U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

PUBLIC COMMENT

Wilda Marston Theater
Loussac Library
Anchorage, Alaska
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Environmental Impact Statement
for the Proposed Land Exchange and
Road Corridor for Izembek Wildlife Refuge
MR. SCHOEN: Good evening, my name is John Schoen and I'm the senior scientist at Audubon Alaska and I appreciate the opportunity to provide scoping comments tonight. Audubon Alaska is the state office of the National Audubon Society. We have five chapters in Alaska with 2000 members, and National Audubon has a membership of half a million. Audubon has been actively involved in the Izembek issue for about a decade and our members have a high interest in the conservation of this nationally significant refuge. Izembek National Wildlife Refuge on the Alaska Peninsula is a globally significant wetlands area and of great value to migratory birds. Most of the world's Pacific Brant and substantial numbers of Emperor Geese use the Izembek wetlands during their migration. Trumpeter Swans and hundreds of thousands of waterfowl and shorebird also use these important wetland habitats. And as you also said, it's important for a number of mammals and quite a few marine mammals and fish.

There are many scientifically documented impacts to wildlife associated with roads, including loss and fragmentation of habitat, displacement of wildlife, and elevated mortality from increased human access. Compounding those issues is that the proposed road corridor is ecologically very significant habitat and provides a critical ecological linkage within the refuge and within the Alaska Peninsula. Although the land exchange provides more acreage to the refuge, those acres are not comparable in their habitat values to the small, really ecological -- ecologically significant area around Kinzerof Lagoon. Specifically, Audubon recommends that the Fish and Wildlife Service should address the following issues in your EIS: Impacts to fish and wildlife and their habitats from the proposed road, including road construction, sediment runoff and impacts to water quality and hydrology and road avoidance by wildlife. Potential impacts to eelgrass beds which provide vital habitat for many birds and marine organisms. Long term cumulative impacts to wildlife populations and their habitat from a road bisecting this significant wetlands habitat should be assessed in context with how such impacts may be confounded [sic] by climate change. Potential impacts to threatened and endangered terrestrial and marine species and their habits. A cost benefit analysis of the road that considers the
previous investments from the King Cove Health and Safety Act and also analyzes the cost effectiveness of the current transportation system to the proposed one lane gravel road that you're looking at right now. And then finally, a compatibility determination as required in the National Wildlife Refuge Systems Improvement Act.

Thank you very much for considering our comments.

MS. SPANG: Thank you for the opportunity to comment on the proposed land exchange and road corridor through Izembek Refuge. My name is Theresa Spang and I am the Alaska representative for Defenders of Wildlife. Defenders of Wildlife is a national, non-profit conservation organization dedicated to protection and restoration of all wild animals and plants in their native communities. We represent more than one million members and supporters nationwide, including over 3000 members and supporters in Alaska. Defenders of Wildlife opposes the proposed land exchange and road corridor through Izembek Refuge, an issue with which we have been involved since 1997. And we encourage the US Fish and Wildlife Service to consider the following points when preparing its environmental impact statement:

Approximately 300,000 acres of Izembek Refuge are designated as wilderness. Wilderness designation recognizes the tremendous values contained in the refuge by affording it with the highest level of federal protection. The Fish and Wildlife Service should strongly consider the precedent that would be set by withdrawing wilderness designated land from the heart of the refuge. A decision to transfer the lands and therefore remove this designation would render the permanent protection afforded by wilderness designation meaningless and would literally pave the way for other wilderness areas to be similarly lost within the national refuge system and other public lands. Among the purposes for which it was established are the conservation of fish and wildlife, including waterfowl, shorebirds, and other migratory birds and the fulfillment of international treaty obligations. If carried out, this proposal will seriously compromise these purposes.

Additionally, a road corridor would contribute to significant loss of wilderness value for those who visit the refuge and would compromise the long term viability of wildlife populations used for subsistence harvest and recreational hunting. Izembek Refuge is -- has been designated as a wetland of
international importance. The global importance and ecological integrity of the refuge is due to the fact that it holds some of the largest eelgrass beds in the world, supporting an abundant plant, animal and sea life in and around the refuge.

One of the species most likely to be impacted by the road is the Pacific Black Brant, more than 98 percent of which winter in or spend time in the refuge. With climate change expected to continue to impact ecological systems and their habitat, it is imperative that we maintain the integrity of key wildlife strongholds such as Izembek Refuge. The lands offered by the state do not provide comparable wildlife habitat to the land that would be lost. Although the lands of King Cove Corporation include wetlands and tidelands, they lack the vast eelgrass beds of Izembek and Kinzerof lagoons and they provide no net conservation gain to the landscape of the refuge system.

