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U.S. FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

PUBLIC SCOPING MEETING

PUBLIC COMMENT

Wilda Marston Theater  
Loussac Library  
Anchorage, Alaska  
March 4, 2010

Environmental Impact Statement  
for the Proposed Land Exchange and  
Road Corridor for Izembek Wildlife Refuge

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P R O C E E D I N G S  
(Anchorage, Alaska - 3/4/2010)  
(On record)

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

1 previous investments from the King Cove Health and  
2 Safety Act and also analyzes the cost effectiveness of  
3 the current transportation system to the proposed one  
4 lane gravel road that you're looking at right now. And  
5 then finally, a compatibility determination as required  
6 in the National Wildlife Refuge Systems Improvement  
7 Act.

8 Thank you very much for considering our  
9 comments.

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

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

45 Additionally, a road corridor would  
46 contribute to significant loss of wilderness value for  
47 those who visit the refuge and would compromise the  
48 long term viability of wildlife populations used for  
49 subsistence harvest and recreational hunting. Izembek  
50 Refuge is -- has been designated as a wetland of

1 international importance. The global importance and  
2 ecological integrity of the refuge is due to the fact  
3 that it holds some of the largest eelgrass beds in the  
4 world, supporting an abundant plant, animal and sea  
5 life in and around the refuge.

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

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

31           Thank you.

32           MS. TRUMBLE: Good evening. My name is  
33 Della Trumble. I am speaking tonight as an official  
34 spokesperson for the King Cove Corporation and the  
35 Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove. I was born and raised and  
36 have lived most of my life in King Cove. I'm a past  
37 president of the corporation and have been on the  
38 corporation board of directors for decades. I have  
39 also served as a tribal administrator and a past  
40 president for the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove. Please  
41 know that for more than half of my adult life, in fact  
42 it's actually -- it is more, I have been actively  
43 involved in advocating, promoting, lobbying for this  
44 road connecting my community to the Cold Bay airport.  
45 You should also know that my work on this issue shall  
46 never end until we achieve our goal of seeing this road  
47 become reality. I believe this reality is now getting  
48 closer and I'm hopeful, but I never thought it would  
49 take a land exchange of this magnitude and sacrifice.  
50 The fact that the King Cove Corporation is willing to

1 give the federal government back 20 percent of its --  
2 of the lands that were given to us to resolve our  
3 aboriginal land rights is still difficult for me to  
4 accept. However, I've come to a point where we have  
5 and can accept the fact that this is what our political  
6 system sometimes demands when there are such diverse  
7 opinions on a matter.

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

36 Thank you.

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

50 Our company provides the only health

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

26 Thank you for your time.

27 MR. SELBY: Not to appear overly ready  
28 to turn my back on the federal government, but as this  
29 is a public hearing, and I wish to face the audience.  
30 Ken Selby, Anchorage of -- resident of Anchorage,  
31 Alaska. I support the development of the road through  
32 Izembek Refuge, Izembek Bay Refuge. From 1980 to 1983  
33 I served as a planning director for the cities of King  
34 Cove and Sand Point. My primary duty was to work with  
35 the City Council Planning and Zoning Committee through  
36 public hearings to develop a 10-year comprehensive  
37 community plan. It was during this time period and  
38 purpose of future planning the development of the city  
39 of King Cove's socioeconomic plan segment that the  
40 concept for a road linking King Cove to Cold Bay was  
41 illustrated as a ground transportation corridor. It's  
42 been 30 years, right? Furthermore, the loss of life  
43 from the emergency air evacuation in December of 1980  
44 and other air traffic deaths since has confirmed the  
45 cost of life lost that could be remedied with a  
46 comparatively low cost single lane gravel road. From a  
47 planning perspective, considering sensitive land  
48 conditions, cost and socioeconomic factors, proper  
49 design, engineering and construction can adequately  
50 address certain adverse environmental impacts while

1 providing safe, accessible and reliable ground  
2 transportation. The low density of use and with a  
3 right-of-way will add a minimum -- a minimized impact  
4 of disturbance to the adjacent ecosystem. I encourage  
5 the approval of the proposed road.

