge and Wilderness and would cause irreparable harm to sensitive wildlife habitat and important wetlands.¹² The Interior Department’s final decision was challenged by road proponents in U.S. District Court, but the U.S. District Court upheld the Interior Department’s decision in September 2015.¹³ This court’s decision has been appealed to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

The 2013 U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Land Exchange/Road Corridor, Final Environmental Impact Statement,¹⁴ concluded that a road would result in significant degradation to irreplaceable ecological resources. The Final EIS documented that the uses of the habitat of the Refuge by the large number of species that are dependent on the isthmus would be irreversibly and irretrievably changed by a road. The Final EIS also concluded that a road would bring increased human traffic, noise, hydrological changes, damage to wetlands, run off, introduction of contaminants and invasive species to the sensitive wetlands complex. Increased human access and activity also would result from the presence of a road, including year-round, increased access radiating from the road by pedestrian traffic and all-terrain vehicles. Indeed, increased all-terrain vehicle use and habitat damage is already occurring since completion of the 17.2 mile road to the

⁹ Ibid., p. 454.

¹⁰ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, King Cove Access Project, Final Environmental Impact Statement, December, 2003, Executive Summary, p. FES-25

¹¹ <https://www.govtrack.us/congress/bills/111/hr146>, Subtitle E, Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange, Sec. 6402, (d) (1).

¹² U.S. Department of the Interior, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Record of Decision, Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, Land Exchange/Road Corridor, Final Environmental Impact Statement, December 23, 2013.

¹³ <http://www.adn.com/article/20150908/federal-judge-sides-interior-secretary-dispute-over-road-through-refuge-0>

¹⁴ U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange/Road Corridor, 2013

northeast corner of Cold Bay. The 2013 Final EIS documented that, since the 17.2 mile road to the northeast corner of Cold Bay became passable by all-terrain vehicles, increased, new all-terrain vehicle use and habitat-damaging trails have developed from the endpoint of that road.¹⁵ These trails are of concern, and the agency concluded that the physical impacts caused by increased all-terrain vehicle use on wet soils will have profound and long-lasting adverse effects on wildlife use and habitats of the narrow isthmus. Increased activity associated with the road would also place a strain on Refuge management personnel while Refuge budgets and capacity are decreasing.

The 2013 final EIS indicated that a road would have major negative effects to Tundra Swans, Brant, Emperor geese, and brown bears. These species depend on the Izembek Lagoons complex, which provides critical subsistence resources. The Fish and Wildlife Service's analysis also indicated that increased human access, hunting pressure, and disturbance to birds would occur as a result of the road, causing displacement from feeding and nesting areas.¹⁶ These findings are very significant for the following reasons: 1) Virtually the entire population of the Pacific brant feed and stage at Izembek before and after their long migrations to and from wintering grounds to the south. Brant are also highly sensitive to disturbance; 2) the Izembek Tundra swan population is the world's only non-migratory population, and Tundra swans use the isthmus for nesting and rearing young. They are also highly sensitive to disturbance; 3) Emperor geese, are highly dependent on the Izembek Lagoons complex in winter months, particularly when other feeding areas are frozen. Winter is a critical time that challenges their limited physical reserves, and disturbance from winter use of a road would significantly impact them. Izembek's Joshua Green watershed is an important brown bear natal area and supports the highest density of brown bears on the Southern Alaska Peninsula. Both habitat and remoteness of the watershed contribute to the high density, and increased access and hunting resulting from road access would significantly alter this key brown bear denning and natal area. The analysis concluded that the effects of a road to caribou and other large mammals would be at least moderate.

Legislating incompatible development in a refuge would set a negative precedent that undermines the 1997 National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act mandate to: "ensure that the biological integrity, diversity and environmental health of the System are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans."¹⁷ Further, , a road would destroy the very premises and values associated with designated Wilderness. Designated Wilderness areas are maintained in their natural, untrammeled state. Any road developed that would bifurcate, fragment and otherwise harm the designated Wilderness of Izembek Refuge would have irreparable and extremely significant impacts to the Wilderness area, effectively destroying it and the intent of the Congress when it designated the area as Wilderness.

¹⁵ Ibid., p. 4-137 and 4-205.

¹⁶ Ibid. FEIS, p. 2-64

Costs of A Road:

In lieu of building a damaging road across the Izembek Refuge, the King Cove Health and Safety Act provided a total of \$37.5 million to address King Cove's transportation and health and safety needs. It directed \$20 million for a one-lane gravel road, a dock and marine facilities, and equipment; \$15 million to improve the King Cove airport; and \$2.5 million to upgrade the communities medical facilities. Just prior to the completion of a 2003 U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Environmental Impact Study of non-road transportation alternatives for King Cove, Alaska Senator Ted Stevens sponsored a rider on an appropriations bill that directed a 17-mile road be built from King Cove to a hovercraft terminal site in the northeast corner of Cold Bay.¹⁸ Construction of this road began in March, 2004. Nine million of the \$20 million dollars provided in the King Cove Health and Safety Act was used to purchase the Suna-X, a state-of-the-art hovercraft, which left \$11 million remaining for the dock and one-lane gravel road. This amount was not sufficient to complete the 17.2-mile road that Senator Stevens had legislated, so the \$15 million originally appropriated in the King Cove Health and Safety Act to upgrade the King Cove airport was redirected to help fund and build the 17.2-mile road. This resulted in using a total of \$26 million of the \$37.5 million provided in the King Cove Health Safety Act to construct the road. However, this amount was not sufficient to complete the road, and the road remained partially built but unfinished for a number of years. Between 2010 -2013, an additional \$14.5 million was provided to finish the road through the Alaska's State Transportation Improvement Project. Thus, 90% (\$13 million) of which came from federal funding, with the remaining funds coming from the State of Alaska.¹⁹ An additional \$2 million was received by King Cove for transportation from the 2009 American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.²⁰ The 17.2 mile road was finished in 2013. In total, approximately \$40 million, or \$2.29 million/mile, was spent to build the one-lane, 17.2-mile gravel road to the northeast corner of Cold Bay.

