

United States Senate

WASHINGTON, DC 20510

December 8, 2008

Dear Colleague:

Recently the *New York Times* editorialized about a proposal to construct a road through a wilderness area in Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, which was one of the United States' first designated sites to the Ramsar Convention's List of Wetlands of International Importance. I have enclosed the editorial for your review.

The health and safety concerns of the roughly 800 residents of the King Cove community were addressed in 1998 when Congress passed the King Cove Health and Safety Act and subsequently appropriated \$37.5 million. These federal funds were used to buy a state of the art hovercraft for medical evacuations, provide the community with advanced tele-medicine capabilities, and build a new marine terminal for the hovercraft, and a road to provide access to the terminal.

Nonetheless, significant lobbying resources have been spent to continue pushing for a road through the heart of the Izembek Refuge and wilderness area. Such a road would need to avoid the numerous ponds and priority wetland areas—taking one to two hours to drive—and would not provide safer, faster, or more cost-effective transportation than the hovercraft. In fact, I am told that the hovercraft crosses Cold Bay in about 20 minutes and to date has met every medical evacuation need in all weather conditions (over 30).

As the Senate prepares to consider public lands legislation early next Congress, I hope you will join me to oppose this ill-conceived proposal.

Sincerely,



Russell D. Feingold

Enclosure

New York Times
September 18, 2008
EDITORIAL

First a Bridge, Now a Road

First there was Alaska's Bridge to Nowhere, an infamous pork-barrel project that eventually succumbed to public derision. Now comes the Izembek road — some call it the Road to Nowhere — another Alaska boondoggle and a surefire environmental disaster.

American taxpayers should not spend a dime on this project and Harry Reid, the Senate majority leader, should make sure that they don't have to.

The road would connect the remote fishing hamlet of King Cove on the Alaskan peninsula to an airport 25 miles away in the village of Cold Bay. By all accounts, the hovercraft service on which King Cove's 800 or so residents rely to reach Cold Bay has met every evacuation need since it began in early 2007.

The problem is that the road would slice through the federally protected Izembek National Wildlife Refuge — an extraordinary preserve where millions of migratory birds congregate each fall before resuming their global travels. It would imperil not only the birds but rich concentrations of other animal life.

Congress, for good reason, designated the area as a wildlife refuge in 1960 and as permanent wilderness in 1980. When the road proposal first appeared in an appropriations bill 10 years ago, President Bill Clinton, at the urging of Bruce Babbitt, the interior secretary at the time, threatened a veto unless the project was removed.

Congress agreed, but not before the Alaska delegation — which rarely comes away empty-handed — extracted other projects worth \$37.5 million. These included a new medical facility, an upgraded airport in King Cove and the hovercraft.

Now, 10 years later, the Alaska delegation is perilously close to getting the road. The project has the enthusiastic backing of Gov. Sarah Palin, John McCain's running mate who supported the Bridge to Nowhere until it became insupportable.

As part of the careless horse trading that goes on near the end of a Congressional session, the proposal has been approved by committees in both the Senate and the House and could end up as part of a package of several hundred small public land bills. The task is to extract the proposal from the House or Senate bills before they go to a conference committee. Mr. Reid should deny Alaska a piece of pork that it does not need.