

**In the Matter Of:**

**IZEMBEK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE LAND EXCHANGE/ROAD CORRIDOR**

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**Public Meeting - Anchorage, Alaska**

*December 09, 2024*

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**CERTIFIED  
TRANSCRIPT**

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IZEMBEK NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE  
LAND EXCHANGE/ROAD CORRIDOR  
DRAFT SUPPLEMENTAL ENVIRONMENTAL IMPACT STATEMENT  
PUBLIC MEETING  
ANCHORAGE, ALASKA  
DECEMBER 9, 2024

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TRANSCRIPT OF PROCEEDINGS

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ANCHORAGE, ALASKA

6:07 P.M.

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BILL CRAIG: Hello everyone, and welcome to the public meeting on the Izembek Land Exchange Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement.

My name is Bill Craig, and I'm the project manager for AECOM, the contractor who is assisting the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service with the preparation of the Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement. Also here tonight from AECOM are Jon Isaacs, planner; Arika Mercer, who is at the back at the welcome table; and Deirdre, who is our court reporter who is recording the meeting for us.

Emergency exits, there are three of them. There's one on each end of the room in the back, and then there's one here. I don't know about this one here. But let's move towards those three if we need to evacuate. You also passed the restrooms in the hallway on your way in.

This meeting will consist of a presentation by Fish and Wildlife Service followed by your public comments. This meeting does not have a question-and-

1 answer component. If you have substantive questions  
2 that you would like answered in the Supplemental EIS,  
3 please provide those questions in your comments.  
4 Thank you for coming on such a yucky weather night  
5 and thank you for participating tonight.

6 Bobbie Jo is up next.

7 BOBBIE JO SKIBO: Hey there, everybody.  
8 Welcome. My name is Bobbie Jo Skibo. I am the  
9 senior planner and project leader for the Izembek  
10 Supplemental EIS. I have been working in Alaska  
11 close to 30 years on all sorts of natural resource  
12 issues. So grateful to have you all here. We just  
13 got off the road out in King Cove, Cold Bay, and  
14 Sand Point, and we're here tonight to listen to your  
15 testimony.

16 I currently live in Palmer. And yeah,  
17 thank you for just braving the roads and the wind to  
18 get here. I'll be speaking a little bit later on in  
19 the presentation, but I will pass it over to our  
20 colleagues from the Fish and Wildlife Service. And  
21 our Regional Director is here, so I'll pass it to  
22 her.

23 SARA BOARIO: Good evening, everyone. My  
24 name is Sara Boario. I'm the Regional Director for  
25 the Fish and Wildlife Service here in Alaska. It is

1 a position I've had the great privilege to serve in  
2 for the last nearly three years. But I've been in  
3 Alaska a lifetime and I know how important the work  
4 of the Fish and Wildlife is to people across the  
5 state and beyond and how consequential it is in  
6 people's lives.

7 I'm grateful that you could make it out  
8 here tonight to participate in the public process.  
9 And I'm looking forward to listening and learning  
10 from you this evening. I'll pass it to our Assistant  
11 Regional Director for the National Wildlife Refuge  
12 System in Alaska.

13 KARLIN ITCHOAK: Thank you, Sara.

14 My name is Karlin Itchoak, Assistant  
15 Regional Director for Refuges. And I was born and  
16 raised in Nome, Alaska, and live here now in  
17 Anchorage. And I would just like to acknowledge that  
18 we're on the ancestral homelands of the Dena'ina  
19 people, Dena'ina Elnena, and also that the proposed  
20 road impacts the traditional homelands of the Unangan  
21 people and the Aleut. So we acknowledge the Unangan  
22 as the original stakeholders and stewards of the  
23 land, as well as the Dena'ina people.

24 As the Assistant Regional Director of  
25 Refuges, and as you know, we have over 570 refuges in

1 the National Wildlife Refuge System across the  
2 country, across the United States, totaling about  
3 95 million acres of protected lands, public National  
4 Wildlife Refuges, and of those 95 million acres,  
5 76.8 million acres are here in Alaska, almost over  
6 90 percent of the National Wildlife Refuge System.  
7 And we have 16 refuges here in Alaska.

8 The Izembek Refuge is one of them, and we  
9 have an amazing manager there, who I'm now going to  
10 pass the mic to, Maria Fosado.

11 MARIA FOSADO: Good evening, everyone, and  
12 thank you, Karlin.

13 As Karlin mentioned, I'm Maria Fosado. I'm  
14 the Izembek Refuge manager. I've been working for  
15 the Fish and Wildlife Service for over 15 years. I  
16 started my career in the state of Minnesota and I  
17 worked at various national wildlife refuges and  
18 wetland management districts until finding my way to  
19 Alaska. I accepted the position of the Izembek  
20 Refuge manager position in 2020 and I've been living  
21 and working in Cold Bay since that time.

22 So thank you for your time, and I think  
23 we're going to go ahead and get started. So  
24 hopefully folks can hear me. But I'm here to provide  
25 a little bit of background on what we today recognize

1 as the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.

2 So Izembek National Wildlife Refuge was  
3 originally established as the Izembek National  
4 Wildlife Range in 1960 by public land order. In  
5 1972, Izembek Lagoon and the surrounding watersheds  
6 were protected by the Alaska legislature via the  
7 establish of the Izembek State Game Refuge. And then  
8 with the passage of the Alaska National Interest  
9 Lands Conservation Act, otherwise known as ANILCA, in  
10 1980, the Izembek National Wildlife Range was  
11 redesignated as the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge.  
12 It comprises approximately 310,000 acres, and at that  
13 time, approximately 300,000 were designated by  
14 Congress as wilderness.

15 So the Congressionally designated Izembek  
16 wilderness area is comprised of the majority of the  
17 refuge, and they became part of the National  
18 Wilderness Preservation System. These areas are  
19 managed and administered for the use and enjoyment of  
20 the American people in such a manner as will leave  
21 them unimpaired for future use and enjoyment as  
22 wilderness, to protect the areas, and for the  
23 preservation of their wilderness character. These  
24 areas provide scenic, wildlife, and scientific  
25 values, as well as the opportunity for solitude and

1 primitive and unconfined types of recreation.

2 So each unit of the National Wildlife  
3 Refuge System is established to serve a statutory  
4 purpose that targets the conservation of native  
5 species which are dependent on its lands and waters.  
6 And to administer those units in accordance with  
7 their statutory purposes, uses are evaluated for  
8 appropriateness and compatibility.

9 With the passage of ANILCA and the  
10 redesignation from Izembek National Wildlife Range to  
11 Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, the refuge also  
12 received ANILCA-specific refuge purposes, and those  
13 purposes include to preserve fish and wildlife and  
14 their habitats in their natural diversity, including  
15 but not limited to, waterfowl, shorebirds, and other  
16 migratory birds, brown bears, and salmonids; to  
17 fulfill the international treaty obligations with  
18 respect to fish, wildlife, and their habitats; to  
19 provide for the opportunity for continued subsistence  
20 uses by local residents; and to ensure water quality  
21 and necessary water quantity.

22 So Izembek National Wildlife Refuge was the  
23 first site in the United States to be designated as a  
24 wetland of international importance by the Ramsar  
25 Convention in 1986, and subsequently it was



1 recognized as an important bird area of global  
2 importance by BirdLife International and the National  
3 Audubon Society. Izembek Refuge received these  
4 global recognitions because of its diverse habitats,  
5 the dynamic landscape, and its unique geographic  
6 location where it's situated between the highly  
7 productive waters of the Bering Sea and the Gulf of  
8 Alaska. So from brown bears to Pacific salmon, over  
9 200 species call the refuge home.

10 At the heart of the refuge is Izembek  
11 Lagoon, which is the coastal ecosystem that's home to  
12 one of the world's largest eelgrass beds. On the  
13 Pacific side of the Alaska Peninsula, you will find  
14 Kinzarof Lagoon, which is also recognized as a  
15 significant eelgrass bed, again on the Pacific side.

16 The location of Izembek Refuge along the  
17 avian migration routes, in conjunction with abundant  
18 food sources that can be found that are provided by  
19 the eelgrass beds make Izembek Refuge one of the most  
20 important migratory staging and wintering habitats of  
21 the world. This site is especially critical for  
22 waterfowl, especially geese and shorebirds that make  
23 transoceanic flights. It provides for virtually the  
24 entire population of Pacific black brant, half the  
25 world's population of emperor geese, and a

1 significant percentage of the population of Steller's  
2 eiders and Taverner's Canada goose.

