

PRESS RELEASE

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Alaska's King Cove Road Supporters Scheduled To Meet Face to Face with Staunchest Critics in Washington, D.C. This Week

Proponents of the Land Exchange Bill Also Return to Nation's Capital to Lobby Lawmakers before Congressional Hearing is Scheduled

King Cove, AK – Sept. 19, 2007 – This week community and Native leaders from King Cove, Alaska and the Aleutians East Borough will meet in person for the first time with the president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association (NWRA) to discuss the contentious congressional Izembek Enhancement bill. The NWRA is one of the bill's most vocal critics.

The State of Alaska, the King Cove Corporation, the Aleutians East Borough, the Agdaagux Tribe and the City of King Cove hope Congress will pass the bill to provide reliable and safe transportation access from King Cove to Cold Bay's all-weather airport, located about 25 miles away. Supporters of the bill tried unsuccessfully to meet with the National Wildlife Refuge Association's president last February.

"We're excited to finally have this opportunity to meet face to face with Evan Hirsche, the president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association this week," said Ernest Weiss, mayor of King Cove. "Opening a dialogue about this matter is crucial to the indigenous Aleut people of King Cove who have been struggling for decades to gain access to Cold Bay's airport for health, safety and quality-of-life factors," he added. "We're hopeful we can find some common ground."

In July, the National Wildlife Refuge Association produced a brochure entitled "The Road to Nowhere." The King Cove Corporation, The Agdaagux Tribe and the City of King Cove wrote a letter to NWRA president Evan Hirsche, stating that the document is full of misinformation, very unfair and inaccurate. Furthermore, the three groups said the NWRA's implication that Peter Pan Seafoods, located in King Cove, is the silent yet leading partner in this effort to get a road built is completely untrue.

"As indigenous people, we felt insulted by the brochure," said Della Trumble, president of the King Cove Corporation. "We were appalled that that the NWRA produced this document without ever contacting us. Nevertheless, we're looking forward to meeting with Mr. Hirsche this week to discuss the land exchange bill further and hopefully keep the channels of communication open."

Three months ago, Rep. Don Young (R-Alaska), Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-Alaska) and Sen. Ted Stevens (R-Alaska) introduced companion legislation (H.R. 2801 and S.1680) that would add 61,723 acres of key wildlife habitat to the Izembek and Alaska Peninsula Wildlife Refuges. In exchange for this land, the State of Alaska would receive a right-of-way for a single-lane road through Alaska's Izembek National Wildlife Refuge from King Cove to Cold Bay, a community located about 25 miles away.

The Cold Bay airport was built in 1942 during World War II and has the third longest runway in Alaska. However, getting from King Cove to Cold Bay's airport can be extremely difficult and even impossible at times because King Cove is often plagued by gale force winds or fog. It can be a life-threatening situation for people needing to access major medical facilities in Anchorage during health emergencies. Since 1979, eleven people have died while flying in this flight corridor during questionable weather.

In June 2007, Dale Hall, the director of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, wrote a letter to the House of Representatives praising the land trade bill. Hall said the lands include large areas of tundra swan nesting, as well as caribou movement, and their wilderness values are significant.

"This bill offers a proposal that we believe warrants future discussion to fully determine if the needs of both the King Cove residents and the people of the United States would be properly evaluated and met," Hall said in the letter. "We recognize the special needs of Alaska residents to have access to medical, dental and other care," he added.

A Senate hearing on the land trade bill is expected some time next month. Community and native leaders representing King Cove will be in Washington, D.C. Sept. 17 – 21, 2007, to meet with senators and congressional representatives to educate them further about the significance of this legislation.

A separate meeting is scheduled this week with the Republicans for Environmental Protection (REP). Three months ago, REP, along with several other environmental groups, signed a letter addressed to Congress opposing the land exchange bill. King Cove and Aleutians East

Borough community leaders are planning to provide REP with additional information about the legislation and are optimistic they will find major areas of agreement.

The Aleuts have lived in this remote area of the Alaska Peninsula for more than 4,000 years. In 1980, the federal government designated a major portion of the land that lies between King Cove and Cold Bay as wilderness, without consulting the indigenous people. That action prohibited the construction of a road between the two communities.

“We believe this is a tremendous opportunity for both the federal government and the Aleut people of King Cove to resolve a long-standing issue of safe and reliable transportation,” said Trumble. “We have stepped up to the plate in good faith to resolve this issue.”

“This land exchange legislation is a windfall for the United States,” said Weiss. “It also shows respect for the people of King Cove. We are optimistic the process will move forward with fair consideration and a great outcome for all.”

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