



Alaska Senator, Congressman Introduce Bills to Build “Road to Nowhere” in Biological Heart of Wilderness Area *Congress Already Solved Problem in 1998* *With \$37.5 Million Payout to Village of 750*

July 23, 2007 (Washington, DC) – Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) and Rep. Don Young (R-AK) introduced legislation late last month that, if passed, calls for the construction of a \$15.6 million, nine mile gravel road in the biological heart of a nationally designated wilderness area. Senator Ted Stevens (R-AK) is a co-sponsor of the Senate bill, representing full support from the Alaska delegation.

The two bills – S. 1680 and H.R. 2801, respectively – would allow for the construction of the road through Izembek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), located on Alaska’s southern peninsula. Izembek was the first wetlands area on the continent to be recognized under the Ramsar Convention as a Wetland of International Importance.

The road would connect two remote communities – King Cove (population 750) and Cold Bay (population 80). The residents of King Cove argue the road is necessary for public health, since airport evacuations occur nine miles across the bay in Cold Bay. However, \$37.5 million was already appropriated by Congress in 1998 to this tiny community to solve their public health needs. Of that, \$9 million was spent to purchase a 98-foot hovercraft that could safely transport people and vehicles in any weather conditions to the airport, and 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 spent on improving a community medical clinic.

Since September 2006, nine medical evacuations have successfully made the 20-minute hovercraft trip across the bay between the two communities.

“Since Alaska’s politicians solved this problem effectively the first time around, this road to nowhere is nothing more than a boondoggle that throws millions to a solution is search of a problem,” said David Raskin, president of the Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges. “This classic example of pork barrel politics would not only bilk taxpayers, but put more than 500,000 animals at risk.”

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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 the refuge and wintering grounds in Mexico. Road construction could jeopardize their feeding – and their migration. Almost the entire population of the emperor geese would be similarly vulnerable, as would be the threatened Stellar’s eiders and tundra swans.

In order to help get their legislation passed, the Alaska Congressional delegation has 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.

“Construction of this road would be the dagger in the heart of this refuge,” said Evan Hirsche, president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. “We’re almost always fighting for *more* land – so if we’re turning down over 61,000 acres in exchange for 200, you know it’s a rotten deal.”

The Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges and the National Wildlife Refuge Association are using a public awareness and lobbying campaign to help kill the bills before they leave committee.

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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.

The National Wildlife Refuge Association’s mission is to protect, enhance and expand the National Wildlife Refuge System, lands and waters set aside by the American people to protect our country’s diverse wildlife heritage. For more information, visit www.refugenet.org. To download the report, visit <http://www.refugenet.org/new-pdf-files/Izembek-report.pdf>.

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ALSO AVAILABLE TO JOURNALISTS:

- Full Report
- Photos
- Interview w/ Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges President David Raskin
- Interview w/ National Wildlife Refuge Association President Evan Hirsche