6 Thank you.

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

35 Currently I am the president of the  
36 Aleut Corporation, which has over 3600 Aleut  
37 shareholders and is one of the 12 Alaska Native  
38 regional corporations created under the Alaska Native  
39 Claims Settlement Act. We own over 70,000 acres of  
40 surface lands in the Aleutian Pribilof region and over  
41 1.5 million acres of subsurface lands in the Aleutian  
42 Pribilof regions. We at the Aleut Corporation are the  
43 largest landowners in the Aleutian region. With that  
44 said, the Aleut Corporation has a resolution in support  
45 of this desperately needed land exchange. The Alaska  
46 Native Claims Regional Corporation president/CEO group  
47 who represent the 12 Alaska Native Regional Corporation  
48 and all their individual shareholders also has a  
49 resolution in support of this land exchange. The  
50 Alaska Federal of Natives, who speaks on behalf of the

1 more than 130,000 Alaska Natives in Alaska has a  
2 resolution in support of this exchange. The National  
3 Congress of American Indians, the very strong entity  
4 who speaks on behalf of all the tribes of the United  
5 States also has a resolution in support of this land  
6 exchange. I have copies of all the resolutions for the  
7 record. And last but not least, the Alaska  
8 Congressional Delegation all support this land  
9 exchange. I encourage those making this -- those  
10 making the decisions to do the right thing and come  
11 back with an EIS that is in favor of this land  
12 exchange. This will not only positively affect the  
13 people in the area surrounding the land exchange but  
14 the people from all over the state and the nation.

15 So I thank you for the consideration  
16 and I'll put the comments in for the record.

17 MR. BARNETT: I'll just look at you.  
18 My name is Bob Barnett and I'm a long time resident of  
19 Sand Point and not getting paid by anybody to be here.  
20 So I'd like to begin by saying what a good deal you  
21 have in front of you from the Fish and Wildlife about  
22 the land trade and the state with the King Cove  
23 Corporation. I sure hope that this process that we're  
24 trudging through once again can prove once again that  
25 the people who actually live and work in these  
26 communities of Cold Bay and King Cove will get the  
27 road. I've been involved with this project one way or  
28 another since we deemed that there was a need for a  
29 different mode of transportation. I was an assembly  
30 member way back in the early 90's when we were working  
31 with the communities and gathering support and started  
32 planning and trying to figure out a different mode of  
33 transportation or an alternative way to get in between  
34 these communities. I've been involved with this  
35 project more or less for probably three decades, either  
36 traveling or being involved with the planning process.  
37 After I was fortun -- after this, I was fortunate to be  
38 a phone guy for these two communities along with Sand  
39 Point. To give insight on how much I traveled between  
40 these communities, during my traveling phone guy days,  
41 I was speaking with a PenAir worker, oh, maybe about a  
42 half a dozen years ago and we started counting up the  
43 number of pilots I have flown with between Cold Bay,  
44 King Cove and Sand Point and we lost count after 37.  
45 So I have flown, I've traveled, I can tell you stories  
46 that would, you know, make your skin crawl. And also  
47 there's some really nice stories too. But I would just  
48 like to comment that not only have I flown between  
49 these communities, I have also used the marine link.  
50 That was before the hovercraft. And there is plenty of

1 stories, but most of them are scary because that's one  
2 of the last resorts we use. I've been on several  
3 medivacs -- and I've got one minute. So, I've been on  
4 several medivacs, and they're not fun when you have to  
5 hoist someone up the dock. But they did put the  
6 hovercraft in and that was a major improvement but it  
7 still has its limitations. And they're going through  
8 those issues right now. And I believe there is enough  
9 time out that it's been in service that they've kind of  
10 figured out that that might not be the best solution  
11 there is. So I'm just going to reiterate that the road  
12 is the answer and I would encourage all the agencies  
13 involved with this and the land trade to just get this  
14 done. I thought it was already completed when the  
15 Congress said it was okay to do, so that's all I got to  
16 say.

