

Blue Goose Alliance Bulletin

#60 – March 28, 2009

Congress has passed a huge public lands bill that, unfortunately, includes a proposal for a land swap and construction of a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. The proposal represents a deeply flawed perception of need. If allowed, it would set a precedent threatening Wilderness and specially recognized wetlands throughout America.

The Blue Goose Alliance, along with more than 15 other conservation organizations, has strongly and consistently opposed this proposal over the past several years. We stand as firmly opposed to this destructive, unneeded road as ever. Secretary Salazar needs to be convinced that it is not in the public interest to construct a road through key wetlands that support the world-class eelgrass beds in the Izembek and Kinzarof Lagoons.

Pacific black brant, Emperor geese, Taverner's Canada geese and numerous other waterfowl species, shorebirds, and waterbirds rely on these crucial habitats for building energy reserves needed for lengthy migrations to wintering areas in Washington, Oregon, California, Mexico and numerous Pacific Islands and atolls. Without the pristine habitats offered by this vital staging-feeding area, the populations of all migrating species that depend upon Izembek would suffer. Young-of-the-year are especially vulnerable during lengthy migrations to inadequate energy reserves.

Izembek's wetlands were the first U.S. "Wetlands of International Significance" recognized under the Ramsar Convention. Much of the refuge was designated Wilderness in 1980.

It is important to understand that this lands bill does not require, nor openly allow the exchange of lands or road construction. Rather, it requires the Secretary to thoroughly examine the proposal and to make a diligent effort to determine if it is "in the public interest." It is imperative that the Department conduct a complete analysis of need, costs and actual benefits under the National Environmental Policy Act.

The road does not offer the safest or most reliable transit between the Village of King Cove and the airport at Cold Bay. Weather conditions, including high winds and white-outs that have restricted air travel in the past will certainly affect overland driving, especially in the mountainous and open tundra landscapes.

The King Cove Health and Safety Act of 1998 allowed an Expenditure of \$38 million dollars to provide a reliable connection between the village and Cold Bay. The funds expended resulted in a first-rate medical center in King Cove and a specially designed 90 foot hovercraft-ferry capable of transiting the waters from King Cove to Cold Bay against 10 foot waves and 40 mile-per-hour winds in as little as 20 minutes. Since August of 2007 the craft has consistently and successfully evacuated more than 30 medical emergencies

It should be noted that an additional \$25 million has been spent since March of 2004 for construction of a road that would only have extended the existing 7 mile road to the ferry terminal for 10 miles further away from King Cove to a different ferry terminal than originally

planned. That change, if completed, would have made road travel more treacherous. Road construction and annual maintenance are remarkably high, approaching \$2 million per mile for construction and at least that much each year for maintenance of the entire route.

All of that uncertainty, cost, and marginal results, at best, would come with definite loss of habitats, wilderness and adverse effects on migratory birds, the southern peninsula caribou herd, grizzly bears and the important fisheries that depend upon Izembek's high quality wetlands for their seasonal and annual needs.

The Blue Goose Alliance intends to work hard to convince the Secretary that the best possible method of land/water access from King Cove to Cold Bay has already been achieved. A road through Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is neither practical nor in the best interests of the public. A road would only work in an adverse way for all concerned. The environmental and ecosystem costs are beyond mitigation.

This Bulletin and all previous Bulletins are available in PDF format at:
<http://www.bluegoosealliance.org>

**NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGES....WHERE THE EXTRAORDINARY IS
EVERY DAY**