



THE ROAD TO *Nowhere*

Gravel Road Full of
Potholes for Wildlife
and Taxpayers

*A problem already solved
by Congress in 1998*

“This road would significantly harm global populations of migratory bird species and other wildlife at taxpayer expense”

USEFWS

An unnecessary road construction project threatens to devastate a globally significant wilderness area on a national wildlife refuge on the Alaskan peninsula. Two bills currently before Congress, H.R. 2801 and S. 1680, would authorize a multi-million dollar road carved through the heart of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, an area internationally recognized as biologically important. Although other transportation methods are available, road proponents argue this boondoggle is needed to connect the villages of King Cove and Cold Bay. Yet such a road would significantly harm geese, ducks, global populations of migratory bird species and other wildlife at taxpayer expense and set a precedent for other destructive practices on wilderness areas.

The Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges and the National Wildlife Refuge Association call upon Congress to reject this Road to Nowhere and oppose H.R. 2801 and S. 1680.

- **The Road to Nowhere is a Solution in Search of a Problem** — Congress already solved this problem; further debate of this boondoggle is a waste of time and taxpayer dollars. In 1998, King Cove residents argued they lacked adequate access to medical and airport facilities. In response, Congress allocated \$37.5 million for medical and airport improvements and a 98-foot hovercraft that has successfully provided rapid medical evacuations.
- **The Road to Nowhere is Bad for Wildlife** — Its construction could have devastating impacts on more than half a million Pacific black brant, emperor geese, swans and other wildlife, resulting in fragmentation, disturbance, and pollution.



98-foot Suna-X Hovercraft provides successful transportation between King Cove & Cold Bay. *Kvichak Marine Industries.*

- **The Road to Nowhere is Bad for Wilderness** — It would be a road built through a congressionally designated wilderness, where by definition, humans leave no mark. Precedent would be set, opening the door for other wilderness areas to be destroyed. Further, the National Wildlife Refuge System’s principles established in the “National Wildlife Refuge System Improvement Act of 1997” would be reversed.
- **The Road to Nowhere is Bad for Taxpayers** — This road would cost American taxpayers additional millions of dollars for building and maintenance costs. The 15 miles of road already constructed as part of the hovercraft initiative cost approximately \$26 million. At more than \$1.73 million per mile, the newly proposed 9 miles would cost \$15.6 million!

Retread — A Second Time Around

Citing concerns for public safety, the 750 residents of King Cove argue that this road is necessary for access to the airport located in the community of Cold Bay in case of medical emergencies. However, in 1998 Congress considered and denied a similar proposal for a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), citing the significant anticipated repercussions as noted in an Environmental Impact Statement. Instead, legislators appropriated \$37.5 million to fund a road-hovercraft link between the villages and improvements to the King Cove airstrip and clinic.

Of the \$37.5 million in federal funds, \$2.5 million was used to improve the King Cove Medical Clinic and \$9 million to purchase the hovercraft, currently operating out of Lenard Harbor. The remaining \$26 million in American taxpayer dollars was inexplicably spent to build 15 miles of a planned 17-mile, one-lane gravel road from the King Cove airstrip to a hovercraft pad adjacent to the refuge wilderness.

To date, the temporary hovercraft pad in Lenard Harbor, just miles from King Cove, has been the launch point for nine successful 20-

minute medevacs to Cold Bay. In such cases, the ambulance drives aboard the 98-foot craft that travels up to 58 mph over water and land on a cushion of air. In the event of a medical emergency, the extra distance and time on a gravel road could have life or death consequences, particularly in winter when avalanches, high winds and drifting snow are commonplace.

Despite the success of the hovercraft, and exorbitant costs of a road without a clear purpose, King Cove is once again asking Congress to allow the previously denied 9 miles through the heart of the Izembek Refuge Wilderness.