Extending the road through the Izembek Wilderness would cost many millions more tax dollars. Approximately 12.5 miles of new road would need to be built through Izembek Refuge designated Wilderness, and an additional 6 miles of road would need to be fully reconstructed to connect to the Outer Marker road that is maintained to the Cold Bay airport. Building a total of 18.5 miles of and fully reconstructed road, with the majority traversing challenging wetlands terrain with no local gravel source, would be a very significant expenditure for an outcome that likely would be dangerous and undependable in inclement weather, especially for transporting an ill or injured person requiring emergency treatment.

¹⁸ Section 115 of PL 108-137 (a 2003 appropriations act) says, "The Secretary of the Army, acting through the Chief of Engineers, shall direct construction of Alternative 1 (Northeast Corner) for the project authorized in section 353 of Public Law 105-277 notwithstanding any other provision of law."

¹⁹ Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, 2010 – 2013 STIP, Revision 27 Incorporated, Amendment (Revision 27), Approved by FHWA & FTA, July 28, 2011, Alaska, "King Cove to Cold Bay Corridor,"

²⁰ <http://www.recovery.gov/Transparency/RecoveryData/pages/RecipientProjectSummary508.aspx?AwardIdSur=95169&AwardType=Grants>.

Congress already helped finance one of the most effective modes of transport between King Cove and Cold Bay—a specially designed marine hovercraft-ferry system – and taxpayers have already paid over \$50 million to resolve King Cove’s transportation problems and health and safety concerns. This is a considerable and disproportionate investment for a town of approximately 938 people²¹. If another 18.5 miles of road were built, it certainly would be an extraordinary expenditure to accommodate a small community.

Proposed Land Exchanges:

After passage of the King Cove Health and Safety Act, in 2006 a proposed land exchange and road proposal was presented by the Aleutians East Borough and the State of Alaska . Their proposal renewed efforts to construct the road. The proposed land exchange was offered as a means to compensate or mitigate for any loss of wetlands habitat and Wilderness resulting from the road. However, the lands offered in the exchange did not represent comparable wildlife habitat value, and still do not to this day.

The proposed land exchange would have added acreage to the Refuge, but not wildlife value. Further, the value of any exchange lands offered would be diminished if the ecological heart of the Refuge were severely degraded. The value of any exchange lands would be made *de minimus* if the negative impacts described by FWS biologists over the last 30 years become reality. The road would sever fragile refuge wetlands, and would harm significant ecological habitats. Construction, operation and maintenance activities would require filling wetlands, modifying drainages, potential spillages and pollution, dust, noise, on-land barriers and over-land turmoil and disruptions.

The two State townships (approximately 43,000 acres) proposed for exchange in H.R. 4371 for acquire land through the Izembek Refuge designated wilderness, were analyzed in the 2013 agency Final EIS. It concluded that the exchange lands would not provide comparable habitat or be able to compensate for the loss or sever degradation of the wetlands in the Lagoons Complex. Indeed, no amount of exchange lands can compensate for the irreversible impacts a road would have on these globally significant and unique wildlife habitat values. The southernmost state township is entirely uplands, with some bear denning habitat, but virtually no value for waterfowl. The more northern township has some wetlands with viable caribou and brown bear habitat, but is of little value for the many species of waterfowl that depend on the lagoons and isthmus wetlands complex. The state townships also have no current development threat, and offer minimal conservation benefit. They are located entirely outside the watershed of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and would be costly to inventory and administer due to access limitations. It appears as though King Cove Corporation owned lands on the east and west side of Cold Bay, including Mortensen Lagoon, and lands within the Kinzarof Lagoon, which were a part of the exchange proposal between 2006 – 2013, but are not included in the text of H.R.

²¹ <https://www.google.com/#q=population+of+King+Cove>, 2010 U.S. Census data.

4371. Submitted along with this testimony is a TWS fact sheet that compares the proposed exchange lands offered in the 2009 Omnibus Lands Protection Act.

Alaska Native Stakeholders Oppose the Road

The potential damage to subsistence use is a primary reason that the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP), the recognized tribal organizations and nonprofit Alaska Native Regional Corporation for its 56 member indigenous Native villages within Western Alaska, has repeatedly opposed the King Cove Road. In 1998, the AVCP passed a resolution opposing the road. On October 17, 2007, I received a letter from Myron Naneng, President of the AVCP that reaffirmed their opposition and cited their interest and concern for the critical habitat of our Pacific black brant that use the area for staging and feeding during their long and treacherous spring and fall migrations. The Waterfowl Committee of the AVCP has reaffirmed their 1998 resolution twice during their spring meetings in 2013 and 2015. The resolution and other letters from AVCP regarding the proposed road are submitted with this testimony.

The AVCP resolution notes that “the people of the Y-K Delta are primary stakeholders of waterfowl, our customary, and traditional use of birds has long been used as part of our diet and culture and because of the destructive development and habitat loss conducted by those areas in the Pacific Flyway throughout the 1960’s, 70s, and 80’s significantly affect waterfowl populations resulting in curtailing our subsistence hunters and gatherer’s practice.”

In June of 2014, Mr. Naneng affirmed the AVCP’s opposition to a road in the Alaska Dispatch News. That story can be found [here](#), and is submitted with this testimony. Another Alaska Native organization, REDOIL (Resisting Environmental Destruction on Indigenous Lands), voted to support the AVCP opposition to the Izembek road in 2014.

