



National
Wildlife Refuge
Association



Gov. Sarah Palin Supports a New “Road To Nowhere;” Senate Committee Approves Treacherous Road Cutting Through Protected Alaska Wilderness

Another \$30 Million for 800 Villagers Who Already Got \$37.5 Million

September 15th, 2008 (Washington, DC) – Late last week, The Senate Energy & Natural Resources Committee approved a proposal that will lead to the construction of a \$30 million, nine-mile gravel road through the biological heart of a premier American wilderness area. The proposed legislation was added to the Senate Lands Package, and is expected to be voted on within two weeks.

“This boondoggle is a solution in search of a problem while endangering the biological heart of a national wildlife refuge,” said Evan Hirsche, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “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.”

In order to help secure this deal, the residents of King Cove employed Abramoff-connected lobbyist Steve Silver – the same lobbyist Governor Sarah Palin used to help secure millions while mayor of Wasilla, Alaska.

Senate Bill 1680, supported by Alaska’s Congressional delegation and Governor Sarah Palin, would allow for the construction of the road through Izembek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), located at the southern end of the Alaskan peninsula. The residents of King Cove argue the road is necessary for public health, since airport evacuations to Anchorage must leave from Cold Bay, nine miles across the bay.

However, 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 32 medevacs. Another \$26 million was spent building a 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 craft 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 their legislation passed, 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 receiving more than 60,000 acres for the price of just 200 acres, you know it’s a bad deal,” said David Raskin, President of the Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges. “Given the tremendous negative publicity the Alaska Congressional delegation earned for its ‘Bridge to Nowhere,’ it’s astounding they have the audacity to try it again.”

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.

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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. For more information, visit www.refugeassociation.org.

The Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges educate the public and decision makers on local, national, and international levels about Alaska’s National Wildlife Refuges; assist the refuges in accomplishing their missions through wildlife management and habitat improvement projects; and fund refuge-oriented projects through grants, memberships, donations, and other activities. For more information, visit www.alaskarefugefriends.org.

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ALSO AVAILABLE TO JOURNALISTS:

- Photos and Maps
- Interview with National Wildlife Refuge Association President Evan Hirsche
- Interview with Friends of Alaska NWR President, David C. Raskin
- Letter of support from Governor Sarah Palin