17 Thank you.

18 MR. ROWLEY: My name is Dan Rowley.  
19 I'm a civil engineer on the Aleutians East Borough  
20 staff. And I started as the borough's project manager  
21 for the design and construction of the King Cove access  
22 project. That was a 16.9 mile long road that went from  
23 the airport to the northeast corner of Cold Bay. And I  
24 also managed the preliminary engineering that was the  
25 basis for the draft EIS, the final EIS, and record of  
26 decision that preceded the construction of that  
27 project. And that work included the environmental  
28 assessment of a proposed extension of the access road,  
29 termed Alternative 6, from the proposed hovercraft  
30 terminal at the northeast corner through the Izembek to  
31 a conjunction with the existing Outer Marker Road.  
32 Given that the land exchange will be assessing the  
33 environmental impacts of a road, if the land exchange  
34 is approved, I would like to point out some facts about  
35 the road as it was presented and assessed in the  
36 previous environmental documentation.

37 As has been pointed out, it's simply a  
38 one lane, two-way graveled road. It's about as simple  
39 of a road as can be in terms of its impact, its  
40 footprint. It would be projected at least one foot  
41 above the existing ground to allow -- to prevent snow  
42 from accumulating. The road would be located, as it  
43 was presented in the previous EIS, approximately a half  
44 mile away from Kinzerof Lagoon, or further if necessary  
45 to avoid any adverse impacts on waterfowl in that  
46 lagoon. It would avoid lakes and ponds that might be  
47 nesting habitats for swans. It would avoid wetlands  
48 and utilize uplands. And it would utilize existing  
49 trails, vehicle trails in the refuge to the maximum  
50 extent practical. Given that the isthmus of land

1 between Izembek and Kinzerof lagoons is approximately  
2 two and a half miles at its narrowest point, the road  
3 would be no closer than two miles to Izembek Lagoon.  
4 Waterfowl using that lagoon would not be affected by  
5 road traffic. None of the drainage courses that the  
6 road crosses would flow into Izembek Lagoon. The  
7 estimated length of the road would be about 16.6 miles.  
8 The last thing I'd comment on is that based on an  
9 estimated 3500 air travelers annually, the estimated  
10 average daily traffic on the road would be 35 vehicles  
11 per day. That traffic would be almost entirely  
12 passenger vehicles. As a mitigation measure to  
13 preclude having vehicles leaving the road and traveling  
14 into the refuge or wilderness, the borough agreed to  
15 erect a two-strand cable barrier on each side of the  
16 road.

17                   The access project, the King Cove  
18 access project EIS required obtaining numerous federal  
19 and state permits for the construction of the road.  
20 Also several resource protection plans were developed.  
21 Each of those permits and resource protection plans  
22 contained numerous mitigation measures which the  
23 borough agreed to adhere to. A list of those measures  
24 is attached to my testimony. It would be the borough's  
25 commitment to have those same mitigation measures apply  
26 to the proposed road through the Izembek.

27                   Thank you very much.

28                   MS. BOYETTE: My name is Sharon Boyette  
29 and I'm the administrator of the Aleutians East  
30 Borough. The communities of King Cove and Cold Bay and  
31 the Izembek Refuge are within the boundaries of our  
32 borough and I'm pleased to be here today to make a  
33 comment about the proposed land exchange and the road  
34 corridor through the Izembek Refuge and to see that  
35 this process is off and running. I'm really proud to  
36 be part of this effort that is really led by the  
37 residents of King Cove. And their idea is to bring a  
38 measure of safety to their friends and neighbors  
39 especially, and piece of mind, especially for those  
40 people that have small children or who have aging  
41 parents or perhaps a family member with special health  
42 concerns.