Local Experts Have Opposed the Road Because of Safety and Maintenance Concerns:

Local experts, including two former Cold Bay Mayors, a former Cold Bay EMT and the former Medical Director for the Eastern Aleutians Tribes, have also pointed to maintenance and safety concerns that would be associated with the road. These individuals have previously provided written testimony to Congress in opposition to the road, citing the dangers of traveling on a road during Aleutian winter storm conditions and the challenges of keeping a road open in these conditions. The Cold Bay area and the isthmus where the proposed road would be located regularly experiences winter storms with gale force winds and ground blizzards. Please refer to the photo attached and submitted with this testimony that illustrates the challenges of keeping a road open during winter storm conditions. Dr. Peter Mjos wrote in a 2013 letter to the Secretary of the Interior about the safety and maintenance challenges of a road in winter storm conditions, stating:

In such storms Cold Bay cannot maintain for even one hour the flat, paved 10,000 foot runway, much less the community gravel roads. It is inconceivable that the proposed 27

mile road could be passable. Any vehicle or ambulance attempting transit or rescue in such conditions could be suicidal, rescue impossible, rescuers gravely imperiled.

Submitted with this testimony are some of the letters and testimony from these local experts that convey some of the challenges of the proposed road for medical evacuations.

IV. Non-Road Alternatives

Marine Transportation Links:

Nine million dollars of the original 37.5 million of taxpayer dollars appropriated for King Cove's transportation needs was used to acquire and equip a modern hovercraft, a type of vehicle most often used by commercial and military operators in such conditions as ice floes, mudflats, beaches, and tundra. Unique to the hovercraft is its ability to land without a traditional dock or harbor.

The hovercraft operated between 2007 and 2010 and successfully performed at least 30²² medical evacuations helping King Cove residents cross the 20 miles across Cold Bay to reach the Cold Bay airport. At that time, the hovercraft, powered by four MTU 2000 diesel engines, was the largest hovercraft ever built in the U.S. The craft seated 49 passengers and vehicles, and could accommodate a fully staffed ambulance. It traveled from Lenard Harbor on the southeast side of Cold Bay to Cold Bay in approximately 17 minutes²³.

U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Report:

The transportation options presented in the 2015 report by the Army Corps of Engineers demonstrate that there are viable alternatives to constructing a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness. At the request of the Department of the Interior, the Army Corps of Engineers assessed three non-road alternatives for medical evacuation from King Cove. These transportation modes include: (1) ice-capable marine vessel, (2) fixed-wing aircraft/new airport, and (3) helicopter/heliport. For each transportation mode, the ACOE made a high-level assessment of the various locations, type of equipment, and facilities needed, along with the costs, risks and dependability of each. Each option was assigned a level of dependability, cost, and risk. The report determined that the marine vessel is the most dependable of the options (99.2% or better). The ACOE analysis is a high-level assessment that did not recommend one alternative over another and did not address many significant details of the various options.

²² U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, King Cove – Cold Bay: Assessment of Non-Road Alternatives, July 2015, p. 6

²³ Ibid., p.6.

A summary Table from the ACOE Report follows, from page ii of the report:

Table ES-1. Summary of Costs and Operating Factors

	Marine 150-ft ice-capable monohull ferry			Airport New airport located NW of Mt. Dutton		Helicopter Leased helicopter and crew with dedicated heliport			
	1a NE Cold Bay Ferry	1b Lenard Harbor Ferry	1c Direct Ferry (KC- CB)	2a 5,000-ft Runway (Learjet)	2b 3,500-ft Runway (King Air)	3a NE Cold Bay Heliport	3b Lenard Harbor Heliport	3c Peninsula Heliport	3d King Cove Heliport
Life-cycle Costs (75 years)									
Capital Cost (\$ millions)	41.8	29.9	39.0	84.0	47.0	2.8	2.8	28.3	2.8
Operations and Maintenance Cost (\$)	872,300	925,600	1.14 M	674,700	223,300	2.34 M	2.25 M	2.28 M	2.19 M
Net Present Value (\$ millions)	65.7	56.7	71.9	97.0	49.3	78.3	75.3	99.1	73.6
Operating Factors									
Medevac Time (hrs)	3.5	3.7	5.0	2.4	3.0	3.1	2.6	2.7	2.1
Risk Score	2.4	2.4	2.5	2.5	2.6	2.5	2.5	2.5	2.2
Annual Dependability	99.9%	99.9%	99.6%	94.9%	94.9%	82.6%	67.5%	67.5%	70%

Notes:

All costs are shown in 2015 dollars. See main document for explanation of cost estimates.

Medevac time is the elapsed travel time between the City of King Cove and Ted Stevens Anchorage International Airport. See main document for further explanation.

Risk score compiles multiple risk factors on a 1–4 scale (1=low, 2=moderate, 3=serious, 4=high) and averages them. Risk assessment is qualitative. Scoring allows for deriving the average and is not meant to imply precision in quantifying risk. See main document for explanation of methods.

Dependability shown is based largely on wind data thresholds. Other factors affect dependability and may differ between modes of travel. See main document for explanation.

The alternatives to a road identified in the ACOE report, as well as other non-road alternatives, avoid many of the risks and problems associated with a road as discussed above.

A comparison of the travel times required for a med-evac patient to get from King Cove to Cold Bay by road or non-road options is informative. The July 2015 ACOE assessment indicates, that a ferry from Lenard Harbor would take approximately 1 hour and 20 minutes to Cold Bay, while helicopters and planes take only a matter of minutes. The taxpayer-funded hovercraft that operated between the two communities from 2007 – 2010 took approximately 17 minutes from Lenard Harbor to Cold Bay.²⁴ Traveling the entire proposed one-lane gravel road route from King Cove to Cold Bay – approximately 40.5 miles – would take between 90 minutes and two hours in good weather conditions.²⁵ In bad weather the road could be impassable or take many hours of dangerous travel. For true medical emergencies, safety of the passengers and the fastest travel times between the two communities are presumably the most desirable.