3 The highest density of brown bears can be  
4 found within the Joshua Green Watershed located just  
5 to the northeast of Cold Bay. However, bears can be  
6 seen all throughout the refuge, as they use a wide  
7 variety of habitats from the coastal shorelines to  
8 the low-lying tundra, the streams, into the alpine  
9 areas.

10 Caribou have a high profile as a refuge-  
11 purpose species and are a high value for subsistence  
12 users. The Southern Alaska Peninsula Caribou Herd  
13 ranges from Port Moller all the way south to the  
14 southern end of the Alaska Peninsula, with their  
15 primary calving grounds located just to the north of  
16 Izembek Refuge. Wintering areas have historically  
17 expanded southward, encompassing the area of Izembek  
18 Lagoon and Cold Bay, making the isthmus corridor an  
19 important migratory corridor for these species. The  
20 refuge additionally supports satellite populations of  
21 caribou year-round.

22 And lastly, Pacific salmon also have a high  
23 profile as a refuge-purpose species, and they're, of  
24 course, very valuable for subsistence users. The  
25 refuge supports five species of -- supports five

1 Pacific species of salmon, and they return each year  
2 to the refuge to spawn and ultimately fuel the  
3 coastal ecosystems.

4 So with that, I'll pass it on to Bobbie Jo.

5 BOBBIE JO SKIBO: Okay. We're going to go  
6 down a little bit of a memory lane. The memory lane  
7 is going to start in 2009. And I want to recognize  
8 this project predates 2009 by at least a few decades,  
9 but we're going to start there. Okay?

10 In 2009, the Ominous Public Land Management  
11 Act -- we refer to it as the 2009 Act -- directed the  
12 Secretary at that time to analyze a land exchange  
13 through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge,  
14 including the Congressional wilderness. And it  
15 directed the Service to prepare an environmental  
16 impact statement through the National Environmental  
17 Policy Act.

18 In 2013, the EIS was completed and the  
19 no-action alternative was selected. Then in 2019,  
20 Secretary of Interior Bernhardt entered into a new  
21 land exchange agreement with the King Cove  
22 Corporation, but then in March 2023, the sitting  
23 Secretary of Interior Haaland withdrew from that land  
24 exchange, citing several procedural flaws. So that  
25 has brought us up to today.

1           So the Draft Supplemental EIS that we're  
2           discussing today supplements the 2013 Environmental  
3           Impact Statement. And at this time we are analyzing  
4           a proposed potential land exchange based on an offer  
5           that we did receive from the King Cove Corporation,  
6           and we're updating the 2013 EIS wherever possible.

7           This Draft SEIS evaluates the no-action  
8           alternative, four action alternatives that were from  
9           the pre-existing 2013 EIS, and then added a new  
10          alternative, which is Alternative 6. Now, if a land  
11          exchange is approved within the Izembek National  
12          Wildlife Refuge in the Congressionally designated  
13          wilderness, this will require additional permitting  
14          and other processes. So basically this assumes that  
15          it will happen if all permitting and regulatory  
16          requirements are met which would allow for the  
17          construction, operation, and maintenance of a  
18          single-lane gravel road between King Cove and  
19          Cold Bay.

20          The Service's work on this was directed by  
21          a request from the Department of Interior and  
22          Secretary Haaland, and so the proposed action is to  
23          enter into a land exchange to add land with  
24          conservation, subsistence, and habitat values to the  
25          National Wildlife Refuge System in exchange for a

1 transfer to King Cove Corporation of real property  
2 interests, both the surface and the subsurface, with  
3 the United States for a corridor of land through the  
4 refuge.

5 The purposes of this proposed action are to  
6 provide a safe, reliable, year-round transportation  
7 system for health and safety purposes. That's with a  
8 particular emphasis on emergency medical evacuations  
9 between these two communities. Another purpose is to  
10 increase the overall conservation value of lands  
11 preserved in the National Wildlife Refuge System and  
12 to maintain or increase the opportunity for  
13 subsistence by rural Alaskans.

14 The details of the need for this project  
15 can be found in Section 1.4 of the Supplemental EIS.  
16 It's a pretty lengthy, big paragraph, and so we  
17 didn't want to remove some of the words and change  
18 the meaning here today on the slides. So definitely  
19 take a look at that as you're able.

20 I'm assuming most of you that are here  
21 probably are pretty familiar with this project. But  
22 let's just orient high level, and I have a really  
23 cool pointer here.

24 So right here we have King Cove and we have  
25 Cold Bay. Some of the things on this map that we

1 will get into greater detail is that one of the  
2 alternatives from the 2013 EIS that we're still  
3 analyzing is the hovercraft operation. It comes  
4 across from Cold Bay over to King Cove. The other  
5 green line here is a ferry that would come from  
6 Cold Bay to Lenard Harbor.

7 And what you're seeing on this map, just to  
8 orient, is the new proposal, Alternative 6, red line.  
9 Additionally on this red line, you'll see little dots  
10 throughout. Those are the proposed gravel material  
11 sites. So we'll talk a little bit more about that.  
12 Also, after this meeting, we do have a lot of  
13 materials that kind of go into detail about this, so  
14 feel free to take a look at them before you leave.

15 So I've already alluded to this, but just  
16 to orient us to the range of alternatives. So 2013  
17 analyzed the no-action. That's customary for NEPA.  
18 So we always have a no-action to compare to.

19 We have Alternatives 2 and 3. Those are  
20 land exchanges, but those are no longer viable. They  
21 were included in this process for comparative  
22 purposes only. But this is due to the fact that the  
23 State of Alaska is not party to this land exchange at  
24 this time and they were associated to the 2013. And  
25 that is also because the 2009 Act, the Omnibus Act,

1 has expired. So those are no longer on the table for  
2 consideration.

3 We have Alternative 4, the hovercraft;  
4 Alternative 5, Lenard Harbor ferry; and the new land  
5 exchange, proposed road alignment, Alternative 6. So  
6 let's go through these in a little more detail.

7 So here you can see Cold Bay here straight  
8 across to the Northeast Terminal, and this is  
9 Alternative 4, and it is still considered a  
10 reasonable alternative. It was in 2013 and it has  
11 still been retained as a viable alternative here. It  
12 considers operations of the hovercraft for six days  
13 of service per week between the Northeast Terminal  
14 and over to Cross Wind Cove, which is over here in  
15 Cold Bay.

16 Alternative 5 is the Lenard Harbor ferry  
17 with Cold Bay dock improvements. This would be a  
18 ferry that would travel 14 miles between the terminal  
19 here from Lenard Harbor and then it would have a  
20 substantially modified dock in Cold Bay. We have  
21 been notified they're in the baby stages, but there  
22 is a planning process currently in place to upgrade a  
23 replacement dock, and that is with the Alaska  
24 Department of Transportation currently.

25 So we don't have any details on what that

1 would look like, but that is going to be forthcoming.  
2 This would not include a land exchange. And as I  
3 said, we still have this on the table as a viable  
4 alternative that could be selected.

5 Okay. This is the new alternative,  
6 probably what most people are interested to hear  
7 about. So Alternative 6 is the preferred  
8 alternative, and just note that just because it's a  
9 preferred alternative doesn't constitute that that  
10 will be the decision at the end. That decision will  
11 ultimately be made in the record of decision, which  
12 is the final step of the NEPA process.

13 But we will start here at the terminus of  
14 King Cove, number 1, and this is an access road near  
15 the Northeast Terminal. It continues through the  
16 Izembek wilderness. And that green outline is the  
17 Congressional wilderness boundary. It comes  
18 through -- across the wilderness boundary and it  
19 terminates at the intersection of Outer Marker Road  
20 and Blinn Lake Loop.

21 Just while we're here on this slide, the  
22 yellow here are the parcels that King Cove would be  
23 exchanging for this corridor through Izembek National  
24 Wildlife Refuge. On this slide you can kind of see  
25 those red dots a little clearer. Those would be the



1 proposed material sites.

