

Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange and Road Corridor Environmental Impact Statement

Questions and Answers

Q1: What is the purpose of an environmental impact statement?

A1: An environmental impact statement (EIS) is required by the National Environmental Policy Act of 1969 (NEPA) to evaluate significant Federal projects. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service is required to analyze the effects of a proposed project on Federal lands.

Q2: Why is the US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) writing an EIS for Izembek NWR?

A2: In the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (the Act), Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to prepare an EIS to conduct an analysis of the proposed land exchange with the State of Alaska and the King Cove Corporation. In addition, the Act required an analysis of a road corridor through Izembek NWR in designated Wilderness between the communities of Cold Bay and King Cove, Alaska.

Q3: What is the scope of the EIS?

A3: The EIS evaluates a three-party land exchange that would add approximately 56,000 acres to the Izembek and Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuges (NWR), designate approximately 43,000 acres as wilderness, transfer 1,600 acres of refuge lands on Sitkinak Island to the State of Alaska, and transfer an estimated 200-acre, 9-mile corridor through Izembek NWR and Izembek Wilderness to the State, to allow a road to be constructed between the communities of King Cove and Cold Bay within the Izembek NWR and Izembek Wilderness.

Q4: What is the purpose of Congressionally-designated wilderness?

A4: The purposes of the Wilderness Act are to: a) secure an enduring resource of wilderness; b) protect and preserve the wilderness character of areas within the National Wilderness Preservation System; c) administer the System for the use and enjoyment of the American people in a way that will leave these areas unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as wilderness; and d) gather and disseminate information regarding the use and enjoyment of wilderness areas.

Q5: How long does the EIS process take?

A5: The process takes approximately three years from the beginning of scoping to a Record of Decision. The Service conducted public involvement and scoping in spring 2010; developed and analyzed alternatives in 2010 and 2011; and will release the draft EIS in March 2012. A 60-day public comment period will follow release with public meetings in Anchorage, Alaska and the 5 communities surrounding Izembek NWR. Public comments received will be analyzed and any necessary revisions of the draft will occur in the spring and summer of 2012. The final EIS will be released in the fall of 2012. A Record of Decision and a Public Interest Finding will be completed no earlier than 30 days after release of the final EIS.

Q6: Who is involved in development of the EIS?

A6: The project planning team includes the Service (lead agency), U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration - Western Federal Lands Division, State of Alaska, Aleutians East Borough, City of King Cove, King Cove Corporation, the Agdaagux Tribe, and the Belkofski Tribe as formal cooperators. A third-party contractor is preparing the EIS under the direction of the Service. The Environmental Protection Agency and Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council also are working with the planning team, though they are not formal cooperators.

Q7: What past NEPA actions have occurred?

A7: The King Cove Health and Safety Act of the Omnibus Consolidated and Emergency Supplemental Appropriations Act of 1999 (Public Law 105-277) provided the Aleutians East Borough with \$37.5 million to construct a year round marine-road transportation system between the cities of King Cove and Cold Bay, Alaska; build a health clinic; and make airport upgrades. The Army Corps of Engineers prepared a final EIS in December of 2003, which analyzed the effects of a 17.2 mile access road, two hovercraft ramps and terminals located on the Northeast Corner of Cold Bay and Cross Wind Cove on the west side of Cold Bay, and a hovercraft. The 2003 EIS also discussed a road corridor through Izembek NWR designated Wilderness but a full analysis of the road corridor was not completed because the Law stated that a marine-transportation system was to be analyzed.

Q8: What happens next?

A8: Once the comment period closes, the Service will analyze the public comments and prepare the final EIS. A summary of the comments received and responses to substantive comments will be included in the final EIS, which is scheduled for release in the fall of 2012. The final EIS will be followed by a Record of Decision made by the Service. A Record of Decision will be completed no earlier than 30 days after release of the final EIS. Following the Record of Decision, the Secretary of the Interior will determine if the land exchange is in the public interest. The Secretary will make the final decision and he is not bound by the Service's preferred alternative or Record of Decision.

Q9: What are the wildlife values at Izembek National Wildlife Refuge?

Q9: Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is the smallest and one of the most ecologically unique of Alaska's refuges. Most of the refuge is designated wilderness and home to a diverse array of wildlife species including five species of salmon; furbearers such as wolf, fox and wolverine; large mammals such as caribou, moose and brown bears; shorebirds, seabirds; and other waterfowl. For more information about the refuge visit, <http://izembek.fws.gov>.