The King Cove access project has a long history. In 1998 37.5 million dollars was earmarked to improve the community's access to the -- to Cold Bay. These costly projects that were completed as recently as 2007 have hardly been in place long enough to demonstrate their effectiveness. On behalf of Defenders of Wildlife, I urge you to carefully and thoroughly consider in the environmental impact statement the numerous harmful impacts this proposal will have on the refuge, the environment and American tax payers.

Thank you.

MS. TRUMBLE: Good evening. My name is Della Trumble. I am speaking tonight as an official spokesperson for the King Cove Corporation and the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove. I was born and raised and have lived most of my life in King Cove. I'm a past president of the corporation and have been on the corporation board of directors for decades. I have also served as a tribal administrator and a past president for the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove. Please know that for more than half of my adult life, in fact it's actually -- it is more, I have been actively involved in advocating, promoting, lobbying for this road connecting my community to the Cold Bay airport. You should also know that my work on this issue shall never end until we achieve our goal of seeing this road become reality. I believe this reality is now getting closer and I'm hopeful, but I never thought it would take a land exchange of this magnitude and sacrifice. The fact that the King Cove Corporation is willing to
give the federal government back 20 percent of its --
of the lands that were given to us to resolve our
aboriginal land rights is still difficult for me to
accept. However, I've come to a point where we have
and can accept the fact that this is what our political
system sometimes demands when there are such diverse
opinions on a matter.

I have testified in front of Congress
many times on this topic with the same basic message,
that the road is the only logical, affordable and
dependable means of transportation connection between
King Cove and Cold Bay. I have proudly served my
community and environment with numerous national and
state media officials and politicians. We have
discussed who we are and why this road connection is so
important to our lives. I have also introduced many of
those visitors to my family and friends. And I've also
done the same for those of our staunchest critics who
have come to visit King Cove. And even though one of
these critics ultimately testified in front of the
Senate Resource Committee that there's no room for
compromise between the waterfowl and the Aleut people
and of Izembek. I have not abandoned my respect for
the rights of reasonable people to disagree and make
statements I may not understand; however, it is my
expectation that this EIS and the Secretary's public
interest findings will fairly evaluate the statement.
And I hope that this is a realistic expectation. Thank
you and I will be making oral and written comments
throughout this scoping period, wherever it may go, and
possibly, if I have to, for the rest of my life. This
is something that we've been fighting for 30 years and
I will be doing it as long as I live and as a defender
of the Aleut people and the wildlife in the Izembek
Refuge.

Thank you.

MR. CHRISTENSEN: I'm Michael
Christensen. I'm from the Eastern Aleutian Tribes and
I'm grateful for the opportunity to be in front of you
and present perhaps a human side to this question. I
have great respect for people who have been involved
for decades in this discussion. I have greater respect
for the Aleut people who have lived here for thousands
of years in harmony and peace and harmony with the
ecology, with the Brants, with the geese, with the
swans, with the wildlife. But I'm not here to talk
about people living in harmony with the environment.
I'm here to address the question of the safety and
health.

Our company provides the only health
care in these two communities in question. We provide
clinics in all five of the communities you will be
going to visit. And being the only health care
providers in both Cold Bay and King Cove, we recognize
the lifeline this road could bring to saving lives. I
have a recent example that I wanted to share with you
of exactly what I'm talking about. Recently there was
a double emergency, which in our terms means we had two
people's lives who were at risk and needed immediate
transport to higher level of medical service. The
weather was terrible. All of the normal current means
of getting those people out of King Cove were not
available, so eventually we ended up having to call the
Coast Guard. The Coast Guard had to fly a helicopter
in and evacuate those patients by helicopter to get
them to the emergency health care that they needed.
Gratefully neither of those patients died. One of
those patients had a much longer recovery period
because during that emergent golden few minutes, we had
to wait because we were not able to get to the access
that we needed. This is a daily occurrence where we
operate health care. This isn't about the theory of
living with the environment, this is people's lives
which at times are lost. And we would be very much in
favor of a nine mile corridor in order to save lives.

MR. SELBY: Not to appear overly ready
to turn my back on the federal government, but as this
is a public hearing, and I wish to face the audience.
Ken Selby, Anchorage of -- resident of Anchorage,
Alaska. I support the development of the road through
Izembek Refuge, Izembek Bay Refuge. From 1980 to 1983
I served as a planning director for the cities of King
Cove and Sand Point. My primary duty was to work with
the City Council Planning and Zoning Committee through
public hearings to develop a 10-year comprehensive
community plan. It was during this time period and
purpose of future planning the development of the city
of King Cove's socioeconomic plan segment that the
concept for a road linking King Cove to Cold Bay was
illustrated as a ground transportation corridor. It's
been 30 years, right? Furthermore, the loss of life
from the emergency air evacuation in December of 1980
and other air traffic deaths since has confirmed the
cost of life lost that could be remedied with a
comparatively low cost single lane gravel road. From a
planning perspective, considering sensitive land
conditions, cost and socioeconomic factors, proper
design, engineering and construction can adequately
address certain adverse environmental impacts while
providing safe, accessible and reliable ground transportation. The low density of use and with a right-of-way will add a minimum -- a minimized impact of disturbance to the adjacent ecosystem. I encourage the approval of the proposed road. Thank you.