2 A lot of words on this slide. But we  
3 wanted to be sure to give you a feel for all the  
4 different acres and things that are part of the  
5 exchange. This information is, and the next slide,  
6 on a -- there is a poster back there, and it's kind  
7 of complicated, but if you have any questions after  
8 this, I'm glad to sit down and point some things out.

9 So these are the key components of  
10 Alternative 6. There's 31,198 acres being offered  
11 from the King Cove Corporation that would be  
12 transferred to the federal government. Of the 31,000  
13 and some change, 29,459 surface acres would come back  
14 to the government, but they would be going back to  
15 the Alaska Peninsula Refuge, not to Izembek. The  
16 1,739 acres, both surface and subsurface, would go  
17 back into the Congressionally designated wilderness  
18 of Izembek Refuge.

19 Now, the transfer would be for a total of  
20 490 acres, 484 of which are surface and subsurface,  
21 and six are only for subsurface to help facilitate  
22 one of the gravel material sites, and that would go  
23 from the government to King Cove Corporation to  
24 facilitate the proposed road corridor. Just note  
25 that 336 acres of that 490 here, that's already

1 Izembek Congressionally designated wilderness. So  
2 336 of the 490.

3 Another component is this would be an  
4 18.9-mile single-lane gravel road, and there are  
5 15 material sites, the little red dots, and there are  
6 13 that would be closest to the road corridor with  
7 two on spurs off of that road corridor.

8 A few other key components of Alternative 6  
9 is that the road traffic would be restricted to  
10 noncommercial uses and further restricted to those  
11 necessary for health and safety purposes and access  
12 to the refuge for resources by federally qualified  
13 subsistence users who are actually actively engaged  
14 in subsistence uses.

15 So this is on a poster in the back, because  
16 it can be a little complicated. But I'll run through  
17 some of the high points. So here we have  
18 Alternative 2 and Alternative 3 and the acres for the  
19 land exchanges that were proposed in 2013. Again,  
20 these are not viable alternatives because the State  
21 is no longer party to this exchange. But just to  
22 compare and contrast, Alternative 6 would be  
23 18.9 miles of road corridor mileage. You can see the  
24 comparison.

25 It's assumed that Alternative 6 would vary

1 between 100 and 240 feet of the right-of-way, that  
2 corridor, but with inside that -- we were reviewing  
3 our documents -- that's about 13-foot actual gravel  
4 road within that. And then the material sites would  
5 be along that corridor as well.

6 Now, again, just to refresh your memory  
7 from the last slide, these are basically the same  
8 numbers, but 31,198 would be transferred for 490 from  
9 Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, including 336 acres  
10 of wilderness. 1,739 would come back to wilderness,  
11 surface and subsurface. And the 29,459 from  
12 King Cove would go over to the Alaska Peninsula  
13 National Wildlife Refuge. And please note that is  
14 surface only for those acres. Again, if there's  
15 other questions on this, I'll be glad to try to  
16 answer those at the end.

17 So what we've done with this Supplemental  
18 EIS to help aid you all in reading it and  
19 understanding what is new, you will find sections  
20 that sort of look like this. At the beginning of  
21 each section there will be a box. It will summarize  
22 the changes that have been made to the 2013 EIS. In  
23 some situations when you see text within the body of  
24 the document, they will be highlighted, the sentences  
25 will be highlighted, and any tables, figures,

1       etcetera, that have been updated will be marked with  
2       an asterisk to help you navigate the document.

3               So where we're at on the next steps is that  
4       you can, once you testify here, or you could submit  
5       public testimony or input online, that's fine, and  
6       you would go to regulations.gov. I think you can  
7       just search Izembek SEIS or put in the docket number.

8               We do have a 45-day comment period at this  
9       time, and the deadline for comments is December 30th.  
10       That is 11:59 Eastern Standard Time. If we do  
11       receive comments postmarked by that date, we would  
12       still include those in the public record.

13               The Final Supplemental EIS and record of  
14       decision, that will happen once we get out of the  
15       public comment period, take all the input into  
16       consideration, update where appropriate. And I think  
17       most of us are aware we are in a transition of  
18       administrations, so once the new Department of  
19       Interior leaders get in place, we will then have a  
20       little bit more direction on what the next steps will  
21       be and the timeline. But we do anticipate that a  
22       Final SEIS and a record of decision will be done in  
23       2025.

24               So I think with that, we wanted to give you  
25       a quick overview of what is included in the land

1 exchange that was an offer by King Cove. There is  
2 more information, like we said, in the back, but also  
3 it is a 1,400-page document, so obviously we didn't  
4 cover every piece of information. I hope that you  
5 have a chance to dig in. Hopefully the yellow  
6 highlights help you navigate it easier.

7 And I think with that, I'm really anxious  
8 to hear from you. That's why we're here, is to  
9 really understand from your perspective the range of  
10 alternatives and specifically your thoughts on  
11 Alternative 6.

12 So with that, I will pass this over to  
13 Jon Isaacs and he will give us the ground rules for  
14 the next part of our meeting.

15 JON ISAACS: Thanks, Bobbie Jo. My name is  
16 Jon Isaacs. I work with AECOM here in Anchorage.  
17 I'm a senior planner. And I'll be running the public  
18 comment period tonight.

19 We are going to begin taking public  
20 comments of the Draft Supplemental EIS, and what  
21 we're going to do is we're going to call on people in  
22 the order that they've signed up. Rather than making  
23 you climb over seats and come up here, what I'll do  
24 is I'll call your name, ask you to raise your hand,  
25 and I'll bring you the mic and you can start the

1 public comment.

2 We do have a court reporter, and so what  
3 I'm going to do is ask you to clearly state your name  
4 for the record so she can take down your comments on  
5 the record for the EIS.

6 Each person is going to be given three  
7 minutes to testify, and we're going to ask you to try  
8 to honor those three minutes. We have a timer that  
9 is going to go up on screen here. And if you can  
10 keep an eye on that, and I'll be doing the same. As  
11 you get close to, say, maybe two and three quarters  
12 minutes, please start thinking about wrapping up.  
13 And if you get to that three minutes, I may urge you  
14 to do the same. Please don't take offense.

15 Depending on the time for those who didn't  
16 sign up to testify at the end, if we're still before  
17 8 o'clock, I'll ask to see if there's anybody in the  
18 audience who has not testified but wishes to do so  
19 and then we can take your testimony.

20 As Bobbie Jo has indicated, this is not the  
21 only opportunity to testify tonight. You can testify  
22 tonight, you can go online and testify. We have some  
23 comment forms. And I would really urge you to take  
24 what you've learned tonight and perhaps looking at  
25 the document and consider submitting testimony

1 through those other forms.

2 We do have a poster up there that talks  
3 about how to submit effective comments, and it's  
4 important to look at that and make sure that the  
5 comments you submit count and they are used in the  
6 EIS in the most effective way they can. I would  
7 recommend you do that.

8 As Bobbie Jo has also said, this project  
9 has been around for at least 25 years. This is the  
10 second time I've worked on it. And we know that  
11 there are a lot of people with very heartfelt  
12 positions on either side of the concept of a road  
13 between King Cove and Sand Point. We ask you to be  
14 respectful to people who are commenting, respectful  
15 for their comments. Also be respectful to the Fish  
16 and Wildlife Service folks who are here tonight. We  
17 want this to be a really productive meeting.

18 So I think with that, I'm going to go ahead  
19 and start with the list. First up is Ernest Weiss.  
20 If I mispronounce your name, take no offense. Bear  
21 with me.

22 ERNEST WEISS: For the record, my name is  
23 Ernie Weiss. I live in Anchorage, but I lived out in  
24 King Cove for about 26 years. Got there in 1982 to  
25 be a teacher there. And most of my career was in

1 King Cove. Married into the community, and so most  
2 of my King Cove and Alaska relatives are Aleut,  
3 Alaska Native.

4 Coming into King Cove, well, I started at  
5 SeaTac and it was a direct flight in those days on  
6 Reeve Aleutian Airways on a prop airplane direct to  
7 Cold Bay, and then take a small PenAir over to  
8 King Cove and then in the back of a truck into town  
9 from the airport.

10 So come to find out, you know, why get  
11 there -- why is there not a road, because you can  
12 almost see it from there? And come to find out, it  
13 had been designated wilderness just two years before.  
14 And apparently there was a meeting in Cold Bay, but  
15 the people of King Cove were not aware of it.

