

# Interior Secretary Salazar Now Charged With a Vital Decision at Izembek National Wildlife Refuge

*Proposed Road is Unnecessary, Wastes Taxpayer Dollars, and Threatens America's commitment to International Treaty obligations, the Wilderness Act, and the National Wildlife Refuge System*

When Congress passed the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (P.L. 111-11), it placed the wildlife, wetlands and Wilderness in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge in great peril. The bill allows internationally significant habitats to be removed from this vital National Wildlife Refuge in order to construct an unnecessary road between the Alaskan communities of King Cove and Cold Bay.

The Izembek proposal shouldn't have been included in a meritorious package of public lands legislation. Its provisions contravene more than a century of American commitment to protecting our treasured wildlife habitats. While many conservation organizations supported the lands package as a whole because of its overall benefits, a substantial group of environmental organizations, including the Blue Goose Alliance, offered united opposition and tireless work to get the Izembek provision removed. That work now continues with the Interior Department NEPA process to ultimately defeat the road proposal.

The community of King Cove claims a road transecting the narrow isthmus between Izembek Lagoon and Kinzarof Lagoon is needed to assure safe transport to Cold Bay in the event of an emergency. U.S. taxpayers have already provided a safe, reliable and successful transportation system to the King Cove community in 1998, when Congress appropriated \$37.5 million to improve the community's medical facilities, build a connecting road from King Cove to a new marine terminal, and purchase a state-of-the-art \$9 million hovercraft which can transport a fully staffed ambulance from the terminal to Cold Bay in as little as 20 minutes in nearly all kinds of weather. The hovercraft has already performed more than 30 successful medical evacuations, responding to every emergency raised by King Cove thus far.

Construction and operation of the road would cause irreparable harm to Izembek's land, water, and wildlife, adding avoidable stress to an ecosystem now stressed by the accelerating effects of climate change. To give away irreplaceable Refuge Wilderness habitats—and in the process compromise the populations of migratory birds, marine- and mammal-life that rely on Izembek's unique wetlands—would be reckless and short-sighted. We cannot afford to risk unduly the vital habitats and populations of brown bear, caribou, sea otter, and hundreds of thousands of the world's migratory birds that rely on Izembek's Wilderness to rest, reproduce their kind, replenish their energy reserves during sensitive seasons, and sustain their migrations—all for the sake of an inordinately damaging road *that is not needed*. Constructing and operating the road also places at severe risk subsistence resources that sustain many northern and western Alaska native villages whose people have spent years assisting the recovery of once depressed brant, geese, and other migratory bird populations of western Alaska.

Interior Secretary Salazar was delegated the option to stop this wasteful and harmful project, and he should do so. Building a road through Izembek's wilderness lands would undermine America's history of conservation, and would place Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and all of America's protected wild lands at the mercy of irresponsible and unnecessary development. We cannot afford to take this risk, and we hope that Secretary Salazar agrees.