²⁴U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, King Cove – Cold Bay: Assessment of Non-Road Alternatives, July 2015, p. 6

²⁵ U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, December 2003, and King Cove – Cold Bay: Assessment of Non-Road Alternatives, July 2015.

The analysis conducted by the Army Corps of Engineers confirms what The Wilderness Society, other conservation organizations, local experts and medical professionals familiar with this area have stated for decades, namely that there are viable alternatives to a road through the heart of fragile, congressionally-designated Wilderness that would provide safe and reliable, and in some cases more reliable, and efficient emergency transport for the people of King Cove, while maintaining the integrity of the globally significant Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

Additional Considerations:

Many remote communities in Alaska struggle with issues similar to those of King Cove regarding transportation and medical services. It is not clear that King Cove residents are in any more danger than many other Alaskan communities that rely on air transportation. Additionally, King Cove is better equipped than many other remote Alaskan communities to handle medical emergencies because of their state-of-the-art-medical clinic and staff. While there has been much mention of the tragic fatalities resulting from airplane crashes near King Cove, thankfully there have not been any since February, 1990. More than 25 years have passed since the last aircraft fatality – a situation that TWS and the entire conservation community certainly hope will continue forever. The flight safety record of the past 25+ years is no doubt a testament to the skilled pilots and technical flight personnel in the region. Further, in reviewing wind and weather data from the many documents assembled about this issue, it is not clear that King Cove residents are in greater danger than other Alaskan communities that rely on air transportation.”²⁶ While King Cove does not have a full-time physician, it does have a state-of-the-art medical clinic with telemedicine capabilities, a result of the King Cove Health and Safety Act. The medical clinic has a total of 17 staff, including a physician’s assistant, making King Cove’s clinic better equipped to handle medical emergencies than many of Alaska’s remote communities, including Cold Bay.

Conclusion:

For all of the reasons stated above we appreciate the Department of Interior’s commitment to find a non-road alternative, and, and we strongly support the Department’s 2013 decision to reject a land exchange and road development through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness area. The U.S. Army Corps of Engineers’ 2015 Non-Road Assessment indicates that there are other viable, safer, more dependable and efficient alternatives for medical evacuation transport than the proposed road.

Thank you again for the opportunity to testify before the Senate Committee on Energy today.

²⁶ Wind and weather is available in the following sources: Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, King Cove – Cold Bay Access Assessment of Transportation Need, 1997; U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, King Cove Access Project, Final Environmental Impact Statement, December, 2003; and U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, King Cove – Cold Bay: Assessment of Non-Road Alternatives, July 2015.

**Alaska Wilderness League * Audubon Alaska * Blue Goose Alliance * Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice * Environmental Protection Information Center
Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges * Klamath Forest Alliance
League of Conservation Voters * National Wildlife Refuge Association * Sierra Club
The Wilderness Society * Wilderness Watch**

April 12, 2016

The Honorable Lisa Murkowski, Chair
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Maria Cantwell, Ranking Member
Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
304 Dirksen Senate Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Chairwoman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell:

On behalf of our millions of members and supporters nationwide, we are writing to reaffirm our steadfast opposition to construction of a road through the heart of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. We strongly urge you to reject any such proposals that are discussed in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee hearing “to conduct oversight on options for addressing the continuing lack of reliable emergency medical transportation for the isolated community of King Cove, Alaska” on April 14, 2016. A road through Izembek would cause irreparable damage to a globally important conservation area, and set a precedent that jeopardizes wildlife refuges and wilderness protections on public lands across the country. We respectfully request that this letter be included in the hearing record.

The Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is an internationally recognized wetland and coastal habitat for iconic wildlife, including grizzly bears, caribou, salmon and hundreds of species of migratory birds. One of America’s most unique and ecologically significant wildlife refuges, this extraordinary landscape in Alaska is almost entirely designated wilderness. Even as Congress considers alternatives for addressing King Cove’s medical concerns, it must continue to protect these irreplaceable wildlands.

Legislating a road through Izembek’s fragile wetland complex would not only severely damage this treasured ecosystem and threaten the survival of imperiled species, but would also undermine the integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System. Fish and Wildlife Service managers have repeatedly determined that a road would cause irreversible harm to the wildlife and habitat Izembek was established to protect, making it incompatible with the primary purposes of the refuge and the conservation mission of the Refuge System. Legislating incompatible development in a refuge would set a negative precedent that also contravenes the National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act mandate to “ensure that the biological integrity, diversity and environmental health of the System are maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

In addition, de-designating wilderness to cut the destructive road through Izembek would violate the very purpose of the Wilderness Act to permanently protect public wildlands. It would undermine the wilderness values in the refuge and permanently alter the character of this biologically essential

landscape, creating dangerous national policy implications for wild places throughout the United States and inviting more such attacks in the future.

The Izembek road controversy was already addressed during the Clinton Administration when the federal government provided substantial funding to resolve King Cove's medical needs in an effort to end this decades-long dispute. At that time the federal government allocated over \$37 million to upgrade access to quality medical care for the community in lieu of building the environmentally destructive proposed road. In fact, American taxpayers have now spent over \$50 million improving medical access in support of that commitment, yet demands for the damaging road persist.

The Interior Department has studied this issue exhaustively, and repeatedly concluded that the road should not be built. In 2013, after a comprehensive four year analysis including over 130 stakeholder meetings, extensive consultation with state and local governments, numerous visits to the region and consideration of more than 70,000 public comments, Secretary Jewell reaffirmed that a road through Izembek would cause irreversible damage to natural resources and should be rejected. Just last year, the U.S. District Court of Alaska upheld the Secretary's decision to protect the refuge. Most recently, the Interior Department requested the Army Corps of Engineers conduct a study to evaluate additional non-road transportation alternatives for King Cove. The study established that other options exist.