MR. MACK: Most of the time I face the audience, so I'll face backwards this time. My name is Thomas Mack and I am representing the Aleut Corporation. I am an Aleut. I was born and raised in King Cove, Alaska. I'm a member of the King Cove Corporation. I'm a member of the King Cove Tribe and a shareholder of the Aleut Corporation. As I said, I grew up in King Cove and know firsthand of the desperate need of this land exchange for the health and safety of all the people of the Aleutian region. The indigenous Aleut people of King Cove were there in the region long before the refuge was -- were there long before the refuge and were not given the opportunity for a public meeting in King Cove in order to voice their concerns before the lands were turned into wilderness. If they were, they would never have agreed to closing the corridor. Travel between King Cove and Cold Bay airports can be treacherous in poor weather. I have personally experienced many dangerous flights between the two communities, including many boat rides that were just as horrible. Plane crashes are a constant concern of King Cove residents and getting people out that need medical attention as well as getting medicine into King Cove can be difficult in extreme weather conditions. Plane crashes not only affect the people living in the communities that are nearby, they affect the people in the entire state of Alaska as well.

Currently I am the president of the Aleut Corporation, which has over 3600 Aleut shareholders and is one of the 12 Alaska Native regional corporations created under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. We own over 70,000 acres of surface lands in the Aleutian Pribilof region and over 1.5 million acres of subsurface lands in the Aleutian Pribilof regions. We at the Aleut Corporation are the largest landowners in the Aleutian region. With that said, the Aleut Corporation has a resolution in support of this desperately needed land exchange. The Alaska Native Claims Regional Corporation president/CEO group who represent the 12 Alaska Native Regional Corporation and all their individual shareholders also has a resolution in support of this land exchange. The Alaska Federal of Natives, who speaks on behalf of the
more than 130,000 Alaska Natives in Alaska has a
resolution in support of this exchange. The National
Congress of American Indians, the very strong entity
who speaks on behalf of all the tribes of the United
States also has a resolution in support of this land
exchange. I have copies of all the resolutions for the
record. And last but not least, the Alaska
Congressional Delegation all support this land
exchange. I encourage those making this -- those
making the decisions to do the right thing and come
back with an EIS that is in favor of this land
exchange. This will not only positively affect the
people in the area surrounding the land exchange but
the people from all over the state and the nation.
So I thank you for the consideration
and I'll put the comments in for the record.

MR. BARNETT: I'll just look at you.
My name is Bob Barnett and I'm a long time resident of
Sand Point and not getting paid by anybody to be here.
So I'd like to begin by saying what a good deal you
have in front of you from the Fish and Wildlife about
the land trade and the state with the King Cove
Corporation. I sure hope that this process that we're
trudging through once again can prove once again that
the people who actually live and work in these
communities of Cold Bay and King Cove will get the
road. I've been involved with this project one way or
another since we deemed that there was a need for a
different mode of transportation. I was an assembly
member way back in the early 90's when we were working
with the communities and gathering support and started
planning and trying to figure out a different mode of
transportation or an alternative way to get in between
these communities. I've been involved with this
project more or less for probably three decades, either
traveling or being involved with the planning process.
After I was fortun -- after this, I was fortunate to be
a phone guy for these two communities along with Sand
Point. To give insight on how much I traveled between
these communities, during my traveling phone guy days,
I was speaking with a PenAir worker, oh, maybe about a
half a dozen years ago and we started counting up the
number of pilots I have flown with between Cold Bay,
King Cove and Sand Point and we lost count after 37.
So I have flown, I've traveled, I can tell you stories
that would, you know, make your skin crawl. And also
there's some really nice stories too. But I would just
like to comment that not only have I flown between
these communities, I have also used the marine link.
That was before the hovercraft. And there is plenty of
stories, but most of them are scary because that's one of the last resorts we use. I've been on several medivacs -- and I've got one minute. So, I've been on several medivacs, and they're not fun when you have to hoist someone up the dock. But they did put the hovercraft in and that was a major improvement but it still has its limitations. And they're going through those issues right now. And I believe there is enough time out that it's been in service that they've kind of figured out that that might not be the best solution there is. So I'm just going to reiterate that the road is the answer and I would encourage all the agencies involved with this and the land trade to just get this done. I thought it was already completed when the Congress said it was okay to do, so that's all I got to say.