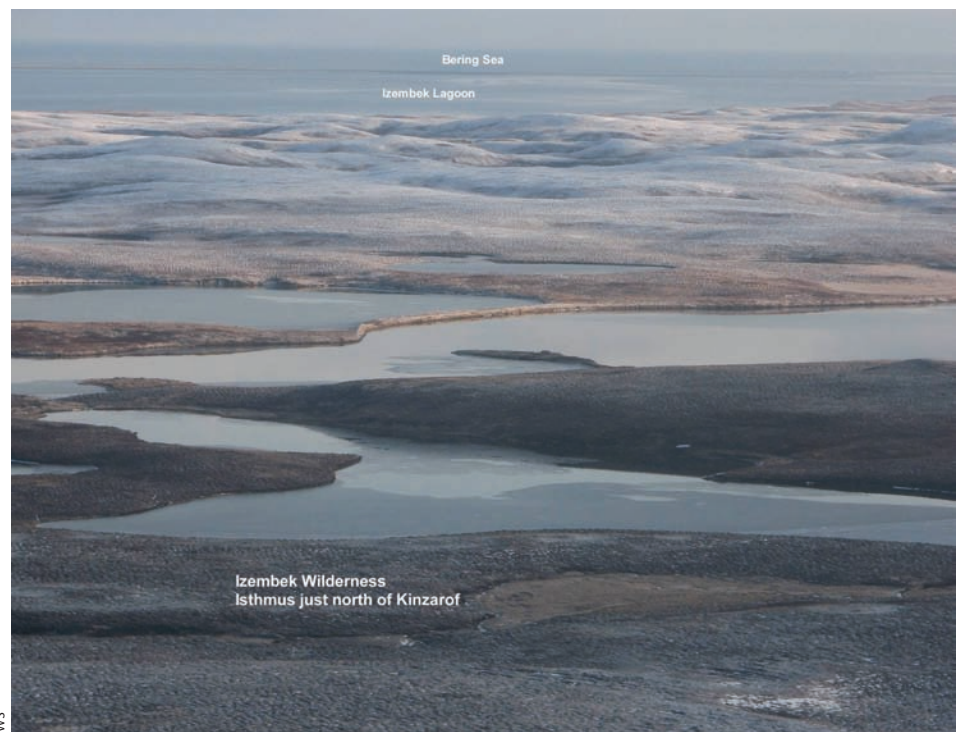
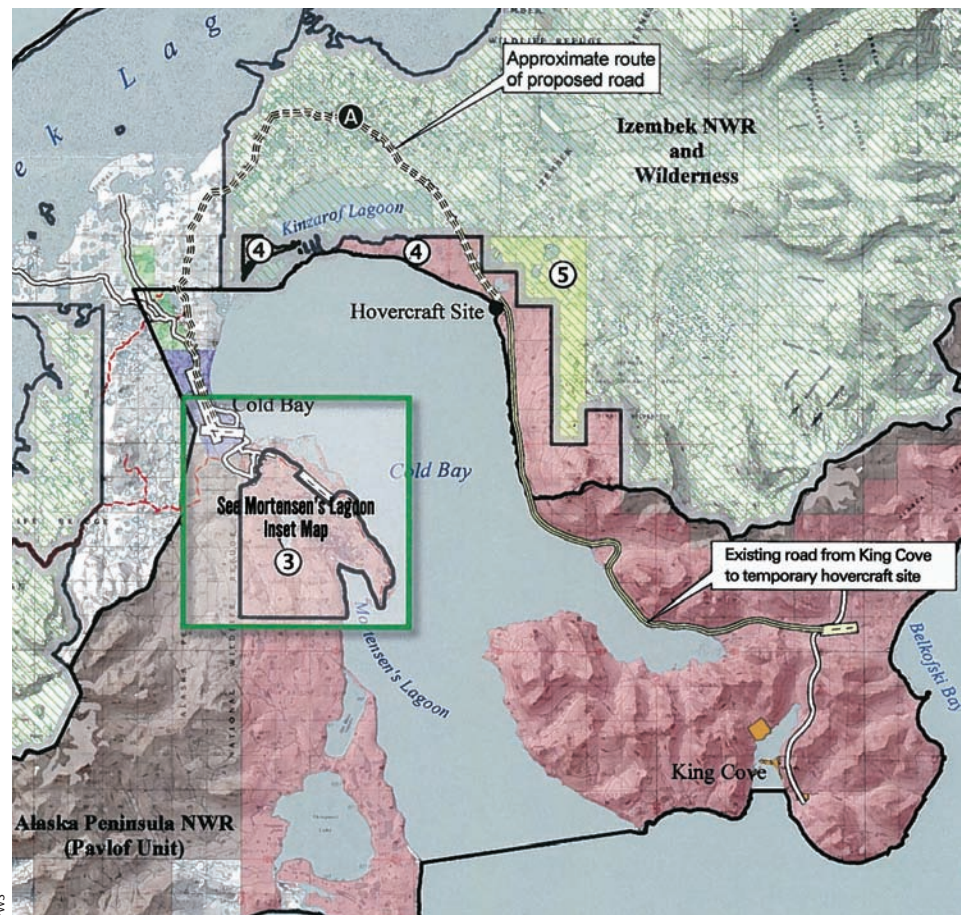
Top: Tundra Swan: As the name implies, tundra swans breed and nest on the tundra in wilderness havens including the Izembek NWR. Above: The current hovercraft pad in Lenard Harbor, just miles from King Cove, has been the launch point for nine successful medevacs aboard a 98 foot craft that travels up to 58 mph over water and land on a cushion of air. Nevertheless, King Cove has inexplicably already spent 26 million in taxpayer dollars to move the pad 17 miles down a perilous one-lane gravel road prone to avalanches, high winds and drifting snow.