Diverse voices have consistently demonstrated fierce and broad opposition to the ill-advised road. The Association of Village Council Presidents, representing 56 Native villages in western Alaska, formally opposed the road due to the impact it would have on their subsistence way of life. The former U.S. Indian Health Service medical director for King Cove believes that during severe winter storms, due to ice and avalanche conditions "any attempt to travel the proposed road will be foolish beyond any reason...and would clearly jeopardize life." The taxpayer organization, Citizens Against Government Waste, has profiled the proposed road as a fiscal boondoggle, noting that the government has already spent tens of millions of dollars to address local concerns and prevent the need for a road through Izembek. Former Department of Interior officials from Bush, Clinton, Ford and Nixon administrations have stated that the road has long been a "terrible idea" and remains so today.

We hope you will ensure that any solutions Congress considers to address King Cove's medical needs do not undermine the continued preservation of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and the bedrock environmental laws protecting this extraordinary area. We strongly urge you to uphold the integrity of the National Wildlife Refuge System, the Wilderness Act and our country's conservation legacy by rejecting any proposals to cut a road through the heart of this internationally significant refuge and wilderness.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Alaska Wilderness League
Audubon Alaska
Blue Goose Alliance
Defenders of Wildlife
Earthjustice

Environmental Protection Information Center
Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges
Klamath Forest Alliance
League of Conservation Voters
National Wildlife Refuge Association
Sierra Club
The Wilderness Society
Wilderness Watch

Cc: Members of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, U.S. Senate

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you. Thank you, all.

We will quickly turn to questions here, and again, try to move through them quickly as we do have a vote coming up.

I want to ask a question of both the Lieutenant Governor and to you, Mayor Mack and Ms. Trumble, in terms of support because we have just heard from Ms. Whittington-Evans that there has been a history within successive administrations in opposition to this road, agency officials in opposition to this road. I recognize that sitting here in Washington, DC we are 4,000 some odd miles from where you live and the State of Alaska, and oftentimes it is very easy to be opposed to something if you have no connection to it.

The suggestion that the wilderness needs to be there for all Americans to enjoy, I think, we understand. We understand the principle of that, but we also recognize that something in concept and theory is different than those who live in the region, exist in the region and raise their families there. It has also been mentioned, and we recognize, that AVCP has come out in opposition to the road.

Can you speak to the support for the road from the community of King Cove and what level of support we have? Then, Lieutenant Governor, if you can address the level of support that the state has for construction of this lifesaving road that we are talking about?

Mr. MACK. Thank you, Senator Murkowski, Chairman.

On behalf of the Alaska Federation of Natives, they're in full support of this road and resolutions that were submitted prior to the ruling by Secretary Jewell, that they were in favor of it. The leaders of the corporations in Alaska are in favor of this road. And of course, everyone in the Aleutians East Borough and both from the Bristol Bay region are also in favor of this road. They can't understand why we don't have it.

The CHAIRMAN. Della, can you speak from the Tribal Council's perspective?

Ms. TRUMBLE. Thank you.

Yes, all the tribal governments in Alaska do support this. We have strong support from the tribal governments in the region, Aleutian Pribilof Islands Association, Eastern Aleutian tribes that provides the health care in the region. And maybe to add to this, I'm also a member on the Kodiak Aleutian Federal Subsistence Advisory Council, and in early February we met, they had a statewide gathering of all the RACs as we call them, regional councils. We met with the AYK groups to discuss specifically bird allocations and looking at the potential on Emperor geese because there may be some hunts in 2017 that they'll open up for sport and subsistence.

Nothing was ever mentioned in regard to not supporting this road from King Cove to Cold Bay. In fact, I've actually heard more personal comments directed at me that we really should have this road.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Lieutenant Governor, from the state's perspective, please?

Mr. MALLOTT. Yes. The State of Alaska, the Alaska Legislature and the Governor of the State strongly support this road.

I would think I can, with little argument, say that I know of no elected state official who is knowledgeable of this issue, who does not support it.

Thank you.

The CHAIRMAN. We recognize that the State of Alaska, in terms of its fiscal situation, is in a different place now than we have been for some time, and that when we build the road, not if we build the road, but when we build the road, there will be responsibility to the state, obviously, for some costs.

Is it fair to say that this road still remains a priority, certainly within the Walker/Mallott Administration?

Mr. MALLOTT. Absolutely.

The CHAIRMAN. Thank you.

Senator Cantwell.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ms. Whittington-Evans, the proponents of the road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge have mentioned that there are existing roads within the refuge and that an additional gravel road would not have a significant impact on wildlife.

Do you agree with this assessment of the existing road situation, and can you explain specific impacts you believe the new road would have?

Ms. WHITTINGTON-EVANS. Thank you, Senator Cantwell.

There are roads that were developed during the second World War in the refuge that are outside of the designated wilderness area. There are no roads in the designated wilderness area. There are some former World War II tracks that have not been maintained that are not currently traveled on by vehicles. And so, there are no roads in the designated wilderness portion of the refuge.

We believe and Fish and Wildlife Service and others have documented that there would be significant impacts from a road going through this very narrow wildlife corridor that is surrounded by two lagoons, Izembek and Kasegaluk lagoons to the north and south. The significant impacts that the Fish and Wildlife Service focused on in their latest analysis include significant impacts to Black brant, Emperor geese and Tundra swans, as well as brown bears. The caribou, which use the corridor to travel from one side of the refuge to the other, often spend time in the corridor during winter which is a very challenging time for reserves, and they certainly would be impacted as well with winter travel on the road.