16 I had heard from an elder that has since  
17 passed, Tommy Dobson, that some members of the  
18 military during World War II were trying to build a  
19 road at that time until the tractor got stuck in the  
20 mud, so that was the end of that. But there were  
21 thousands of soldiers in that region at that time.

22 So I do support the preferred Alternative 6  
23 for a one-lane gravel road. I think it will benefit  
24 greatly the people of King Cove. I don't think this  
25 action necessarily has to be precedent-setting. It's



1 a discrete action that would help the people of  
2 King Cove. And I don't think it's going to be a  
3 trouble for the birds, but I'm sure there's other  
4 opinions on that.

5 Of course, there are other communities that  
6 have access road problems, but this access problem  
7 has a potential solution, that one-lane gravel road.

8 I think that's it. I really appreciate you  
9 guys coming and taking the time to hear us. I'll  
10 pass it off. If you haven't been to King Cove, I  
11 would suggest you hop on the Alaska Marine Highway  
12 System. Beautiful country. And I hope you make the  
13 trip. Thank you.

14 JON ISAACS: Paul Mueller is next up.

15 PAUL MUELLER: Good evening. I'm Paul  
16 Mueller. I'm the CEO of East Aleutian Tribe. We run  
17 the clinic in King Cove and the clinic in Cold Bay.  
18 I want to share a letter with you that I wrote to  
19 Gary Hennigh, the city administrator.

20 Dear Gary, I'm writing to share a summary  
21 of medevac activity from King Cove over the past  
22 few -- now, this was dated November 1, 2024, covering  
23 the period of October 1st, 2023 to the present.  
24 During this time period we conducted a total of  
25 21 medevacs out of King Cove. Of these, seven

1 required special charter flights to transport a  
2 patient from King Cove to Cold Bay due to medevac  
3 company's inability to land in King Cove.

4 Additionally, there were two instances of  
5 which the U.S. Coast Guard intervened in those cases.  
6 A Coast Guard helicopter transported the patient and  
7 provider from our clinic to Cold Bay. As with other  
8 cases, these medevacs required an escort provider,  
9 leaving the city of King Cove down one provider,  
10 sometimes for several days, depending on the region's  
11 weather, which, as you know, is very unpredictable.  
12 While we were fortunate enough for the provider to  
13 return promptly, more often than not, this simply is  
14 not feasible.

15 Of the 21 medevacs, three required our  
16 staff to work an excess of 24 hours performing  
17 life-saving measures while waiting for weather  
18 conditions to safely transport the patient from  
19 Cold Bay. Sadly, one of those patients passed away  
20 after finally being transferred to Anchorage. These  
21 situations underscore the critical need for reliable,  
22 timely transport options between King Cove and  
23 Cold Bay to ensure patients receive the urgent care  
24 they need.

25 A road connecting King Cove to Cold Bay can

1       alleviate these medevac challenges and ultimately  
2       save lives. Such a connection would streamline  
3       patient support, reduce our dependency on  
4       unpredictable flight conditions, and allow providers  
5       to remain available to serve King Cove more  
6       consistently.

7                I wrote this to Gary in support of this.  
8       Since this letter, we've had one additional medevac  
9       requiring Coast Guard intervention. That brings  
10      22 medevacs a year. Alternative Number 6 would save  
11      lives, and that's what this comes down to. I hold  
12      everybody in this room, their lives as valuable as  
13      mine. If you're in King Cove, I will do everything  
14      in my power to save that life. This road is one of  
15      those things. I wish it was solely within my power,  
16      because it would be built.

17               That is all I have. I defer my 38 seconds  
18      to anyone else that wants it.

19               JON ISAACS: If I could ask you to curb  
20      your applause. Everyone has heartfelt comments.

21               Next up is Gary Hennigh.

22               GARY HENNIGH: Good evening. My name is  
23      Gary Hennigh, and I've been the city administrator of  
24      King Cove for the last 34 years. This issue has  
25      dominated most of my time during those 34 years. My

1 testimony tonight adds to the testimony I provided  
2 last Thursday night in King Cove. The testimony will  
3 also be further added to its written testimony later  
4 this month.

5 The city and residents of King Cove praise  
6 Secretary Haaland's commitment to support this land  
7 exchange and a road corridor to the Cold Bay airport  
8 for our residents. Her courage and dedication to her  
9 department to do what is right for the Aleuts and  
10 other residents of King Cove is exemplary. The  
11 Secretary has been clearly influenced, and rightfully  
12 so, in being able to relate to many past  
13 environmental injustices for the Native people.

14 I applaud the Secretary's selection of  
15 preferred Alternative 6, recommending a major land  
16 exchange between the King Cove Corporation and the  
17 federal government for a modest road corridor to the  
18 Cold Bay airport. We recognize that she made some  
19 difficult choices in arriving at that decision.

20 I personally believe that the Secretary was  
21 very disappointed, possibly offended, when she  
22 learned that there had been absolutely no outreach to  
23 the Aleut residents of King Cove in the late '70s  
24 when ANILCA was being developed.

25 I firmly believe that, had their been

1 communications at that time with King Cove, Aleuts  
2 and residents, discussing what restrictions would be  
3 placed on accessing the refuge, the wilderness,  
4 subsistence access, this issue could have been  
5 favorably resolved back then instead of this  
6 30-plus-year process we have been embroiled in.

7 I would also like to recommend that  
8 Alternative 4, the hovercraft in the northeast  
9 corner, and Alternative 5, the Lenard Harbor ferry  
10 and Cold Bay dock improvements be deleted from the  
11 Final EIS. Neither of these are viable, real-world  
12 alternatives.

13 In both the 2019 Secretary Bernhardt land  
14 exchange agreement and Secretary Haaland's well-  
15 stated position that the land exchange and road  
16 corridor is the only choice that makes real world  
17 sense for the health and safety and subsistence  
18 purposes for the residents of King Cove is the  
19 underpinning of this request.

20 I am also submitting for the record tonight  
21 31 copies of signed testimony from King Cove  
22 residents that attended last Thursday night's meeting  
23 in King Cove. And as you know, many King Cove  
24 residents testified at the public hearing on the  
25 Draft SEIS and the ANILCA 810 public hearings. In

1 addition to these signed testimonies, an overwhelming  
2 majority made a special note saying, I support  
3 subsistence.

4 Finally, I want to make sure that the  
5 record includes a copy of Senator Murkowski's recent  
6 article Climate Justice Comes in Many Forms that just  
7 appeared in the October 24th American Bar Association  
8 Journal. The senator accurately speaks to the long  
9 history of this issue and that it's long overdue.  
10 Now with the courage and foresight of Secretary  
11 Haaland and her Department of Interior, we believe  
12 that the fairness and ultimate environmental justice  
13 pendulum is swinging in the right direction. Thank  
14 you.

15 JON ISAACS: Next up is Lauren Cusimano.

16 LAUREN CUSIMANO: My name is Lauren  
17 Cusimano.

18 The Izembek Refuge encompasses a globally  
19 vital wetlands complex with some of the largest  
20 eelgrass beds in the world. These wetlands sustain  
21 an extraordinary level of biodiversity, including  
22 virtually the entire global populations of Pacific  
23 black brant and emperor geese and they are deserving  
24 of protection.

25 Studies have repeatedly found that the road

1 would have devastating consequences for the land and  
2 wildlife of the refuge. Building a road through the  
3 Izembek Lagoon complex would irreparably harm these  
4 feeding and nesting habitats. Moving forward with  
5 this exchange risks the integrity of all Alaska  
6 conservation system units, including all of Alaska's  
7 national wildlife refuges, national parks, national  
8 monuments, designated wilderness, and other  
9 conservation system units.

10 The exchange opens the door to future land  
11 exchanges for commercial and private purposes,  
12 jeopardizing the protection of over 150 million acres  
13 of national public lands.

14 I stand behind 20 resolutions representing  
15 78 tribes and one village corporation that have  
16 passed opposing the land exchange in the Izembek  
17 Refuge.

18 A land exchange and road through Izembek's  
19 sensitive wetlands and premier waterfowl habitat  
20 would not fulfill the purposes of the refuge, which  
21 include to conserve fish and wildlife populations and  
22 habitats to fulfill international treaty obligations  
23 regarding Fish and Wildlife and their habitats, to  
24 provide continued subsistence uses by local  
25 residents, and to ensure water quality and quantity.