Roadkill

Constructing a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge would have numerous negative impacts on wildlife and would degrade the critical wetlands habitat and wilderness quality of the refuge. It would devastate the exceptional refuge habitat vital to over half a million migratory birds, as well as brown bear, caribou, red fox, sea otters, and other wildlife. Almost the entire population of emperor geese and 98% of the Pacific black brant population, as well as threatened Steller's eiders and tundra swans, depend on the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

The isthmus where the road would be constructed is extremely narrow; standing in the center, one can easily see both the Izembek Lagoon to the north and the Kinzarof Lagoon to the south. Populations of Pacific black brant gorge on the eelgrass beds of Izembek Lagoon before their non-stop journey to wintering grounds in Mexico. Birds and wildlife such as brown bears travel between the two lagoons, sometimes more than once a day, in search of food revealed by receding tides. Caribou use the isthmus as a wintering ground and as a pathway when traveling to and from locations beyond the refuge. Brown bear make extensive use of the area for denning.

Road construction, traffic, and maintenance could cause irreversible harm to the eelgrass beds and wetlands vital to many migratory birds. Every passing vehicle would flush



Top: Map of King Cove's proposal to build road through heart of the Izembek NWR. Numbers refer to some lands offered in exchange. Above: Narrow isthmus where proposed road would slice through the fragile refuge lands.

birds, wasting their valuable energy as they try to build up enough strength and resources for their migration. A road through this isthmus would also disrupt wildlife movement and result in increased mortalities.

The very wilderness character of the refuge is at stake. By definition, wilderness is where humans leave no mark. This precedent could open the door for other destructive practices on wilderness areas.



© SCOTT DICKERSON

Brown bears, such as the one that left the foot prints in the above photo, will find it difficult, if not impossible, to transverse between the lagoons in search of food due to the road and associated cable barriers. Below: The treeless Arctic-alpine landscape is home to mammals such as red fox, caribou, wolves, river otter, mink and brown bear as well as numerous bird species.

Quantity vs. Quality

The proposed legislation offers a land exchange to sway members of Congress. The U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service would receive more than 61,000 acres to add to the Izembek NWR and nearby Alaska Peninsula NWR, with over 45,000 of those acres designated as wilderness. In exchange, the state of Alaska would receive 206 acres of the refuge to build the road. However, these 206 acres are on the sensitive isthmus — the biological heart of the refuge — and the road construction would have a severe impact on the birds and wildlife that depend on the refuge. The wetlands of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge are internationally recognized as globally significant. Izembek was the first wetlands area in North America to be recognized under the Ramsar Convention as a Wetland of International Importance. Izembek is an “Important Bird Area” of global significance as identified by Audubon and BirdLife International, and is a sister refuge to Russia’s Kronotskiy State Biosphere Reserve through a U.S.-Russian Governmental Agreement on Cooperation in Environmental Protection.

“The proposed land exchange would not come anywhere close to compensating for the irreversible impact to wildlife and wetlands.”

“The proposed road could actually increase dangers and travel time, thereby posing additional health risks to King Cove residents, contrary to the road’s stated purpose.”