Thank you.

MR. ROWLEY: My name is Dan Rowley. I'm a civil engineer on the Aleutians East Borough staff. And I started as the borough's project manager for the design and construction of the King Cove access project. That was a 16.9 mile long road that went from the airport to the northeast corner of Cold Bay. And I also managed the preliminary engineering that was the basis for the draft EIS, the final EIS, and record of decision that preceded the construction of that project. And that work included the environmental assessment of a proposed extension of the access road, termed Alternative 6, from the proposed hovercraft terminal at the northeast corner through the Izembek to a conjunction with the existing Outer Marker Road.

Given that the land exchange will be assessing the environmental impacts of a road, if the land exchange is approved, I would like to point out some facts about the road as it was presented and assessed in the previous environmental documentation.

As has been pointed out, it's simply a one lane, two-way graveled road. It's about as simple of a road as can be in terms of its impact, its footprint. It would be projected at least one foot above the existing ground to allow -- to prevent snow from accumulating. The road would be located, as it was presented in the previous EIS, approximately a half mile away from Kinzeroof Lagoon, or further if necessary to avoid any adverse impacts on waterfowl in that lagoon. It would avoid lakes and ponds that might be nesting habitats for swans. It would avoid wetlands and utilize uplands. And it would utilize existing trails, vehicle trails in the refuge to the maximum extent practical. Given that the isthmus of land
between Izembek and Kinzerof lagoons is approximately
two and a half miles at its narrowest point, the road
would be no closer than two miles to Izembek Lagoon.
Waterfowl using that lagoon would not be affected by
road traffic. None of the drainage courses that the
road crosses would flow into Izembek Lagoon. The
estimated length of the road would be about 16.6 miles.
The last thing I'd comment on is that based on an
estimated 3500 air travelers annually, the estimated
average daily traffic on the road would be 35 vehicles
per day. That traffic would be almost entirely
passenger vehicles. As a mitigation measure to
preclude having vehicles leaving the road and traveling
into the refuge or wilderness, the borough agreed to
erect a two-strand cable barrier on each side of the
road.
The access project, the King Cove
access project EIS required obtaining numerous federal
and state permits for the construction of the road.
Also several resource protection plans were developed.
Each of those permits and resource protection plans
contained numerous mitigation measures which the
borough agreed to adhere to. A list of those measures
is attached to my testimony. It would be the borough's
commitment to have those same mitigation measures apply
to the proposed road through the Izembek.
Thank you very much.

MS. BOYETTE: My name is Sharon Boyette
and I'm the administrator of the Aleutians East
Borough. The communities of King Cove and Cold Bay and
the Izembek Refuge are within the boundaries of our
borough and I'm pleased to be here today to make a
comment about the proposed land exchange and the road
corridor through the Izembek Refuge and to see that
this process is off and running. I'm really proud to
be part of this effort that is really led by the
residents of King Cove. And their idea is to bring a
measure of safety to their friends and neighbors
especially, and piece of mind, especially for those
people that have small children or who have aging
parents or perhaps a family member with special health
concerns.
The land exchange discussed here I
think is nothing short of amazing. The King Cove folks
have never asked for a handout or a freebie or any
special government consideration, but rather have paid
dearly for their -- and with their only currency, which
is their aboriginal lands, for access to an airport
that they can depend on and to help in emergencies.
Most of the people that I know don't give a thought to
what they would probably consider to be their right to
get to a dependable airport or to medical care, but
that's what this land exchange is really about and what
the King Cove folks have contributed their land to
achieve. I believe that we can expect minimal
environmental impacts to Izembek Refuge from a one lane
gravel road less than 20 miles long. But nonetheless,
I expect the mitigation measures outlined in the
previous EIS will more than protect the resources that
are valuable to the residents of King Cove and Cold
Bay. Nobody knows any better that the Izembek Refuge
is a jewel than the people who live out there in our
region.

The Aleutians East Borough will be
submitting detailed and formal comments in writing.
We'll ask for the EIS to look at specifics and we'll
ask the Secretary to exercise his trust
responsibilities to the Aleut people, especially
considering that they didn't have a voice when the
refuge was formed.

But I thank you for this opportunity to
speak today and I'll see you again.

MR. TILISTON: For the record, I'm
Jules Tiliston. I live here in Anchorage and I am a
consultant tonight with King Cove, the City of King
Cove. In my past lives I was the third party
contractor for the EIS that we've just been talking
about, and I can honestly say I do not envy the person
that gets that job because it will be very difficult to
balance the resource values, the trust values, the
national designation. It's going to be very difficult
and I don't envy them at all.