There has already been ATV trail expanding use coming off of the Northeast corner, the 17.2-mile road that goes to the Northeast corner of Cold Bay, and that is also something that the Fish and Wildlife Service documented in their most recent EIS. And there are a lot of concerns about the impacts to wetlands and the increased access by humans on these populations of wildlife.

Increased access will definitely impact wildlife including the brown bears which are some of the densest that you will find anywhere in Alaska.

There could be competition in the future between sport and subsistence users in the refuge as a result of this road. The Army Corps of Engineers, for example, in 2003 identified that as a potential problem for future subsistence users.

I want to say one other thing, and that is that tens of millions of dollars have already been spent on this issue. As you mentioned earlier, there are no great alternatives, but the Army Corps of Engineers' most recent report indicated that a marine alternative would be 99 percent dependable which is the highest of any of the alternatives involved.

Thank you very much.

Senator CANTWELL. When you are mentioning sport and subsistence competition, is that an issue you think exists today?

Ms. WHITTINGTON-EVANS. I am not aware that that exists today as a problem. I think that the wildlife populations are very plentiful at Izembek.

Brant have definitely, I mean, some of these water fowl populations have declined over the years and that is, a lot of that, is due to the fact that habitat elsewhere, outside of Alaska, potentially, has been degraded. But there—I am not aware of a current problem between sport and subsistence users, but increased access would definitely impact these wildlife populations from, you know, from additional hunting going on and this could be a problem in the future.

Senator CANTWELL. Thank you.

Thank you, Madam Chair.

The CHAIRMAN. Just to follow on Senator Cantwell's question.

You are aware that the terms of this road have been a non-commercial use road. That is directed to you, Ms. Whittington, yes?

Ms. WHITTINGTON-EVANS. I am aware of that, yes. Thank you, Senator Murkowski. And I also understand that over time that type of arrangement can change as it has elsewhere in the state.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I understand that.

When I was out in King Cove, actually with the Secretary, what we heard from some of the Fish and Wildlife folks was really quite offensive because they basically asserted that as soon as we do this people in King Cove will break the law.

I am looking at it and I am thinking a people willing to move forward with a 300 to 1 exchange, give up their ancestral lands for a lifesaving road, are not going to be abusive of the opportunity to then access it. I would certainly like to give the people the benefit of the doubt, the people that have been protecting the environment, the animals and the waterfowl for generations.

I wanted to ask a question to you, Della, about the impact to the community over a period of time in dealing with just the emotional trauma that comes with living in fear of flying. I was particularly struck by it when we were in the clinic and looking at the facilities which we have upgraded. I think the people of King Cove are proud of the community clinic that they have there and the professionals that they have. They wish they had a doctor, but you take what you can get. But I was struck in talking about the cache of prescription drugs that are available to them to dispense as we have in many of our small clinics. It is something that is stocked to a limited perspective. But the thing that they kept the largest supply on hand were anti-anxiety drugs because, I was told, some 70 percent of the people in the community have an extreme anxiety of flying.

Della, I noted in the picture that you showed where the plane had crashed that flew in with your daughter on it, it was not a bad weather day as we have been talking about with dense fog, the examples that Commander Whiddon mentioned. It was a blue sky day, and one would think that if you can see the approach you are going to be just fine.

Is this fear of flying and the anxiety that has been created within the community of King Cove? Am I overstating or exaggerating in some way? Because I do not intend to be, but I'd like to hear from your voice whether this is something that, as a community, there truly is that fear.

Ms. TRUMBLE. Thank you, Senator.

Yes, there it's a real fear. And those, the 70 percent, can be as much as 80 percent.

What happens is when people know that they're going to have to travel, the first thing people do is we start watching the weather five days before we're scheduled to fly to figure out what kind of weather we're going to be looking at before we fly.

Many people will go to the clinic and we have the dispensers that dispense medication. It's just like a candy machine is what it looks like, and they dispense two pills, one when you leave and one when you're coming back. And it's valium or diazepam.

I never used to technically be afraid to fly until I saw that plane crash. I came out and left the other day and I hold the bottom of my chair and I pray those 15 minutes to Cold Bay and I hold my chair and I pray when I come back to King Cove.

I've flown with people that scream, that cry, that cuss and pray the whole way. It's not a good experience to have to do, but it's the reality of what we have to do to get between these two communities.

And many times, to add to that, a lot of people cannot get to their medical appointments because they can't get out of King Cove or will not fly, period, if they don't like the weather report. And so that has to be drawn out to the next month or three months, depending if it's a specialty doc. The fear of flying in this community is extremely real and it's high.

The CHAIRMAN. Let me ask a question of you, Commander Whiddon and then, I am afraid, we are going to have to wrap up because the vote has already started.

You are clearly an experienced pilot having flown in some difficult conditions. I have been told by some in the Coast Guard who fly out in the region that flying into King Cove is the least desirable job of a pilot going in and out.

Now we talk about fear of flying. We have got to fly all over the State of Alaska. Why are the conditions in King Cove region that much worse than anywhere else that we fly in Alaska? Can you speak to that?

Mr. WHIDDON. Thank you, Madam Chair.

As Mr. Mack mentioned, that area is considered the generator of storms. And that's where they, if you watch the Alaska news channel every day, you see huge sweeping lows coming across there and they all seem to converge in the Cold Bay area.

For Coast Guard crews flying in there, just remember that they're only going to fly in there if commercial aviation cannot get

in there which means it's going to be extreme weather or nighttime and—

The CHAIRMAN. So just repeat that again because I think that this is important. They only come in when nobody else can.

Mr. WHIDDON. Exactly.

The CHAIRMAN. So they are the last line of safety.

Mr. WHIDDON. And if I may add just one other thing. When you put your map up, or your chart up there, the Coast Guard pilots, I'm sure it's still the same, get what's called Alaska-qualified. When you come to Alaska you have a 90-day period to become Alaska-qualified which means you get to see some of the places. King Cove is not on the list. Never was on the list.

