

PRESS RELEASE

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Community and Tribal Leaders Laud U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Director for Recognizing Value of the King Cove Land Exchange Bill

King Cove, AK – June 26, 2007 – Community and tribal leaders in King Cove, Alaska are commending the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) director following a letter he wrote to the House of Representatives regarding the King Cove land exchange bill. Last week, Rep. Young (R-Alaska), Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) introduced companion legislation (H.R. 2801 and S.1680) that would add 61,723 acres of key wildlife habitat to the Izembek and Alaska Peninsula Wildlife Refuges. In exchange for this land, the State of Alaska would receive a right-of-way for a single-lane road through Alaska’s Izembek National Wildlife Refuge from King Cove to Cold Bay, a community located about 25 miles away. In the letter, USFWS director Dale Hall said the value of the land is substantial.

“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,” Hall said in his letter to Rep. Todd Tiahrt (R-Kansas), a member of the House Appropriations Committee.

The land exchange included in the legislation would be the first new wilderness in Alaska designated by congress in more than 25 years. The legislation would designate 45,493 acres of that land as wilderness. The State of Alaska has donated 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).

“I have personally visited the Izembek Refuge and flown the areas being proposed,” Hall added in the letter. “The wilderness values of the lands are significant, and include large areas of tundra swan nesting, as well as caribou movement.”

“The Izembek Refuge is indeed a very special place,” said Della Trumble, president of the King Cove Corporation. “The Aleut residents of King Cove treasure the value and

sustainability of this land that we already graciously share with many outside visitors and hunters who access the Refuge through Cold Bay and use its 60 miles of designated roads and trails.”

“As an elected official, today’s news that USFW has recognized the value of our land trade proposal and expressed their desire for the opportunity to fairly evaluate it, reinforces my belief in our democratic process,” said Ernest Weiss, mayor of King Cove.

The majority of King Cove residents are Aleut and the descendants of the indigenous people from this region. The Aleut have lived in this remote 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.

“Part of this process is, in our situation, is taking on the challenge of understanding our issue of indigenous rights at the same time finding the right balance between our unique human and environmental considerations here in King Cove and surrounded by the Izembek Refuge,” Weiss added.

The Cold Bay airport was built in 1942 during World War II and has the third longest runway in Alaska. However, accessing this airport can be extremely difficult and even impossible at times. King Cove is nestled between numerous volcanoes and 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. Since 1979, eleven people have died after flying in this flight corridor during questionable weather.

“We recognize the special needs of Alaska residents to have access to medical, dental and other care,” Hall added in the letter. “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 future 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.”

“There is absolutely no question in our mind regarding the compatibility between our human environment and the natural environment of the Refuge,” said Trumble. “This won’t change just because *another* primitive road may traverse a small portion of the Izembek.”

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