What I would like to do, however, is
say a couple of things. One is, a year and a half ago
I had to do a categorical exclusion for DOT to complete
funding for the road. I had to wade through all of the
permits and the modifications for this road, the
hovercraft and everything else. And based on that,
everything seemed to be working. There's been no NOVs.
And Dan just talked about giving you those at least as
a starting point.

I'd like to move to the legislation and
I do want to recognize the good faith efforts that the
refuge and the service has made in trying to meet very
difficult time schedules, but very honestly, we're not
meeting them. So, that's just kind of a first one.
There's all kinds of reasons, but we need a complete --
timely completion of the EIS, we need a timely decision
by the Secretary because Congress established seven
years to build the road and that clock is running. If
the Secretary says no deal, that's the end of it. If he said it is, then there's one year to get permits. So there's some other timeframes.

In terms of legal issues that I would recommend the EIS consider, first of all, ownerships. I've heard references to eelgrass. Eelgrass is in state ownership. Kinzerof is in state ownership and the legislation would require, if the Secretary deems it's in the public interest, to designate Kinzerof as a state game ranch. That's exactly the same action that was done by the state legislature in 1960 for the Izembek game range, which is in effect where the Ramsar decision is. So ownership is very important to lay out. Who owns what, what are the designations. And it is a very confusing situation.

Secondly, the effect of the land exchange on subsistence uses and access to resources. I know you're going to do it, but I think it needs to be on the record, but it's a very important issue. You need to evaluate the potential fragmentation of wetlands, especially intertidal wetlands that would be gained or lost by the service, with particular attention to the Ramsar Convention designation for the Izembek area. You need to look at the consequences of the cable barrier along both sides of the new road on caribou migration. You need to look at the recommended measures that the state should consider in the establishment of the Kinzerof game ranch. You need to consider whether Title 11 does or does not apply if the Secretary deems that it's in the public interest to proceed with the land exchange. You need to consider whether Section 22(g) of the Native Claims Settlement Act does or does not apply. You need to consider whether a relocated easement -- let's see, it's EIN 9C4 that's in the vicinity of the northeast terminal that was moved. How's that going to be handled? As I say, I'm looking strictly as issues that when we did the first EIS, they always cropped up at the end and I think it's very important that when you move forward these are things that you consider.

Finally, the EIS needs to be thorough in evaluating all of the scoping comments to minimize litigation. We're not going to do it. We'll probably get sued when it's all said and done, but you've got the EIS, you've got the Secretary's decision, and this EIS is the basis for doing that, so it really has to be a top notch job. All of the permitting agencies, federal, state, local, and the need to be involved as well as for the public on what terms and mitigation measures are going to be required. Because at the end
of the process, if the Secretary determines that it's in the public interest, there should not be another round of NEPA on the road. There should not be a supplemental EIS for the road. There should not be a categorical exclusion. In other words, do it right. Do it thoroughly. And finally, you need to have an evaluation of the total impacts of the with and without. With the road you no longer have a hovercraft operating through a series of areas with waterfowl, marine mammals, et cetera, et cetera. So there's this whole balance of what goes away with the road that needs to be considered.

Thank you.

I do have written comments. I'll submit them electronically since I figure that's easy.

MS. LOYA: Hi. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. As it's been identified, the lands in question are a designated wilderness. I think it's important that the EIS identify the importance of wild habitat, and that is the habitat which experiences limited types of disturbance to sensitive migratory and resident species. That is the type of habitat which is un-fragmented, giving species the time and space to rest and adapt to a changing environment and abundant stressors along their migration routes.

As an ecologist with the Wilderness Society here in Anchorage, we look forward to an EIS that quantitatively addresses the cumulative effects of the proposed road as an additive stress on the Izembek isthmus. This should address not just individual species and their habitats, not just the impacts to soils, to water and to air, but a quantitative evaluation of the cumulative effects on the ecosystem as an integrated system of all these physical and biological components. An important component of this quantitative cumulative effects assessment is the impacts of climate change on the area. And important question is what changes has the refuge observed through its climate and habitat monitoring and how do you expect existing climate stressors coupled with the road to impact wildlife in the area. Global climate models predict warmer, drier conditions in the future. How will this further impact habitat quality on the isthmus? And how will the loss of 206 acres of critical wildlife habitat coupled with climate stressors impact species using this area?