43                   The land exchange discussed here I  
44 think is nothing short of amazing. The King Cove folks  
45 have never asked for a handout or a freebie or any  
46 special government consideration, but rather have paid  
47 dearly for their -- and with their only currency, which  
48 is their aboriginal lands, for access to an airport  
49 that they can depend on and to help in emergencies.  
50 Most of the people that I know don't give a thought to

1 what they would probably consider to be their right to  
2 get to a dependable airport or to medical care, but  
3 that's what this land exchange is really about and what  
4 the King Cove folks have contributed their land to  
5 achieve. I believe that we can expect minimal  
6 environmental impacts to Izembek Refuge from a one lane  
7 gravel road less than 20 miles long. But nonetheless,  
8 I expect the mitigation measures outlined in the  
9 previous EIS will more than protect the resources that  
10 are valuable to the residents of King Cove and Cold  
11 Bay. Nobody knows any better than the Izembek Refuge  
12 is a jewel than the people who live out there in our  
13 region.

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

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

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

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

42                   I'd like to move to the legislation and  
43 I do want to recognize the good faith efforts that the  
44 refuge and the service has made in trying to meet very  
45 difficult time schedules, but very honestly, we're not  
46 meeting them. So, that's just kind of a first one.  
47 There's all kinds of reasons, but we need a complete --  
48 timely completion of the EIS, we need a timely decision  
49 by the Secretary because Congress established seven  
50 years to build the road and that clock is running. If

1 the Secretary says no deal, that's the end of it. If  
2 he said it is, then there's one year to get permits.  
3 So there's some other timeframes.

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

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

41 Finally, the EIS needs to be thorough  
42 in evaluating all of the scoping comments to minimize  
43 litigation. We're not going to do it. We'll probably  
44 get sued when it's all said and done, but you've got  
45 the EIS, you've got the Secretary's decision, and this  
46 EIS is the basis for doing that, so it really has to be  
47 a top notch job. All of the permitting agencies,  
48 federal, state, local, and the need to be involved as  
49 well as for the public on what terms and mitigation  
50 measures are going to be required. Because at the end

1 of the process, if the Secretary determines that it's  
2 in the public interest, there should not be another  
3 round of NEPA on the road. There should not be a  
4 supplemental EIS for the road. There should not be a  
5 categorical exclusion. In other words, do it right.  
6 Do it thoroughly. And finally, you need to have an  
7 evaluation of the total impacts of the with and  
8 without. With the road you no longer have a hovercraft  
9 operating through a series of areas with waterfowl,  
10 marine mammals, et cetera, et cetera. So there's this  
11 whole balance of what goes away with the road that  
12 needs to be considered.

13 Thank you.

14 I do have written comments.

15 I'll submit them electronically since I  
16 figure that's easy.

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

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

49 Eelgrass productivity is controlled by  
50 both climate and water quality, so the EIS needs to

1 quantify to what extent the road and sediments in  
2 runoff will impact the eelgrass in the adjacent  
3 lagoons. And this is all happening in a time of  
4 warming temperatures which affect eelgrass productivity  
5 as well as the impacts of sea level rise, which through  
6 light attenuation affect productivity. Additional  
7 considerations for the cumulative effects impact  
8 assessment include impacts to salmon spawning, spawning  
9 tributaries of Izembek Lagoon, as well as the  
10 struggling southern caribou peninsula herd. These all  
11 need to be considered, also the socioeconomic impacts  
12 to local subsistence users. And on a personal note as  
13 a resident of Eagle River, Alaska, living at the end of  
14 a 12 mile road, through -- much of it through Chugach  
15 State Park, I urge you to consider the true safety of a  
16 road as access. There's also problems with traveling  
17 in blizzards and impacts associated with being on the  
18 ground and travel.