1                   For all those reasons and more, and  
2           particularly given the funds already being spent to  
3           upgrade the Cold Bay dock, I strongly urge the  
4           Interior Department to not choose the preferred  
5           alternative, a land exchange and road, and instead  
6           work with the Army Corps of Engineers and other  
7           relevant entities to support a marine transportation  
8           alternative.

9                   Thank you very much.

10                   JON ISAACS: Thank you.

11                   Next up is Kristin Smith.

12                   KRISTIN SMITH: Hi. Thanks for the  
13           opportunity to comment tonight. I am Kristin Smith.  
14           I'm here in town for work obligations. And I live in  
15           Cordova. So I'm wearing my hat as somebody who has  
16           worked on salmon habitat issues for the last 20 years  
17           and also as a board member for the Audubon Alaska  
18           program. I have been to Cold Bay on the ferry. It  
19           is beautiful, beautiful country. It's a really  
20           incredible place.

21                   And I also, I guess, as a Cordova resident  
22           can speak as somebody who lives in an isolated  
23           community that's not connected to a road system.  
24           Clearly the geographic distance that we span is not  
25           comparable to Cold Bay, but I guess I just wanted to



1 note that for the record.

2 I guess I just wanted to say that I think  
3 about things like the harm that's been documented  
4 that roads cause in fragmenting habitat, the damage  
5 they cause just in the prism. Even if the road is  
6 13 feet wide, the right-of-way is a hundred feet.  
7 The construction, all of those things contribute to  
8 degrading fish and wildlife habit in that area.  
9 There's a great book called Crossings that documents  
10 the harms of roadside ecology ever since roads  
11 started to be constructed.

12 And I know that the alternatives talk about  
13 that the road alternatives are about 20 miles. I  
14 think the ferry crossing is maybe 12 miles. I know  
15 the -- I'm sorry -- the hovercraft crossing. The  
16 ferry crossing route is 14. I think the hovercraft  
17 must be shorter. But I just can't believe that a  
18 water route isn't more cost-effective and  
19 time-effective for the crossing. And I hope that  
20 will come out or be looked at in the Supplemental  
21 EIS.

22 And I think the agency is required to  
23 choose the least environmentally damaging practicable  
24 alternative. So I think that takes into account all  
25 those things, time, funding, and hopefully the cost

1 of maintaining a road over time also.

2 And so I say all this as someone who lives  
3 adjacent to the Copper River Delta the its highway.  
4 And the highway across the delta was formed because  
5 there used to be a railroad trestle there which  
6 allowed water to flow underneath. But then they  
7 built a highway in the late '40s, after World War II,  
8 and now that highway is a giant dike across the  
9 Copper River Delta that affects all of the hydrology  
10 in that area. You can't replicate the original  
11 hydrology in that area.

12 So with that, I urge the Fish and Wildlife  
13 Service to work with the Corps of Engineers to select  
14 a water-based alternative. And thanks again for the  
15 chance to comment.

16 JON ISAACS: Thank you very much.

17 Next up is Julie Toomey.

18 JULIE TOOMEY: Good evening. Thanks for  
19 allowing me to speak. My name is Julie Toomey. I am  
20 with the Aleut Corporation. I'm the vice president.  
21 I'm also a shareholder of the Aleut Corporation.

22 The winds of the Aleutians greeted you this  
23 evening. And imagine being on a small plane, a  
24 hovercraft in the middle of the water. One of our  
25 constituents talked about seeing in Akutan where the

1 hovercraft went out and went spiraling. So talking  
2 about a hovercraft or ferry option is not suitable  
3 for this application.

4 Today I stand before you to passionately  
5 advocate for the completion of a single-lane gravel  
6 road from King Cove to Cold Bay, a vital life-line  
7 that has been unjustly denied to our people and  
8 community of King Cove for far too long.

9 Nowhere else in the United States have  
10 people been denied access to health care as we have.  
11 The audacity of having to ask for this for over  
12 50 years, greater than my lifetime, is an injustice.

13 There are signs throughout the Izembek  
14 National Wildlife Refuge touting 40-plus miles of  
15 already existing roads throughout the refuge. We're  
16 asking for an 18.9, one-lane gravel road to connect  
17 the community of King Cove to use in times of  
18 emergencies. Countless resources and taxpayer  
19 dollars have been poured into this issue, researching  
20 and chasing alternatives that are not only more  
21 expensive but also less reliable and more dangerous,  
22 putting more human lives at risk. Meanwhile, the  
23 simplest, most cost-effective option of a one-lane  
24 gravel road remains sidelined.

25 I'll share two examples of refuges in the

1 United States that have successfully protected  
2 wildlife and their environment without impeding human  
3 progress. San Diego Bay National Wildlife Refuge in  
4 Southern California protects a rich diversity of  
5 endangered and native species and their habitats in  
6 the midst of a highly urbanized coastal environment,  
7 but also an important setting for eelgrass.

8 Grays Harbor National Wildlife Refuge in  
9 Washington has one of the largest concentration of  
10 shorebirds on the West Coast. This is another refuge  
11 where eelgrass beds are critical, and yet, this  
12 refuge is adjacent to the airport, the Grays Harbor  
13 Port, and despite the constant stream of air and  
14 water traffic and being bordered by the Washington  
15 State Route 109, this refuge continues to support  
16 hundreds of thousands of birds during springtime  
17 migration.

18 If such vibrant refuges can accommodate the  
19 needs of people and nature, why can't a simple  
20 one-lane road designated to save human lives coexist  
21 with conservation rules? Prioritizing human safety  
22 doesn't have to come at the expense of environmental  
23 stewardship. It can reflect a thoughtful balance.  
24 Both can coexist. Thank you.

25 JON ISAACS: Thank you. Warren Wilson.

1                   WARREN WILSON: Yes. Warren Wilson,  
2                   currently the mayor in King Cove, lifelong resident  
3                   of King Cove, born and raised there of 64 years.

4                   I was raised in King Cove as a fisherman.  
5                   My father was raised in King Cove as a trapper and a  
6                   fisherman. My grandpa came from Sanak Island. My  
7                   great-grandfather and my great-grandmother were from  
8                   Belkofski. So my roots run deep in the area.

9                   But as a fisherman, I want to make note of  
10                  the eelgrass again. I fished from Upiak [ph] Point  
11                  all the way to Port Heiden out west to Unalaska all  
12                  the way to 60 miles north of St. Paul. We all know  
13                  what the weather is on the ocean. It's rough, it's  
14                  dangerous. Same thing that happens in Cold Bay with  
15                  any medevac, with any boat that's going to try to get  
16                  to that dock in Cold Bay.

17                  I went up there on a beautiful day with my  
18                  own boat, got to the dock, it's very nice. The night  
19                  before was freezing rain. I couldn't even climb the  
20                  ladder because the ladder was full of ice. Okay.  
21                  That's one. I'm going to go back again.

22                  I start -- I'm going to start with  
23                  Port Heiden. Port Heiden, biggest bay in between  
24                  Bristol Bay and the South Peninsula. Big eelgrass  
25                  beds in there. I want to move down to Ilnik Lagoon.

1 I also fish outside of there. Another big lagoon,  
2 almost the same size as Izembek. Very big eelgrass  
3 beds.

4 I want to move to Port Moller Bay. Very  
5 big bay. Very big eelgrass beds. I want to move to  
6 Herendeen Bay. Herendeen Bay, big eelgrass beds, big  
7 mud flats. I flew over there with Lake Clark Air a  
8 couple years ago. Brant were sitting on those  
9 eelgrass beds. Then I want to go to Nelson Lagoon.  
10 Very big lagoon, very big eelgrass beds. Another  
11 hundred miles down the beach there's a couple little  
12 estuaries that also have eelgrass beds.

13 Then we get to Moffet Bay. Wasn't  
14 mentioned here, but that's part of the Izembek  
15 National Wildlife Refuge. Very big eelgrass beds.  
16 Izembek, the center of what we're talking about here  
17 tonight, but it is not the only eelgrass bed.