Eelgrass productivity is controlled by both climate and water quality, so the EIS needs to
quantify to what extent the road and sediments in runoff will impact the eelgrass in the adjacent lagoons. And this is all happening in a time of warming temperatures which affect eelgrass productivity as well as the impacts of sea level rise, which through light attenuation affect productivity. Additional considerations for the cumulative effects impact assessment include impacts to salmon spawning, spawning tributaries of Izembek Lagoon, as well as the struggling southern caribou peninsula herd. These all need to be considered, also the socioeconomic impacts to local subsistence users. And on a personal note as a resident of Eagle River, Alaska, living at the end of a 12 mile road, through -- much of it through Chugach State Park, I urge you to consider the true safety of a road as access. There's also problems with traveling in blizzards and impacts associated with being on the ground and travel.

So, thank you.

UNIDENTIFIED SPEAKER: Miss, will you state your name, please?

MS. LOYA: Yes. Wendy Loya.

MS. FERGUSON: My name is Tara Ferguson. I do work for Eastern Aleutian Tribes and I've also been a resident out in the region of Sand Point and Cold Bay for most of my life. Our organization provides health care to both Cold Bay and King Cove as was previously stated. The King Cove to Cold Bay road is an essential transportation link to transport patients, medical providers, and community members to Cold Bay. There is no hospital in King Cove, all medivacs must go through Cold Bay in order to get into Anchorage to a hospital. I have helped both in the air and on the ground via boat to transport many patients. In the air, very dangerous at times but for patients' lives we have transported to get them to Cold Bay to a medevac flight. Boats are regularly used to transport patients when the weather is bad. There isn't a harbor in Cold Bay, and so a dock is used, which is very unsafe at times. The Coast Guard is used only when other forms of transportation have been exhausted. So I urge you to consider the essential transportation link of the road and to remember that we're talking about people's lives.

Thank you.

MR. THORSON: My name is Scott Thorson and I'm a longtime resident of Anchorage, former airline pilot in the Aleutian Islands for several years. My father was in Cold Bay during World War II, so I got a pretty fair background in -- out in the
Chain. The primary issue here is really one of a --
the people that live in King Cove were there before
they ever made this wildlife refuge and they need to
have a reasonable way to get medical treatment and to
get in and out of King Cove. I can tell you as a pilot
you have no idea how scary the flying can be between
King Cove and Cold Bay. There's mountains, when the
wind is blowing, there's down air. It's very difficult
to control the airplane and I -- you know, even in a
bigger airplane and then you can get into King Cove,
like the Electra or the YS-11, you know, it's a pretty
rock and roll ride. The boat that they have that runs
between King Cove and Cold Bay doesn't really work all
that well when the weather is bad. I mean, it's -- you
know, if the weather is not bad, take an airplane, but
if both airplane and marine transportation is not
available when the weather is bad, you know, that
pretty much limits it back to a road.

And I think that the provisions that
the King Cove Corporation has made, what they're giving
up, frankly, I think the people in Washington ought to
really be ashamed of that, stealing their land that way
just so they can get a road going over there. Anyway,
I strongly support the road. I wish you guys would get
on it. I remember this issue has been going on since
my daughter was in high school and she's like over 30
years old now, so it's just time to, you know, get it
moving and make it happen.

Thank you.

MS. LOWE: Hello. I'm a resident of
Anchorage and I've lived in Alaska about a dozen years
and I have been listening to the other speakers and I
would urge you to look into Providence Hospital. I've
been there. They have helicopters that are available
to all the villages throughout the state of Alaska.
And I've visited many of the villages in the state of
Alaska, and whenever they need medical help, they can
easily get to Providence Hospital, the helicopters and
other planes are always available. And the
communications between Providence and all the villages
is very excellent. So I'd like you to look into that,
you know, about the need.

Because the way I look at -- over-
development starts with a small road and if the State
of Alaska has anything to do about it, the current
state legislature and the current state Department of
Fish and Game had very little respect for wildlife.
They look at it as commodities to make money and
they're all for developing the state of Alaska. This
is a unique wilderness area that you won't find
anywhere else in the world, and I have traveled all
over the world, where people can live with the wildlife
and enjoy them, this gorgeous scenery, drop dead
gorgeous scenery. But we like having the animals and
they are not just commodities. So I would really
appreciate you doing thorough research about what will
happen if there's just this one little road and if it's
turned over to the State of Alaska. I know if it is --
if you do have the road built, I'd like to see the US
government get more involved in what's going on here in
the state because of the way the state legislature is
behaving towards our wilderness and our wildlife.