19 So, thank you.

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

22 MS. LOYA: Yes. Wendy Loya.

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

45 Thank you.

46 MR. THORSON: My name is Scott Thorson  
47 and I'm a longtime resident of Anchorage, former  
48 airline pilot in the Aleutian Islands for several  
49 years. My father was in Cold Bay during World War II,  
50 so I got a pretty fair background in -- out in the

1 Chain. The primary issue here is really one of a --  
2 the people that live in King Cove were there before  
3 they ever made this wildlife refuge and they need to  
4 have a reasonable way to get medical treatment and to  
5 get in and out of King Cove. I can tell you as a pilot  
6 you have no idea how scary the flying can be between  
7 King Cove and Cold Bay. There's mountains, when the  
8 wind is blowing, there's down air. It's very difficult  
9 to control the airplane and I -- you know, even in a  
10 bigger airplane and then you can get into King Cove,  
11 like the Electra or the YS-11, you know, it's a pretty  
12 rock and roll ride. The boat that they have that runs  
13 between King Cove and Cold Bay doesn't really work all  
14 that well when the weather is bad. I mean, it's -- you  
15 know, if the weather is not bad, take an airplane, but  
16 if both airplane and marine transportation is not  
17 available when the weather is bad, you know, that  
18 pretty much limits it back to a road.

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

29 Thank you.

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

43 Because the way I look at -- over-  
44 development starts with a small road and if the State  
45 of Alaska has anything to do about it, the current  
46 state legislature and the current state Department of  
47 Fish and Game had very little respect for wildlife.  
48 They look at it as commodities to make money and  
49 they're all for developing the state of Alaska. This  
50 is a unique wilderness area that you won't find

1 anywhere else in the world, and I have traveled all  
2 over the world, where people can live with the wildlife  
3 and enjoy them, this gorgeous scenery, drop dead  
4 gorgeous scenery. But we like having the animals and  
5 they are not just commodities. So I would really  
6 appreciate you doing thorough research about what will  
7 happen if there's just this one little road and if it's  
8 turned over to the State of Alaska. I know if it is --  
9 if you do have the road built, I'd like to see the US  
10 government get more involved in what's going on here in  
11 the state because of the way the state legislature is  
12 behaving towards our wilderness and our wildlife.

13 MR. PORTMAN: Carl Portman, Deputy  
14 Director of the Resource Development Council. I am  
15 here to express RDC's support for the land exchange  
16 because the federal gov -- between the federal  
17 government, the State of Alaska and King Cove  
18 Corporation for the purpose of constructing a single  
19 lane gravel road between the communities of King Cove  
20 and Cold Bay. For a decade, over a decade, RDC has  
21 consistently advocated for a road link between King  
22 Cove and Cold Bay. We strongly believe that a road  
23 corridor from King Cove to the all-weather airport in  
24 Cold Bay is in the public interest. In our view, this  
25 is a public safety and human rights issue which should  
26 be given the highest priority. The proposed land  
27 exchange would involve the removal of only 206 acres  
28 within the Izembek wilderness for the road corridor and  
29 1600 acres of federal lands within the Alaska Maritime  
30 National Wildlife Refuge. Overall the exchange would  
31 add more than 56,000 acres to the Izembek and Alaska  
32 peninsula national wildlife refuges and designate  
33 43,000 acres as wilderness. Clearly this exchange  
34 would provide a net gain for the national wildlife  
35 refuge system while providing a vital public safety and  
36 human health access corridor for King Cove residents to  
37 Cold Bay and its all-weather airport. The land trade  
38 is more than fair and the road would be narrow and  
39 unobtrusive. The road would be closed to commercial  
40 traffic and mitigation strategies will allow the road,  
41 the environment and the wildlife to coexist. The road  
42 would solve the community's perennial problems with  
43 access to the outside world, especially in poor weather  
44 conditions.

