

Secretary Salazar Should Say No to a Road Through Wilderness at Izembek National Wildlife Refuge

Proposed Project is Unnecessary, a Waste of Taxpayer Dollars, and Threatens America's Legacy of Wilderness Conservation



Now that Congress has passed the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-11), federally protected Wilderness in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is in great peril. The bill would allow internationally significant Wilderness lands to be removed from federal protection in order to construct an unnecessary road between the Alaskan communities of King Cove and Cold Bay.

The Izembek proposal should never have been included in an otherwise stellar package of public lands legislation. Its provisions are contrary to the generations-long American

commitment to protecting our treasured lands. While many in the conservation community supported the lands package as a whole because of its overall benefits, environmental organizations were united in their opposition to the proposed road, and worked tirelessly to get the Izembek provision removed from the package. We will continue to work with the Interior Department to defeat the proposal.

The community of King Cove claims a road across Izembek's isthmus is needed to assure safe transport to Cold Bay in the event of an emergency. In truth, U.S. taxpayers provided a safe and reliable transportation system to the King Cove community in 1998, when Congress appropriated \$37.5 million to improve the community's medical facilities, build a connecting road from King Cove to a new marine terminal, and purchase a state-of-the-art \$9 million hovercraft that has already performed more than 30 successful medical evacuations, transporting a fully staffed ambulance to Cold Bay in as little as 20 minutes in nearly all kinds of weather.

Building the road would cause irreparable harm to Izembek's land, water, and wildlife, adding additional stress to an ecosystem already stressed by the accelerating effects of climate change. To give away irreplaceable Wilderness land—and in the process to compromise the migratory birds, marine life, and mammals that rely on Izembek's unique wetlands habitat—would be reckless and short-sighted. Can we afford to risk the brown bear, caribou, sea otters, and hundreds of thousands of the world's migratory birds that rely on Izembek's Wilderness to nest, rest, forage, feed, and migrate—all for the sake of a road that's not needed? Can we afford to risk subsistence resources that sustain many northern and western Alaska native villages? The answer should be a resounding no.

Interior Secretary Salazar has the option to stop this wasteful and harmful project, and he should do so. Building a road through Izembek's wilderness lands would undermine America's history of conservation, and would place Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and all of America's protected wild lands at the mercy of irresponsible and unnecessary development. We cannot afford to take this risk, and we hope that Secretary Salazar agrees.

Alaska Wilderness League, Blue Goose Alliance, Defenders of Wildlife, Earthjustice, Environment America, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, Friends of Pool 9—Upper Mississippi River Refuge, League of Conservation Voters, National Audubon Society, National Wildlife Refuge Association, Natural Resources Defense Council, Republicans for Environmental Protection, Sierra Club, The Wilderness Society, World Wildlife Fund US