18 I want to move down, go to Morzhovoi Bay.  
19 That's on the Pacific side. Very big lagoon, very  
20 big eelgrass beds. I want to move to St. Catherine's  
21 Cove. St. Catherine's Cove, very big eelgrass beds,  
22 very big area. I want to move to Cook Bay. Very big  
23 eelgrass beds, very big estuary. False Pass itself  
24 is a very big grounds for any bird life in the area.  
25 And then I want to move to Urilia Bay, Peterson's

1 Lagoon down in the Unimak area. Very big eelgrass  
2 areas.

3 Then I want to move all the way to  
4 Cold Bay, Kinzarof, Thinpoint. We have Thinpoint and  
5 Old Man's Lagoon in Mortensen's is what we're going  
6 to do trading on. It's a very big area. It's a lot  
7 of lakes, a lot of eelgrass beds. If we were to make  
8 up land, that's where the land is to be made up. Not  
9 to mention it book ends in Kinzarof Lagoon.

10 And if we're just applying for a road to  
11 give up that much land for a small corridor, 31,000  
12 versus 495 acres, now that's what we're willing to  
13 give up to save lives in King Cove. 18 lives lost.  
14 I can't believe it. Anywhere in the United States if  
15 we get lives being lost anywhere, we make the  
16 adjustments to keep them from dying.

17 Okay. I think I'm out of time, but I've  
18 got a lot to say and I've got other times to do it.  
19 So thank you very much for the opportunity.

20 JON ISAACS: Thank you, Warren.

21 Next up is Meg Parsons.

22 MEG PARSONS: Thank you for the opportunity  
23 to speak tonight. I am just a lover of nature. I  
24 was grown up in a family that spent a whole year  
25 planning a two-week vacation going to national parks

1 around the United States on the West Coast.

2 And I came up in -- well, 50 years next  
3 year because I love nature and I love Alaska. I was  
4 really -- I first lived in Homer and then I lived in  
5 Soldotna, Anchorage, and so I've lived in these three  
6 communities, and the two that had refuges were  
7 really -- had such a wonderful sense where I could  
8 really play.

9 I had the opportunity last year to  
10 volunteer in Izembek through Friends of the Alaska  
11 National Wildlife Refuges. I became a friend about  
12 maybe eight years ago, and with the idea of  
13 supporting this organization that supported wildlife  
14 refuges. Since then I've become a member on the  
15 outreach committee and trying to do the best to let  
16 people know about the importance of the lands in  
17 Alaska.

18 But getting back to Izembek, it was there I  
19 just fell in love with the land. It is absolutely  
20 gorgeous. We've all said that tonight. We all know  
21 that. My concern is the amount of -- living on the  
22 road system, and we all know what the roads mean in  
23 Alaska, and the difficulties in maintaining them and  
24 the cost of maintaining them. That was a question I  
25 have that I'd like to have answered.



1 I saw that there was going to be some  
2 gravel areas along the proposed road site. When I  
3 was out there, I saw -- because of the amount of  
4 water in the areas, the amount of erosion that has  
5 been done, the amount of gravel that has to be put  
6 in. So there's two things. One, it is the land and  
7 the maintenance of the land, and one is the cost of  
8 the roads.

9 I'm in favor of the fifth option  
10 alternative. With the federal grants that are coming  
11 in to redo the port, I'd like to see that as being a  
12 viable output and working with refuges, working with  
13 the Corps of Engineers to support a water access for  
14 the people who live in King Cove.

15 Thank you for your time.

16 JON ISAACS: Thank you.

17 Next up is Nicole Whittington-Evans.

18 NICOLE WHITTINGTON-EVANS: Hello, everyone.  
19 My name is Nicole Whittington-Evans, and I am the  
20 Senior Director of the Alaska and Pacific Northwest  
21 Program Defenders of Wildlife. Our organization was  
22 established in 1947. It is a national nonprofit  
23 conservation organization dedicated to the protection  
24 of all native animals and plants in their natural  
25 communities.

1           We have nearly 2.2 million members and  
2 supporters nationwide, including over 6,000 in  
3 Alaska, and we have long advocated for the  
4 conservation of wildlife and habitat on Alaska's  
5 public lands, especially on our national wildlife  
6 refuges, and have been involved in Izembek Refuge  
7 issues for multiple decades. And I say hello to all  
8 my friends here, including Gary, who I've seen over  
9 many years at these events.

10           While we appreciate the opportunity to  
11 testify here tonight and submit public comments on  
12 the Draft Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement  
13 regarding the proposed Izembek Refuge land exchange  
14 and road, we do not appreciate the abbreviated time  
15 frame for the public comment process. The U.S. Fish  
16 and Wildlife Service has established a 45-day comment  
17 period, ending on December 30th, with hearings  
18 occurring during the holiday season. There really is  
19 no excuse for this rushed timeline, particularly  
20 given the significance of the issues at stake and the  
21 fact that the current administration will not be able  
22 to finalize this process.

23           Defenders, many of our partners, and many  
24 tribes have requested a comment extension, which to  
25 date has not been granted. It hasn't even been

1 addressed. We urge the Service and Interior  
2 Department to extend the comment period.

3 Further, the hearings that are occurring  
4 during one of the most challenging times of the year  
5 when weather can and does affect travel plans, as we  
6 are speaking about tonight. We understand this is  
7 occurring right now with respect to the communities  
8 in Western Alaska, and this, on top of the rush to  
9 review and comment on the Draft Supplemental EIS  
10 document does not -- does nothing to allow for  
11 sufficient or effective public process.

12 As mentioned by many, Izembek Refuge is a  
13 biodiversity stronghold deserving of protection and  
14 should not be sacrificed in the face of a  
15 biodiversity crisis currently underway in our nation  
16 and globe.

17 The refuge encompasses a globally  
18 significant wetlands complex with some of the largest  
19 eelgrass beds in the world. It is surprising that we  
20 are here tonight facing the preferred alternative  
21 that overturns decades of policy by the Fish and  
22 Wildlife Service and DOI. DOI seems to have  
23 abandoned its responsibility to conserve refuge lands  
24 and uphold the purposes of the refuge.

25 Thank you very much for the opportunity to

1 comment.

2 JON ISAACS: Thank you.

3 Next up is Christi Heun, Defenders.

4 CHRISTI HEUN: Just want to thank you all  
5 for meeting with us today, and everyone else for  
6 braving the weather. My name is Christi Heun with  
7 Defenders of Wildlife. I'm a biologist by training,  
8 but I'm also a resident of Alaska, so I speak to both  
9 those things.

10 The SEIS and Maria's presentation does a  
11 good job of compiling [as heard] the myriad effects  
12 this road would have on the residents' lives of  
13 Izembek, both human and wildlife.

14 Izembek Refuge encompasses a globally vital  
15 wetlands complex with some of the largest eelgrass  
16 beds in the world. We've heard this over again. And  
17 these wetlands sustain an extraordinary level of  
18 biodiversity, including rich in the entire  
19 populations of Pacific brant, emperor geese, which we  
20 know are extremely important subsistence resources  
21 for communities in Western Alaska.

22 Decades of studies since before I was even  
23 born have repeatedly found that a road through the  
24 narrow isthmus of Izembek would have devastating  
25 consequences for the land and wildlife of the refuge.

1                   First a road was suggested for economic  
2 gains, and when that was shot down, it was reworded  
3 as a medical necessity. In 2023, Cold Bay received a  
4 port infrastructure development grant for  
5 \$43 million, which is a lot of money. The project  
6 would include constructing a new dock in Cold Bay  
7 that would accommodate commercial use, freight, fuel  
8 transportation, private vessels, public transport,  
9 and, of course, emergency medical services.

10                   This combined with a 99 percent  
11 dependability rating of a marine ferry from the Army  
12 Corps of Engineers in 2015 suggests that a marine  
13 ferry would be an excellent transportation solution.

14                   Building a road through Izembek Lagoon  
15 complex would irreparably alter these critical  
16 feeding and nesting habitats for these subsistence  
17 species we're talking about.

18                   According to the law, a land exchange of  
19 Izembek National Wildlife Refuge must further the  
20 purposes for which the refuge was established. So  
21 the idea that trading off lands from a thin isthmus  
22 of protected wilderness surrounded by globally  
23 recognized eelgrass beds between two critically  
24 important lagoons could somehow put the same  
25 ecological importance for hundreds of species of

1 birds hailing from every continent on the planet is a  
2 pretty mind-boggling solution and certainly does not  
3 further the purposes for which the refuge was  
4 created, and that is to further endanger animals'  
5 lives in Izembek.

