



PRESS RELEASE:

King Cove Tribal Leaders Ask Interior Secretary Jewell to Reconsider Decision on Izembek Land Exchange and Road

King Cove, AK – Jan. 16, 2014 – King Cove Tribal leaders and members sent a letter to Interior Secretary Sally Jewell today, requesting that she reconsider her decision in which she rejected the land exchange and small gravel road corridor from the remote community to the nearby Cold Bay Airport, which Congress had enacted to secure the health, safety and quality of life for Alaskans, including Alaska Natives who live in Cold Bay. In the letter, members of the Agdaguux Tribe, the Belkofski Tribe and the King Cove (Native) Corporation called Jewell's decision "arbitrary and capricious" because it was based upon the Secretary's mistaken determination that there was a landing craft alternative to the road that met the "safe, reliable, and affordable" access criteria of the Purpose and Need Statement of the EIS. The Secretary's conclusion that such an alternative existed was based on faulty and unsubstantiated information provided by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service (USF&WS).

The letter states that the Tribal leaders "earnestly believe the Secretary would have reached a different decision had she known that there is no alternative to the road that meets the safe, reliable and affordable Purpose and Need criteria of the EIS."

"The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USF&WS) led Secretary Jewell to believe that there is a land craft alternative to the road when that alternative doesn't exist," said Aleutians East Borough Stanley Mack. "That occurred after the Fish and Wildlife Service read a Borough letter, written to the Corps of Engineers about a year ago. In that that letter, the Borough, which has a Corps permit, committed only to try and develop a landing craft alternative. However, we learned soon afterward that neither landing craft nor any marine craft could provide safe, reliable

and affordable transportation between King Cove and Cold Bay. The Service latched onto the landing craft concept and ran with it, by including it in the EIS. Secretary Jewell then based her finding largely on that information.”

The Borough points out that the USF&WS’s landing craft alternative will not meet the “safe, reliable, and affordable” access criteria of the Purpose and Need Statement of the EIS because there is no docking or receiving facility for a landing craft or any marine vessel on the Cold Bay side, other than the existing Cold Bay dock. People and emergency vehicles cannot be unloaded safely and reliably, especially sick or injured patients being medevaced in harsh weather conditions. Additionally, a landing craft could not reach the northeast corner of Cold Bay in winter icing conditions and at low tides, and therefore, would not be a dependable option. The letter also mentions that a landing craft or any marine vessel is far more expensive for the Borough compared to the road alternative.

“The ROD provided no information about the operating costs of the landing craft,” the letter states. “The analysis in your final EIS for the proposed landing craft is described as “unavailable,” conveniently implying that there are no costs, while more than quadrupling the costs of the road alternatives from the draft EIS costs. The USF&WS failed to take the “hard look” at the alternative required by NEPA, making your decision arbitrary and capricious. Your decision is also a violation of your duty to make a decision which honors the trust responsibility to use the best information available to the Department to make a proper “public interest” determination under the Act.”

Importantly, the tribes and the Corporation state that Jewell violated the federal government’s commitment to consider the health and safety needs of Alaska Natives.

“In her decision to reject the road alternative and land exchange, she completely neglected her trust responsibility to the Aleut people of King Cove,” said Della Trumble, spokeswoman for the Agdaagux Tribe and the King Cove Corporation. “She ignored the needs of human beings in favor of birds when this is a matter of life and death for us.”

In addition, the letter states that a report addressing “whether and to what extent the road is needed to meet emergency medical needs,” as mandated by Jewell’s predecessor, Ken Salazar, was not produced as part of the record. Instead that report merely expressed the opinion of the King Cove residents. The letter further spells out that Jewell did not make public the transcript of the on-the-record public meeting until she published her decision in the Record of Decision (ROD).

“This failed to give the public any opportunity to react to clear testimony,” the letter states.

“It is critical that Secretary Jewell reopen this process to consider the evidence,” said Dean Gould, President of the King Cove Corporation and member of the Agdaagux Tribe. “We’re

confident her decision would have been different had she known that the evidence simply does not support the Fish and Wildlife Service's conclusion that an alternative to the road exists. It does not. The road remains the best option for providing safe and reliable access for our people to travel from King Cove to Cold Bay and to the outside world."

For more information, visit <http://www.aleutianseast.org/> .

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