

**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,

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Audubon Alaska  
Blue Goose Alliance  
Defenders of Wildlife  
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Cc: Members of the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources, U.S. Senate