6 Moving forward with this exchange risks the  
7 integrity of all Alaska conservation units, like  
8 Denali National Park and much of the Arctic National  
9 Wildlife Refuge by setting legal precedent and  
10 opening up the door for future land exchanges for  
11 commercial and private purposes. This would  
12 jeopardize the protection of over 150 million acres  
13 of national public lands in Alaska.

14 On behalf of wildlife and subsistence  
15 peoples of Western Alaska, I stand behind the  
16 78 tribes and village corporation who have opposed  
17 this land exchange and a road in Izembek Refuge, and  
18 I urge you to do the same. Thank you.

19 JON ISAACS: Thank you.

20 Next up is Chantae Kochuten.

21 CHANTAE KOCHUTEN: Hi. My name is Chantae  
22 Kochuten. My parents are Raymond and Delores  
23 Kochuten from Akutan and Belkofski. I'm rising to  
24 speak today as a member of the Belkofski Tribe and a  
25 Native Corporation shareholder, as well as the CEO of

1 the King Cove Corporation.

2 I was born and raised in King Cove, and for  
3 as long as I have been alive, my community has fought  
4 for the right to this life-saving road. I'd like to  
5 thank Interior Secretary Haaland, her and the staff  
6 at Fish and Wildlife Service for their government-to-  
7 government cooperation.

8 It has taken us decades, hours of meeting,  
9 and many lives lost to get here. We support  
10 Alternative 6 in the Draft SEIS. This alternative  
11 supports the proposed road corridor and land exchange  
12 for an unprecedented and game-changing offer from the  
13 King Cove Corporation, addressing the equity of our  
14 request for a road corridor while significantly  
15 enhancing the conservation and subsistence values in  
16 the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act  
17 for the Izembek Refuge. It supports the health,  
18 safety, and subsistence needs of King Cove residents  
19 and visitors which were properly analyzed in the  
20 Draft SEIS and consistent with our expectations.

21 It supports that we no longer need to tell  
22 our stories of lives lost, grief, sadness, and be  
23 able to justify this land exchange and to justify our  
24 request for this land exchange -- oh, sorry. I  
25 repeated myself. It also supports President Biden's

1 executive order for vitalizing our nation's  
2 commitment to environmental justice for all.

3 I know that a couple of people here  
4 mentioned the ferry option. And I just wanted to add  
5 a little bit of reality. In my early 20s, I carried  
6 my nephew as a toddler down that 40-foot-plus rung.  
7 I know it's higher. But at low tide when your boat  
8 is swinging, ten-foot swells, not a single person in  
9 this room would put their toddler over the edge, and  
10 that's what we have to do. That's what you're  
11 proposing of people that actually have to live there.

12 You know, you get to travel around and love  
13 on the lands and the environment. That must be nice.  
14 We live there and we have to survive there. And to  
15 even suggest that -- yeah, climbing up the dock is  
16 unrealistic. You need to understand that just adds  
17 other safety factors. It's very dangerous.

18 Warren talked about the icing up on the  
19 ladder. There's no other way up that dock. That's  
20 it. If you get there on a boat and it's iced up and  
21 it's blowing and the Coast Guard isn't close, they've  
22 got to come from Kodiak, and your mother, your  
23 father, your son is dying on the deck of a boat  
24 because they're having a heart attack, they've had  
25 their -- you know, any sort of accident, it's not



1 realistic. It sounds nice, but it's not.

2 JON ISAACS: Next up is Ian Dooley.

3 IAN DOOLEY: Thank you. My name is Ian  
4 Dooley. I'm an attorney with Earthjustice. I  
5 represent the Native Village of Hooper Bay. I've  
6 been asked by the tribe and by Chief Edward Tall to  
7 make just a brief statement.

8 For the tribes of the Yukon-Kuskokwim  
9 Delta, this project is also potential life-and-death  
10 consequences. There are three major points to make.  
11 One is that the evidence produced by the federal  
12 government is unequivocal that this project -- the  
13 cumulative effects of this project would have major  
14 impact on the Pacific black brant and emperor geese,  
15 and the new Supplemental EIS indicates that it's more  
16 likely under this alternative than proposed in the  
17 previous alternatives that these species would suffer  
18 population-level impacts. So point number one, very  
19 likely harm the birds. Certainly reasonably likely,  
20 and in any plain reading of the evidence that's been  
21 presented, quite likely to occur.

22 Number two, these birds are a crucial  
23 subsistence species in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and  
24 the people of Hooper Bay. These are communities that  
25 suffer some of the highest poverty rates in the

1 country, some food insecurity, have been reported as  
2 highest suicide rates in the nation, especially among  
3 their youth, with suicides coming in waves, sometimes  
4 more than one or two a month among young people.

5 Western science and indigenous knowledge  
6 agree that subsistence practices are crucial for  
7 protecting young people from suicide, from drug and  
8 alcohol use, from a host of health consequences among  
9 the elders and other people, including heart disease,  
10 blood pressure, diabetes. So point number two, harm  
11 to birds, harm to people in the Y-K region.

12 Point number 3, there appears to be a  
13 reasonable compromise on the table to resolve this  
14 issue and the Native Village of Hooper Bay has great  
15 respect for the efforts that have been made by the  
16 people of King Cove, but again, the evidence that has  
17 been presented by the federal government, by the Army  
18 Corps of Engineers, by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife  
19 Service indicates that there is a marine ferry  
20 alternative that could solve this problem that there  
21 are tens of millions of dollars, including more than  
22 \$43 million recently invested to update that Cold Bay  
23 dock to make it safe, to make it an important point  
24 for a safe and reliable transportation system for the  
25 people of King Cove.

1                   The Native Village of Hooper Bay asks that,  
2                   in the Final Environmental Impact Statement, the Fish  
3                   and Wildlife Service recognize that this project  
4                   could significantly restrict the subsistence  
5                   resources of people in the Y-K region, and especially  
6                   the people of Hooper Bay.

7                   Two, as a point of process and to reiterate  
8                   what Ms. Whittington-Evans said, they would ask for  
9                   an extension of the comment period. 45 days is the  
10                  bare minimum, the bare minimum legal requirement.  
11                  This is a community that is under a lot of stress  
12                  from climate change, the salmon crisis, and a host of  
13                  other issues.

14                  Three, recognize this is a community of  
15                  environmental justice concerns. This project will  
16                  have disproportionate impacts on the Y-K communities.

17                  Finally, to ask the Secretary of Interior,  
18                  like she did with King Cove, to meet with communities  
19                  of the Y-K region and with the Native Village of  
20                  Hooper Bay, which is their right under the  
21                  consultation rights that are espoused by this  
22                  president and by the presidents before him.

23                  Thank you.

24                  JON ISAACS: Next up is Vivian Mendenhall.

25                  VIVIAN MENDENHALL: My name is Vivian

1 Mendenhall. I'm retired now from a career in  
2 research and monitoring on water birds, especially  
3 large ducks and sea birds.

4 We've had plenty of review of the  
5 importance of the refuge to birds. One of the major  
6 ones of all is black brant, which migrate -- stop  
7 over when they're migrating from the nesting grounds  
8 all the way down to Mexico. And studies on migrating  
9 birds at the stopovers on the way to migration have  
10 recently raised the issue of protecting those, not  
11 only the places where they nest and where they  
12 winter. They need the energy for the kind of effort  
13 that migration takes.

14 The 2013 EIS favored transport by sea. As  
15 a matter of fact, it was noted somewhere that the  
16 Fish and Wildlife Service themselves made that  
17 decision. However, there have been sort of  
18 start-and-stop efforts to bring that to pass. The  
19 hovercraft was run for a few years and then shut  
20 down, not kept anymore.

21 The new proposal, of course, is that  
22 King Cove, not the State of Alaska, would own the  
23 land that's transferred from the refuge and would  
24 build the road. The Supplementary EIS is quite  
25 upfront about what impacts may occur. I haven't read

1 the part that says why they justify the road, even in  
2 light of those effects. However, they're in there.

3 All the digging and gravel mining would  
4 very likely affect a large swath of ponds, marshes,  
5 and streams by sediment, if nothing else, as well as  
6 the construction noise. And the vegetation there  
7 that the birds depend on too.