So if you do fly into King Cove it might be the first time you ever go in there and it would be at night or in bad weather. And even if you've been in there once or twice during a three-year tour in Kodiak, you'll never go in there enough to know how to get in there and under adverse conditions.

So it's always going to be extremely dangerous for any Coast Guard crew to go in there whether they come in from the Gulf side or they come in from the Cold Bay side.

The CHAIRMAN. So the study that the Corps conducted at the request of the Interior Department without looking at a road alternative, is it correct, Mayor Mack, that no one in the community leadership either of the borough or tribal was brought in as a part or any level of consultation in that study that was conducted?

Mr. MACK. Madam Chairman, yes, we have never been a part of any review or research in regard to information regarding the marine link and any other link by the Corps of Engineers or any other organization that did some study.

I know there was a study done by Johns Hopkins University, and that study was never brought to our attention for any kind of input, and we've never been part of it, no.

The CHAIRMAN. And on the Tribal Council side?

Ms. TRUMBLE. Yes, that's correct. We were never consulted at any point in time during the course of that.

The CHAIRMAN. Yet what we have seen as an outcome of that report were three recommendations: a new marine craft, the potential for a helo base, and an alternative road, route on the water with a dock. All options that have been either tried before or studied before and have been rejected. Correct?

Mr. MACK. That is correct.

The CHAIRMAN. So nothing new from this?

Mr. MACK. There has been nothing new, no.

There are times when the ferry, Alaska State Ferry, cannot even get into King Cove because of weather conditions, let alone try to get to Cold Bay. So that marine link is totally out of it.

As you can see in some of the pictures that we showed, the icy conditions and the wave conditions in Cold Bay would—and that was a hundred-foot crab boat that fished the Bering Sea that could not get to the dock with that patient on board.

The CHAIRMAN. My last question.

The Secretary has indicated that she was going to do something to help the people of King Cove. To your knowledge, to this date, have we seen anything from the Department that has indicated she

is going to work to provide a reliable route to safety for the people of King Cove?

Della?

Ms. TRUMBLE. Senator, we have not heard at all from the Secretary since I know you got the phone call in 2013 and I had a message on my phone in 2013. We have had no communication with her since then.

The CHAIRMAN. Well, I want to thank each of you for being here today.

Lieutenant Governor, I thank you for your eloquent statement at the beginning of the hearing that really begs an Administration to listen to the people.

We do have a responsibility to the land. We recognize that. We have a responsibility for the animals and the birds that fly over our land, but we also have a responsibility to our people. Oftentimes when I think about endangered species I would agree with your suggestion that sometimes the most vulnerable of the species is man. And so recognizing our responsibility to one another is something that must be at the forefront.

Know that what you have given the Committee today through your testimony, your words, your voice to the people, is greatly appreciated. Know that I stand with you in this long, long fight and will stand with you until we have addressed the health and the safety of the fine people of King Cove and within the region.

Thank you for your advocacy and thank you for appearing before the Committee.

With that, we stand adjourned.

[Whereupon, at 10:46 a.m. the hearing was adjourned.]

APPENDIX MATERIAL SUBMITTED

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U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing: Options for Reliable Emergency Medical Transportation
for the Isolated Community of King Cove, Alaska
April 14, 2016
Question for the Record Submitted to the Honorable Byron Mallott

Question from Senator Joe Manchin III

Question: Lt. Gov Mallott, in your written testimony you state that each medevac provided by the Coast Guard costs an estimated \$250,000. I am deeply troubled by the costs and the fact that providing emergency medical evacuations is not part of the Coast Guard's mission. However what I am most concerned with, and what monetary figures don't take into account is the risk. The risk—not just risk to the brave young men and women performing the mission, but the risk to the public because the Coast Guard is having to divert its attention and resources away from its search and rescue missions. Plus I can't imagine this is cost-effective.

Lt. Gov. Mallott, please tell me who ends up paying the final costs of these medevacs?

Answer: My understanding is that there are generally several sources of funding for individuals who are medically evacuated from King Cove.

If weather conditions allow, a private medevac service will transport a patient to a medical facility – generally in Anchorage. If the patient is an Alaska Native or Native American, the U.S. Department of Health and Human Service's Indian Health Service will pay for these expenses via the Eastern Aleutian Tribes organization, which is acting as a contractor. However, it is possible that a portion of such costs is reimbursable if the patient has third party health insurance.

If a private medevac service evacuates a non-Alaska Native or Native American from King Cove, the service will bill the individual's private health insurance plan. It is possible that Medicaid or Medicare could also potentially be billed for this service.

When private medevac services are not able to fly to King Cove due to poor weather conditions, the Coast Guard will attempt to transport patients from King Cove to Cold Bay or Anchorage. The Coast Guard does not seek reimbursement from patients for such costs.

**U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing: Options for Reliable Emergency Medical Transportation
for the Isolated Community of King Cove, Alaska
April 14, 2016
Question for the Record Submitted to the Honorable Stanley Mack**

Question from Senator Joe Manchin III

Question: When I make decisions here in Washington one thing I always want to know is what the people back home are saying. Specifically, is there local support—I have said it countless times, if I can't explain something back home in West Virginia, I can't vote for it in Washington.

My question, Mayor Mack, is what are the folks in this community saying about this road? What percentage supports the road? Would you say that support for the road is overwhelming, among those who actually live in King Cove?

Response: The people of King Cove are 1000% in support for this road. It will be the life line for the community and the people on King Cove. It will connect to the only airport that will get the folks of King Cove to the hospital. That is 600 miles away, that can address the medical attention that is needed. Along with the people of King Cove, here are the names of the other supporters...Alaska Federation Natives, National Congress Of American Indians, State Of Alaska Legislature and the last 4 Governors of the State Of Alaska. The Alaska Federation of Natives represents all the tribes of Alaska. We have resolutions from all these groups.