45 Meanwhile the marine link between the  
46 two communities has not solved King Cove's  
47 transportation challenges in reaching Cold Bay and its  
48 airport. The hovercraft requires a substantial subsidy  
49 which cannot be sustained. Moreover, poor weather  
50 conditions can prevent the operation of the hovercraft

1 while the -- which is the entire -- while the entire  
2 reason for improved access is largely because of the  
3 region's weather. The road has always been the  
4 community's first choice because it provides residents  
5 with the greatest amount of security, mobility, peace  
6 of mind and quality of life. The spirit of this  
7 proposed land exchange would recognize and honor with  
8 equal regard the vital human needs alongside wildlife  
9 and wilderness. The EIS must acknowledge local needs  
10 and the fact that current transportation infrastructure  
11 does not meet these needs and that the proposed road  
12 best meets them.

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

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

1 you enforce that or what are you going to do? Who is  
2 enforcing these things? The seals and the sea otters  
3 will be hunted and shot because it's legal for the  
4 Natives to do it. And then Emperors. In a perfect  
5 world Emperors won't be shot, but this is not a perfect  
6 world and I think there will be quite a few Emperors  
7 shot, which is -- and Steller's, which are -- you can't  
8 hunt them either. And who's going to enforce these  
9 things, that's my question.

10 Thank you for your time.

11 MR. HOFF: Good evening, everybody. My  
12 name is Marvin Hoff. I'm speaking tonight as a  
13 resident of King Cove, born and raised there, and I was  
14 also the past president of the Agdaagux tribe and a  
15 shareholder of the King Cove Corporation. I am also a  
16 veteran and served my country in the Vietnam war. Now  
17 I'm asking that same federal government to serve me in  
18 fairly evaluating the proposed Izembek land exchange so  
19 that we can finally get the road link we desperately  
20 need to the Cold Bay airport. As a former president of  
21 the Agdaagux tribe, I testified in front of Congress  
22 back in 1997 and said that the only logical, affordable  
23 and dependable transportation connection between King  
24 Cove and Cold Bay is a simple road. I said it then and  
25 I say it again now. The only logical, affordable and  
26 safest transportation connection between King Cove and  
27 Cold Bay is a simple road. We appreciate what Congress  
28 did back in the late 1990's, trying to solve our  
29 transportation problem, but the reality is that  
30 hovercraft has not solved our problems with predictable  
31 and timely access to the Cold Bay airport.

32 Now the unbelievable amount of land my  
33 corporation is willing to give to the federal  
34 government along with the State of Alaska to hopefully  
35 allow for this road is absolutely mind boggling to me,  
36 but whatever price we must pay for this simple road is  
37 worth it because we need the piece of mind knowing we  
38 can have safe and timely access to the Cold Bay  
39 airport. Please know I am speaking from the heart on  
40 this issue. It was my wife Kathy, the only nurse in  
41 town at the time, who boarded that fateful night in  
42 blizzard conditions [sic] to get a severally injured  
43 fisherman to the Cold Bay airport for a medevac flight  
44 to Anchorage, trying to save one life became instead  
45 losing four lives. I sincerely believe a road would  
46 have prevented this terrible tragedy, including the  
47 life-altering effect it had on me.

48 Thank you.

49 MR. ROTHE: My name is Tom Rothe from  
50 Eagle River, Alaska. Retired from Fish and Game with

1 30 years worth of wildlife biology and worked with  
2 habitat issues. I'm kind of flying by the seat of my  
3 pants and will offer a few comments and hopefully offer  
4 a more articulate version on paper later. But I had a  
5 few thoughts looking at the materials and having  
6 thought about this issue over the years. And so, first  
7 of all, I would encourage the service as I would  
8 encourage any resource management agency to use the  
9 best available science and technical data throughout  
10 this whole thing. Wilderness is, I'm sure, squishy to  
11 you as it is to almost everyone else. Everybody has a  
12 sense of values, but that will probably be the hardest  
13 thing to maybe get a grip on if you're going to really  
14 assess what this proposal means.

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

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

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

50 Third, the constraint to one lane I

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

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

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

49                   (Off record)  
50                   (END OF PROCEEDINGS)

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1  
2 I, Salena A. Hile, hereby certify that the  
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9 of our knowledge and ability.

10

11 \_\_\_\_\_  
12 Date

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Salena A. Hile, Transcriber