DENNIS CONNELL

Merely comparing numbers of acres overlooks the fact that the lands proposed in the exchange hold vastly different values. Most of the lands offered in exchange are uplands with little wildlife habitat value. The offered lands that do have biological value are currently under no development threat, so adding them to Izembek refuge is not nearly as important as protecting the 206 acres on the isthmus. The proposed land exchange would not come anywhere close to compensating for the irreversible impact to wildlife and wetlands.

Dollars and Sense

Most of the route for the proposed road is through fragile rolling tundra dotted with wetlands and prone to high snowdrifts. The rest of the route crosses areas of steep slopes and unstable volcanic soils prone to avalanches. Gravel is scarce in remote areas of Alaska and must be shipped in. Re-routing and construction delays brought the cost of the 15 miles of road already completed to \$26 million. At that rate of more than \$1.73 million per mile, the additional 9 miles would cost \$15.6 million. Construction cost alone is justification to reject the road. And this number does not even include the cost of maintenance, which in this harsh climate could be exorbitant. Nor does it include the cable barriers on either side of the one-lane road that would be required to protect the refuge wilderness from illegal and damaging off-road vehicle traffic. According to the Washington State Department of Transportation, cable-barrier protectors cost an estimated \$44,000 per mile, with an additional \$2,000-\$5,000 per mile for annual maintenance.



FWS

Above: Tundra Swans. Inset: Brant flying in Izembek.

Caution: Danger Ahead

Frequent snowstorms, avalanches, and extreme high tides, coupled with winds exceeding 100 mph, would pose serious threats on this rugged road. Even when conditions allowed for travel, the journey would be dangerous. The claim that a road would improve health and safety totally ignores statistics from other parts of Alaska that show remarkably high rates of road accident fatalities due to inclement weather and hazardous road conditions. According to the Alaska Department of Transportation, motor vehicle accidents cost Alaska \$475 million dollars in the year 2000 alone. The proposed road could actually increase dangers and travel time, thereby posing additional health risks to King Cove residents, contrary to the road’s stated purpose.

Medevacs on a Cushion of Air

Since late 2006, the massive Suna-X hovercraft has provided medevacs and other transportation from King Cove to Cold Bay. At 98 feet long and 50 feet wide, it can carry 50 passengers and 22 tons of freight, including cars, trucks and an ambulance in case of emergency. The trip across Cold Bay takes only 20 minutes, with the vehicle reaching a top speed of 58 mph. In the 9 medevacs since September 2006 all passengers quickly and safely reached the Cold Bay airport. To date, the Suna-X has transported over 700 passengers, 50 cars and trucks, and countless off-road vehicles. King Cove has \$1 million budgeted annually for Suna-X operating costs, which are currently less than \$900,000.

Problem Solved

The Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges and the National Wildlife Refuge Association call upon Congress to reject the Road To Nowhere and oppose H.R. 2801 and S. 1680. Congress settled the problems addressed by these bills in 1998 when King Cove's concerns over health care were solved with the addition of a hovercraft for medical transports as well as improvements to their

medical clinic. Taxpayers and wildlife should not bear the burden of the additional costs and new problems created by revisiting issues that have already been resolved.

The Friends of Alaska NWRs

Educate the public and decision makers on local, national, and international levels about Alaska's National Wildlife Refuges.

Assist the refuges in accomplishing their missions through wildlife management and habitat improvement projects.

Fund refuge-oriented projects through grants, memberships, donations, and other activities.

www.alaskarefugefriends.org

The National Wildlife Refuge Association

To protect, enhance and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System, lands set aside by the American people to protect our country's diverse wildlife heritage.

www.refugenet.org

The massive Suna-X hovercraft is 98 feet long and 50 feet wide and can carry 50 passengers and 22 tons of freight. *Kvichak Marine Industries.*





Seeing Beyond our own time

2440 E. Tudor Road, PMB 283
Anchorage, AK 99507-1185
akrefugefriends@gmail.com
www.alaskarefugefriends.org



National
Wildlife Refuge
Association

1901 Pennsylvania Ave. N.W. • Suite 407 • Washington, D.C. 20006
Phone: 202-333-9075 • Fax: 202-333-9077
www.refugenet.org