MR. PORTMAN: Carl Portman, Deputy
Director of the Resource Development Council. I am
here to express RDC's support for the land exchange
because the federal gov -- between the federal
government, the State of Alaska and King Cove
Corporation for the purpose of constructing a single
lane gravel road between the communities of King Cove
and Cold Bay. For a decade, over a decade, RDC has
consistently advocated for a road link between King
Cove and Cold Bay. We strongly believe that a road
corridor from King Cove to the all-weather airport in
Cold Bay is in the public interest. In our view, this
is a public safety and human rights issue which should
be given the highest priority. The proposed land
exchange would involve the removal of only 206 acres
within the Izembek wilderness for the road corridor and
1600 acres of federal lands within the Alaska Maritime
National Wildlife Refuge. Overall the exchange would
add more than 56,000 acres to the Izembek and Alaska
peninsula national wildlife refuges and designate
43,000 acres as wilderness. Clearly this exchange
would provide a net gain for the national wildlife
refuge system while providing a vital public safety and
human health access corridor for King Cove residents to
Cold Bay and its all-weather airport. The land trade
is more than fair and the road would be narrow and
unobtrusive. The road would be closed to commercial
traffic and mitigation strategies will allow the road,
the environment and the wildlife to coexist. The road
would solve the community's perennial problems with
access to the outside world, especially in poor weather
conditions.

Meanwhile the marine link between the
two communities has not solved King Cove's
transportation challenges in reaching Cold Bay and its
airport. The hovercraft requires a substantial subsidy
which cannot be sustained. Moreover, poor weather
conditions can prevent the operation of the hovercraft
while the -- which is the entire -- while the entire reason for improved access is largely because of the region's weather. The road has always been the community's first choice because it provides residents with the greatest amount of security, mobility, peace of mind and quality of life. The spirit of this proposed land exchange would recognize and honor with equal regard the vital human needs alongside wildlife and wilderness. The EIS must acknowledge local needs and the fact that current transportation infrastructure does not meet these needs and that the proposed road best meets them.

RDC will be submitting more detailed written comments before the April 30th deadline and we thank you for the opportunity to provide comments here tonight.

MR. SAMUELSON: My name is Bill Samuelson, I'm just representing myself. I propose instead of building an 18 mile road, why not build a two mile runway in King Cove so they get an all-weather runway there? Or build a little hospital -- you've already spent tens or probably 20 million dollars on this project so far from the hovercraft and so on on the road. Why not build a little hospital in the town and give them a good doctor so they don't need to have this road? And most people in Cold Bay are -- or King Cove, sorry, are boat people, so I feel that if they build this road boat traffic on Izembek will explode and there will be -- disturbance will explode on the Brant and the geese and the ducks. And then there's enforcement issues. Who is jurisdiction -- who's going to maintain the road? Who is going to pick up abandoned vehicles? Who is going to pick up the trash? What about drinking and driving on this road? What about a whiteout condition when somebody crashes on the road there and gets killed in a whiteout blizzard? And how about caribou and bears? How do you enforce the hunting there where there's state, federal, tribal enforcement? Who's going to enforce these issues? And what about people -- who is going to rescue people who have crashed or stalled on the road in the middle of a whiteout blizzard? Who is going to take care of that problem? And the commercial activity such as guiding. I understand the road is not for commercial activities. What if a guide takes a bear hunter out or a caribou hunter or a duck hunter? How do you enforce that? Are you going to have people checking IDs and checking guiding licenses along the way? I don't know. And then there's the sea otters and seals that will be hunted in Izembek by the people from King Cove. How do
you enforce that or what are you going to do? Who is  

enforcing these things? The seals and the sea otters  

will be hunted and shot because it's legal for the  

Natives to do it. And then Emperors. In a perfect  

world Emperors won't be shot, but this is not a perfect  

world and I think there will be quite a few Emperors  

shot, which is -- and Steller's, which are -- you can't  

hunt them either. And who's going to enforce these  

things, that's my question.

Thank you for your time.

MR. HOFF: Good evening, everybody. My  

name is Marvin Hoff. I'm speaking tonight as a  

resident of King Cove, born and raised there, and I was  

also the past president of the Agdaagux tribe and a  

shareholder of the King Cove Corporation. I am also a  

veteran and served my country in the Vietnam war. Now  

I'm asking that same federal government to serve me in  

fairly evaluating the proposed Izembek land exchange so  

that we can finally get the road link we desperately  

need to the Cold Bay airport. As a former president of  

the Agdaagux tribe, I testified in front of Congress  

back in 1997 and said that the only logical, affordable  

and dependable transportation connection between King  

Cove and Cold Bay is a simple road. I said it then and  

I say it again now. The only logical, affordable and  

safest transportation connection between King Cove and  

Cold Bay is a simple road. We appreciate what Congress  

did back in the late 1990's, trying to solve our  

transportation problem, but the reality is that  

hovercraft has not solved our problems with predictable  

and timely access to the Cold Bay airport.