8 Also, the subsistence harvesting that will  
9 be allowed along the road is not going to be without  
10 impact on the refuge. It's been isolated from the  
11 impact of people, which may be true of the ones  
12 mentioned by another commenter as being successful.  
13 Wetland refuges and other villages, including  
14 Hooper Bay, several others, have seen health impacts  
15 in the road being built as subsistence effect for the  
16 Izembek Refuge.

17 JON ISAACS: So I think, unless I missed  
18 someone, that concludes all the people who have  
19 signed up. We have the time. Is there anybody else  
20 who is here that would like to comment?

21 If you could please state your name for the  
22 record.

23 ANNE BAILEY: Yes. Hello. My name is Anne  
24 Bailey. I'm the administrator for the Aleutians East  
25 Borough.

1           The Aleutians East Borough is in full  
2 support of the road. We do not support marine  
3 alternatives that have been identified today with the  
4 hovercraft and/or a ferry. The borough has ran the  
5 hovercraft between Cold Bay and King Cove and also in  
6 Akutan between Akun and Akutan. And in both  
7 instances, this was not fiscally sustainable and/or  
8 reliable from an operational standpoint.

9           The same situation would also apply to a  
10 ferry. Although in theory it might be a good idea,  
11 this is not something that is sustainable and also  
12 has its own problems with unreliable weather in the  
13 region.

14           Therefore, the borough is in full support  
15 of a road, and it's not in support of Alternatives 4  
16 and 5. Thank you.

17           JON ISAACS: Gentleman in the back. Can  
18 you state your name for the record?

19           RAY CAMMISA: Good evening. Thank you. My  
20 name is Ray Cammisa. I have no stake in this  
21 program, other than being a casual observer for the  
22 last 50 years of living here and interested in this  
23 area.

24           I don't see any other alternative, but I  
25 believe it's important to be brutally honest about

1 what a road is. There is no such thing as a one-lane  
2 gravel road. Just go leave that in the sand.

3 There's no such thing. In the summertime, the gravel  
4 road is dusty. In the wintertime you have to plow it  
5 regularly. Every other alternative is going to cost  
6 financial input. A ferry system is a long-term  
7 financial investment. The State and someone must  
8 fund it to make it equitable and usable.

9 At either end of that road, every person  
10 that can drive it will. They will take every means  
11 of transportation they have and they will drive that  
12 road from one end to the other. That is just human  
13 nature.

14 So if we're going to build a road, we have  
15 to be brutally honest about what a road is and who it  
16 affects. And I am humbled by how many different  
17 people are affected by this issue. So it's a  
18 complicated issue, but I believe we have to be  
19 brutally honest about what the effects of all sides  
20 are. And I know what those are. You know what those  
21 are.

22 Is there another alternative? Boy, in my  
23 humble opinion, I don't see another solution unless  
24 you're willing to fund an adequate marine system. In  
25 this state of Alaska, we can't even hold a ferry

1 system together. So how do we do this? And I don't  
2 have an answer. But I do know what a road is. Thank  
3 you.

4 JON ISAACS: Thank you.

5 Is there anybody else who would like to  
6 testify? Name for the record.

7 KNEELAND TAYLOR: My name is Kneeland  
8 Taylor, and I came to Alaska in 1974 as a legal  
9 intern working for the Aleut Corporation and also for  
10 Ahtna. I regard myself as an environmentalist. I  
11 have a long history of activism in that area.

12 I've watched this issue, but I really am  
13 not up on the details. But I would like to comment  
14 on the idea that choosing a sensible, workable  
15 solution to the medical issues, the emergencies, and  
16 the outcry of the communities affected, those are  
17 really good arguments, and the idea that a precedent  
18 will be set that endangers all the national preserves  
19 in the state of Alaska, I just think that that's not  
20 a good enough argument to stop a sensible solution.  
21 That's all I have. Thank you.

22 JON ISAACS: Is there anybody else who has  
23 not testified? Name for the court reporter.

24 KATE GILLING: My name is Kate Gilling.

25 I'm the vice president of marketing and coms for the



1 Aleut Corporation.

2 I'm relatively new to this issue. It's  
3 been a couple of years since I joined the Aleut  
4 Corporation. But I can't tell you how frustrating it  
5 is to sit here and listen to folks who live in  
6 King Cove and whose families have been through the  
7 process of having to take a boat across to Cold Bay  
8 and deal with that dock. It is from a place of  
9 privilege. If you've never had to experience that  
10 and sit here and say the ferry or the hovercraft is  
11 the better option, save the birds, fuck human lives,  
12 that's frustrating to hear.

13 And I -- if you've been without access to  
14 health care, if you've not experienced that, and  
15 planes won't fly into King Cove, then going on a  
16 hovercraft against the water -- if the planes can't  
17 come into King Cove, it's because the winds are bad.  
18 So if the winds are bad, being on the water is just  
19 as terrifying.

20 So it is from a place of privilege to be  
21 able to tell the community and residents of King Cove  
22 who are here saying that that's not an option to shut  
23 up and take that option, that is coming from a place  
24 of privilege.

25 Thank you for the opportunity to speak.

1                   JON ISAACS: Is there anybody else who  
2 would like to testify who has not yet testified? I  
3 don't think I see any hands up.

4                   So I think with that, Bobbie Jo, I'd like  
5 to turn the presentation back to you.

6                   I thank everybody for their testimony  
7 tonight.

8                   BOBBIE JO SKIBO: Okay. Bill, do you just  
9 want to put that last slide up if you can?

10                  Thank you so much. Really appreciate  
11 everybody's time.

12                  We will be heading out the next many days  
13 to meet with other communities. And so just to let  
14 you guys know where we'll be. Tomorrow is our one  
15 day off. We'll have a virtual meeting with  
16 False Pass on Wednesday. Thursday we will be in  
17 Bethel. And then we are accommodating a virtual  
18 session for those folks that have been referenced  
19 tonight in the Y-K Delta. We understand that it  
20 would be very hard for everybody to get into Bethel  
21 for that meeting, so we did put a virtual option on  
22 the calendar for Friday.

23                  The following week after that we will have  
24 a meeting on Monday, the 16th, with Nelson Lagoon.  
25 That's also a virtual session. Any of the virtual

1 sessions are open to any of the interested public as  
2 well. But we want to prioritize the community voices  
3 if we can. Then we did just secure two other  
4 consultations that are for Alaska tribal governments,  
5 and so we will be holding a statewide consultation  
6 with the tribal governments on the 17th, and then on  
7 the 18th the same type of format but with Alaska  
8 Native Claims Settlement Act corporations.

9 So if you haven't heard about those, please  
10 go to our project website. It's up on the screen. I  
11 think at this point if you just Google U.S. Fish and  
12 Wildlife Service Izembek SEIS, it does seem to pop up  
13 first. So definitely take a look at that. There are  
14 Zoom links available.

15 And if you are a consultant or legal  
16 counsel, etcetera, we will need to have written  
17 permission to have anybody like that in these  
18 consultations. But we're looking forward to  
19 continuing the dialogue, to listen. And just know we  
20 are here to listen to all of you. And I think what  
21 we heard tonight was pretty important information.

22 And with that, I think we will close this  
23 evening's public meeting. If you have any further  
24 questions, you can feel free to drop me an e-mail,  
25 give me a call. Over the next week or so, of course,

1 it's going to be a little busy. I'll try to respond  
2 as quickly as I can.

3 Just, again, really appreciate everybody's  
4 time, and thank you again for your input.

5 (Proceedings concluded at 7:25 p.m.)

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REPORTER'S CERTIFICATE

I, DEIRDRE J.F. RADCLIFFE, Verbatim Shorthand Reporter, and Notary Public in and for the State of Alaska, do hereby certify that the foregoing proceedings were taken before me at the time and place herein set forth; that the testimony and proceedings were reported stenographically by me and later transcribed by computer transcription; that the foregoing is a true record of the testimony and proceedings taken at that time; and that I am not a party to nor have I any interest in the outcome of the action herein contained.

IN WITNESS WHEREOF, I have hereunto set my hand this 26th day of December 2024.



DEIRDRE J.F. RADCLIFFE

My Commission Expires 5/31/26

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