



For Immediate Release
March 11, 2010

Contact: Desiree Sorenson-Groves
dgroves@refugeassociation.org
(202) 292 - 3961

Alaska “Road to Nowhere” a Solution in Search of a Problem
Another \$30 Million for 800 Villagers Who Already Got \$37.5 Million

(Washington, DC) – The National Wildlife Refuge Association today called on the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) to reject construction of a \$30 million, nine-mile gravel “Road to Nowhere” through the biological heart of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, a premier American wilderness area. Comments were made at an Interior Department scoping meeting.

“This boondoggle is a solution in search of a problem while endangering the biological heart of a national wildlife refuge,” said Desiree Sorenson-Groves, NWRA’s Vice-President of Government Affairs. “The American taxpayer should not be asked to shoulder the \$30 million cost of an often-impassable road for a community of 800 people, particularly after giving them \$37.5 million which has already addressed their needs.”

Congress solved King Cove’s health and safety needs in 1998, when it appropriated \$37.5 million to this tiny community. Of that, \$9 million was spent to purchase a 98-foot, all-weather hovercraft ferry that has a 100 percent success record with at least 35 medevacs to date. Another \$26 million was spent building a still-incomplete and treacherous, single-lane gravel road that dead-ends at the edge of the refuge wilderness area. The remainder was allocated to create a state-of-the-art community medical clinic.

With a top speed of 58mph, the hovercraft can ferry an ambulance between the two communities in just 20 minutes. Even the mayor of the Aleutians East Borough agrees, saying the hovercraft ferry is a “lifesaving machine,” and “is doing what it is supposed to do.”

In order to help get legislation passed that ultimately required FWS to conduct an Environmental Impact Statement on the road, the Alaska Congressional delegation offered a land exchange. Izembek NWR and the nearby Alaska Peninsula NWR would receive an additional 61,723 acres in exchange for 206 acres to build the road. However, those 206 acres represent the biological heart of the refuge – and the road construction would have a severe impact on the birds and wildlife that depend on the refuge.

“If we’re opposed to receiving more than 60,000 acres for the price of just 200 acres, you know it’s a bad deal,” said Sorenson-Groves.

Ninety-eight percent of the Pacific black brant population, medium-size geese that utilize the refuge as a critical stopover and nesting site, depend on this one location for survival. The species, which gorge on the eelgrass beds of Izembek Lagoon, flies non-stop between Izembek and wintering grounds in Mexico. Road construction could jeopardize their feeding – and their migration. In addition, the isthmus through which the road would be carved is an important corridor and foraging area for caribou and Alaska brown bear.

###

The mission of the National Wildlife Refuge Association is to conserve America’s wildlife heritage for future generations through strategic programs that protect, enhance, and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System and the landscapes beyond its boundaries that secure its ecological integrity.

Download NWRA’s “Road to Nowhere” Report at:
<http://www.refugeassociation.org/new-publications/Izembek.html>.