**U.S. Senate Committee on Energy and Natural Resources
Hearing: Options for Reliable Emergency Medical Transportation
For the Isolated Community of King Cove, Alaska
April 14, 2016
Question for the Record Submitted to Commander John Whiddon (USCG, Retired)**

Question from Senator Joe Manchin III

10/10/2016

Question: What sort of risks does the public face because the Coast Guard has to undertake these dangerous missions which divert attention away from their proper search and rescue mission? Is there a safer, more efficient alternative than a road?

In response to the questions posed above, I want to state for the record that I am retired from the US Coast Guard and my statement in no way represents the Coast Guard's opinion or position on their operational capabilities or limitations. I have not consulted with the Coast Guard. My opinions are strictly my own, based on a twenty year aviation career and recollections of an event that occurred over 30 years ago during a search for an overdue aircraft enroute from King Cove to Cold Bay.

The first question asks what risks the public face when the Coast is forced to fly in bad weather to locations such as King Cove and in so doing, diverts the Coast Guard's attention and resources from their proper search and rescue mission. My immediate response to this question is that one of the Coast Guard's primary missions in Alaska is search and rescue which includes medical evacuations. During the course of my career, I flew on numerous medical evacuations in the Gulf of Mexico and in Alaska when other commercial options were unavailable. The lack of commercial options was generally the first consideration on the "go or no-go" decision. The decision to medevac patients from King Cove or any other remote Alaskan village remains to this day, an important service provided by the Coast Guard. The weather is another consideration in the risk assessment matrix that must be evaluated prior to launching an aircraft on a medical evacuation. Flying throughout remote Alaska, often at night or in inclement weather will always be a high risk operation, yet I believe that Coast Guard pilots are highly trained, motivated professionals who consider flight and operational safety as an integral part of their duty when performing rescue missions.

The second question posed is "is there a safer, more efficient alternative than a road?" The answer to this question is unequivocally - NO. A simple one lane, gravel road that connects residents of King Cove to the Cold Bay road system will save lives. It will save the lives of those in need of immediate medical attention and it will eliminate the need for Coast Guard aircrews or in the case of the mission that we responded to 36 years ago, it will prevent needless commercial aviation flights in adverse weather conditions. Building a road would provide a lifeline and link to the "outside" world that is only necessary during times of emergency. There is no safer or more efficient alternative. The construction of a road would be a one-time expense, not including maintenance and upkeep. Relying on Coast Guard medevacs would be a continued expense to taxpayers. Construction of a road that would link King Cove to the Cold Bay road system would allow the Coast Guard to direct their attention to other areas such as the Arctic, the Bering Sea, Cordova and other mission critical regions throughout Alaska.

John Whiddon
1116 Baranof Road
Kodiak, Alaska 99615

**Statement for the Record of U.S. Senator Joe Manchin before the Senate Energy and
Natural Resources Committee on the Proposed King Cove Road
Thursday, April 14th 2016**

Chairman Murkowski and Ranking Member Cantwell, I appreciate the opportunity to present my perspective on the proposed road connecting the residents of King Cove to Cold Bay, Alaska.

As you know, the proposed road is a single-lane, non-commercial gravel road connecting the Aleut community of King Cove to an already existing all-weather airport in Cold Bay, Alaska. King Cove is a remote community, lying on the western edge of the Alaska Peninsula that is home to roughly 1,000 people. This small community has been fighting since the 1940s to construct a small road connecting them to safety. The road would enable King Cove – a small community – to access medical resources beyond what their local clinic can provide. It is my understanding that the local health clinic, an Indian Health Services (IHS) clinic, is able to provide general medical care and respond to minor injuries but is unable to register anesthesia or treat patients with major medical trauma in need of life-saving care. In fact, in order to receive care requiring anesthesia, a King Cove citizen must travel roughly 625 miles to Anchorage, Alaska, often using alternative means of transportation – none of which provide a safer, easier, or faster route than the proposed road would provide.

In times of extreme weather, or when all other transportation options have been exhausted, the U.S. Coast Guard will provide medical evacuations to the residents of King Cove. While I am grateful that the Coast Guard is willing to answer the call and provide help when it is needed, providing medical evacuations is not within the purview of the Coast Guard's proper search and rescue mission. Furthermore, providing medivacs is very expensive—by some estimates \$250,000 per medivac. However, what is most concerning, and what monetary figures do not take into account, is the cost of risk that is undertaken to perform the mission.

Since 1980, there have been 19 deaths attributed to a lack of a safe, reliable method of transportation from King Cove. That's unacceptable.

Despite numerous hurdles and setbacks, Chairman Murkowski continues to persevere in the fight to build this critical road. I have spent time with the people of Alaska and met citizens of King Cove. I deeply believe that no one holds their state's natural resources in higher regard than the citizens of King Cove, Alaska.

My home state of West Virginia is blessed with beautiful landscapes, natural resources and an extraordinary array of wildlife. As a former Governor and Senator for West Virginia, I have seen firsthand that a balance is achievable - we can protect our environment while providing the tools and opportunities necessary for our citizens to live full healthy lives. That is why I share Chairman Murkowski's frustration and I am deeply disappointed by the Administration's determination that the road is not in the public interest. This proposed road is the safest and most efficient way to ensure the good people of King Cove are able to receive proper medical care

while continuing to live in an area that has been inhabited by their ancestors for 4,000 years. The proposal is supported at the local, state and federal levels. I will continue to support Chairman Murkowski and the King Cove community in order to ensure this life-saving road is constructed.

I urge Secretary Jewell to approve the proposed 11-mile road to King Cove as soon as possible.

