



## **PRESS RELEASE**

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## **Alaska Delegation Introduces King Cove Land Exchange Bill**

### **Legislation Would Solve Community's Perennial Access Problem**

King Cove, AK – June 20, 2007 – Community and tribal leaders as well as residents in the City of King Cove, Alaska are applauding the Alaska Congressional delegation, Governor Sarah Palin and the State of Alaska after a bill was introduced in Congress today that would solve the community's transportation access problem. Late this afternoon, Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) introduced companion legislation in Congress that would add 61,723 acres of key wildlife habitat to the Izembek and Alaska Peninsula Wildlife Refuges. In exchange for this land, King Cove residents would receive a right-of-way for a single-lane road through Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge leading to Cold Bay, a community located about 25 miles away.

"We are so grateful that the Alaska delegation, the governor and the State of Alaska is supporting this land exchange legislation," said Ernest Weiss, mayor of King Cove. "This is a win-win for everyone involved. The people of King Cove would get reliable access to Cold Bay with minimum impact to the environment, while thousands of acres of valuable land are added to the refuge and to the wilderness," he said.

"We are extremely thankful to everyone supporting our efforts toward a common sense solution to resolve a longstanding transportation problem," said Della Trumble, president of the King Cove Corporation. "This would provide a safer, reliable, and economically feasible solution for the communities of King Cove and Cold Bay."

The land exchange would be the first new wilderness in Alaska designated by congress in more than 25 years. The bill would designate 45,493 acres of that land as wilderness. The State of Alaska has brought nearly 43,000 acres to this land exchange. The King Cove Corporation (created by the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act) is relinquishing

more than 18,000 acres. In exchange, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) would transfer approximately 206 acres for a right-of-way road. The state would pay for the cost of road construction through its annual STIP (Statewide Transportation Improvement Program).

More than 80 percent of the residents living in King Cove are Aleut and the descendants of the indigenous people from this region. The Aleut have lived in this isolated area of the Alaska Peninsula for more than 4,000 years. In 1980, the federal government designated a major portion of the land that lies between the two villages as wilderness. That action prohibited the construction of a road between King Cove and Cold Bay, the closest village.

“We are the ones who were and are impacted by this decision,” said Trumble. “The Aleut people who live here were never consulted when this area was designated as wilderness. This is an indigenous rights issue for the people of King Cove. It’s also about our quality of life.”

“King Cove is very difficult to access. The Izembek Enhancement Act is a simple solution to this problem, and it shows respect to the people of King Cove,” said Weiss.

The battle for obtaining ground transportation access to Cold Bay has been going on for years. In 1998, a similar effort with considerably less land was proposed as part of the exchange leading to a right-of-way road between King Cove and the all-weather Cold Bay airport. It was rejected after conservation groups lobbied against it. As a compromise, Congress appropriated \$37.5 million under the King Cove Health and Safety Act for improvements to the King Cove medical clinic, airport and a road/marine transportation system link between the two cities. Even though the clinic that was built is state-of-the art, the small community is unable to attract doctors with the skill level needed to handle emergencies and other life-threatening illnesses. A multi-million dollar hovercraft was also purchased to ferry residents to the Cold Bay airport. However, studies show the Aleutians East Borough, the owner of the craft, cannot financially support the hovercraft over the long term.

“This time, the legislation offers an incredible amount of land to the federal government. It would hopefully resolve a problem that’s troubled us for so long and has caused a great deal of sorrow for our community,” said Trumble.

The Cold Bay airport was built in 1942 during World War II and has the third longest runway in Alaska. The problem is King Cove, a community nestled between numerous volcanoes, is often plagued by gale force winds or fog. It can be a life-threatening situation for people needing to access major medical facilities in Anchorage during health emergencies. The unpredictable weather allows residents to access Cold Bay about two-thirds of the time. Since 1979, eleven people have died after flying in this flight corridor during questionable weather.

“We deserve this road,” said Weiss. “The people of King Cove only want permission to have access to a right-of-way road leading to the world-class airfield in Cold Bay. Our access problem can be solved easily, while at the same time, greatly enhancing the wilderness.”

“We deserve safe and reliable access just like everybody else in the United States,” Trumble added. “We’re hopeful this legislation will finally give us a solution to this access problem.”

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