



United States Department of the Interior

FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Washington, D.C. 20240



June 25, 2007

The Honorable Todd Tiaht
House of Representatives
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Mr. Tiaht:

I am writing in regard to requests from your staff for our views on a bill that would authorize land exchanges between the United States, acting through the Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State of Alaska and King Cove Corporation. The lands in question are part of Izembeck National Wildlife Refuge and would provide a road right of way between the town of King Cove and the town of Cold Bay, Alaska.

During my testimony regarding the Service's budget in March, Congressman Dicks asked about my thoughts on such a land exchange. I answered that neither the Secretary of the Interior nor I would propose such a land exchange, but if Congress asked for our opinion on a bill we would evaluate that bill to determine the values offered for wildlife and wilderness, as well as what benefits such a bill might provide to the future of wilderness area protection. That remains our position. Congressional action would be required to complete such an exchange.

Though we are not taking an official position at this time on the bill under discussion, I can say that we will scrutinize any proposal to remove land from wilderness or any other public land designation. As trustees of public lands, we must ensure that any change in the public estate improves the ecological and social values available to the public from wilderness areas, refuges, and other public lands. On its face, the bill offers more than 61,000 acres in exchange for 1,600 acres of National Wildlife Refuge lands. Of that, more than 41,000 acres would be exchanged to make up for 206 acres of wilderness lands. These proposals would offer approximately 38 acres for every acre of wetlands and wildlife habitat, and nearly 200 acres for every acre of wilderness exchanged. I have personally visited Izembeck Refuge and flown the areas being proposed. The wilderness values of the lands are significant, and include large areas of tundra swan nesting, as well as caribou movement.

We recognize the special needs of Alaska residents to have access to medical, dental, and other care. We also recognize our responsibility to the American people to ensure lands are held in trust to provide wilderness and other values. This bill offers a proposal that we believe warrants further discussion to fully determine if the needs of both the King Cove residents and the people of the United States would be properly evaluated and met. Legal issues such as ANILCA must also be fully discussed.

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IN AMERICA 

The Honorable Todd Tiaht

2

We, therefore, believe there is merit in continuing discussions of the bill before we can offer an official position on behalf of the Administration. If I can be of further assistance, please do not hesitate to let me know.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "H Dale Hall". The signature is written in black ink and is centered on the page.

DIRECTOR