Now the unbelievable amount of land my  

corporation is willing to give to the federal  

government along with the State of Alaska to hopefully  

allow for this road is absolutely mind boggling to me,  

but whatever price we must pay for this simple road is  

worth it because we need the piece of mind knowing we  

can have safe and timely access to the Cold Bay  

airport. Please know I am speaking from the heart on  

this issue. It was my wife Kathy, the only nurse in  

town at the time, who boarded that fateful night in  

blizzard connections [sic] to get a severally injured  

fisherman to the Cold Bay airport for a medevac flight  

to Anchorage, trying to save one life became instead  

losing four lives. I sincerely believe a road would  

have prevented this terrible tragedy, including the  

life-altering effect it had on me.

Thank you.

MR. ROTHE: My name is Tom Rothe from  

Eagle River, Alaska. Retired from Fish and Game with
30 years worth of wildlife biology and worked with habitat issues. I'm kind of flying by the seat of my pants and will offer a few comments and hopefully offer a more articulate version on paper later. But I had a few thoughts looking at the materials and having thought about this issue over the years. And so, first of all, I would encourage the service as I would encourage any resource management agency to use the best available science and technical data throughout this whole thing. Wilderness is, I'm sure, squishy to you as it is to almost everyone else. Everybody has a sense of values, but that will probably be the hardest thing to maybe get a grip on if you're going to really assess what this proposal means.

I would -- I'm also getting, I guess, a little frustrated at the hyperbole I hear in the news and in public statements about the refuge, and having been to Cold Bay and on the refuge for quite a bit, I don't think this road is really going to tear out the heart of the refuge. The heart beats in Izembek Lagoon and Kinzerof, not in the road corridor. But, so I would encourage you to be discreet about just kind of how you characterize the values and really stick to the essence of things.

I guess my second area of interest is reviewing all the alternatives within the constraint of the law, and I haven't really done the homework of looking at the legislation, but having lots of experience with roads and environmental impacts in the Prudhoe Bay oilfields, Kuparuk fields and other things in the North Slope, I will say that some of the constraints may be really problematic and you should strive in your analysis to look at every conceivable technical option that's available within the constraints. First of all, gravel roads are not good things. The North Slope is covered with gravel roads. There's huge dust impacts, early melt, mineral contamination of the soils and damage to tundra. It affects wetlands, it affects all sorts of stuff. There is a little wind at Cold Bay, so you can imagine the dust shadow that could eventually develop along a road like that.

Secondly, you know, it's location, location with every facility. And in this case, I don't know how much flexibility you can look at as far as the corridor or the road alignment. You can build a pretty good road if you have options and you know how to maneuver around natural resources and terrain features.

Third, the constraint to one lane I
think is peculiar given that access control is the ultimate thing here, building a one lane road may be economically short-sighted and may not be the best thing in terms of safety and viability. The third thing is I would encourage the service to use due diligence in addressing the effects on wildlife. I'm very familiar with this area of assessment. Disturbance and displacement is notoriously difficult to quantify and assess in terms of survival and productivity populations, and it's going to be tough, I'm sure, for you to relate impact in this one specific area to population level effects. But you have some really smart folks and USGS to help you, and I would hope you'd be able to apply whatever you have available to you.

In terms of impacts to the -- there are many, many mitigation tools and options available developed on the North Slope, Trans-Alaska Pipeline, that you really need to look at in potential impacts of this project. Seasonal traffic control, noise reduction technologies, lots and lots of wildlife and fish crossing designs that were pioneered with Alaska projects. I really believe the best projects are built with the dynamic tension and often conflict between builders and regulators, and especially between engineers and biologists. You put them in a room and sometimes they come up with some really good ideas.

Bottom line here and where my personal concerns lie is conservation of wildlife. I'm a dedicated waterfowl hunter and been to Cold Bay a lot of times to avail myself of that activity. The refuge is there to sustain the resources and public uses and I'm hoping the service remains objective in terms of serving all of the public. I've heard claims that this group deserves more Brant than that group. What you're really talking about is increasing public access potentially for everybody. And that access in itself, apologies to Bill, my buddy, isn't the problem. If there's a harvest problem, you have regulations to address it. If there are violators, you have law enforcement to address it. So just the idea that getting access within a mile of Kinzerof is a bad thing for wildlife is not necessarily the case in terms of hunting and fishing. So, anyway, just to offer a few of those thoughts and, you know, I'm sure that's all swirling in your head and I know there's lots of fun to come, so I'll look forward to participating in the democracy involved.

(Off record)

(END OF PROCEEDINGS)
TRANSCRIBER'S CERTIFICATE

I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the foregoing pages numbered 02 through 21 are a true, accurate, and complete transcript of proceedings of a public meeting on the above-referenced matter, recorded by Computer Matrix Court Reporters whose business address is 135 Christensen Drive, Suite 2, Anchorage, Alaska, and transcribed under my direction to the best of our knowledge and ability.

______________________________  _____________________________
Date                    Salena A. Hile, Transcriber