



**NATURAL
RESOURCES**
COMMITTEE • DEMOCRATS
RANKING MEMBER, RAÚL M. GRIJALVA

OPPOSE H.R. 218: King Cove Road Land Exchange Act (Young, R-AK)

REPUBLICAN BILL GREENLIGHTS ENVIRONMENTALLY DAMAGING ROAD THROUGH CONGRESSIONALLY DESIGNATED WILDERNESS PREVIOUSLY REJECTED BY THE FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE

H.R. 218 mandates a land exchange between the Department of Interior and the State of Alaska for the purpose of building a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Izembek Wilderness. Proponents of the bill claim the road is necessary to address the transportation needs of King Cove, a town of approximately 1000 people on the Aleutian Peninsula. However, construction of the road has been exhaustively evaluated by numerous federal agencies and each evaluation has concluded that the road would do irreparable damage to the ecological resources of the refuge. Congress already appropriated \$37.5 million to support King Cove's transportation and medical infrastructure.

- Congress authorized this land exchange in 2009, but required a study to determine whether the road was in the public interest. After a transparent, four-year review, the Obama Administration determined the project was not. During the review, Fish and Wildlife Service held over 130 meetings and analyzed thousands of public comments - 70,111 of the 71,960 public comments were opposed to construction of the road. H.R. 218 ignores this due diligence and authorizes the road with further review or public input.
- The Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Izembek Wilderness are unique ecosystems that support numerous species of threatened and endangered wildlife, including the only population of non-migrating Tundra Swans and one of the world's largest eelgrass beds.
- Building a road through the middle of congressionally-designated wilderness is without precedent and unwarranted. Increased human and mechanical presence from construction and ongoing use of the road will destroy the wilderness values of the area and do lasting ecological damage to the unique, undisturbed wildlife habitat.
- Thanks to a \$37.5 million appropriation from Congress in 1999, King Cove has a qualified emergency care center and other emergency facilities. This money also went to fund improvements to the airport and purchase a hovercraft. Travel on the proposed gravel road is estimated to take two hours in favorable weather condition; a hovercraft can make the journey over water in twenty minutes.
- Viable transportation alternatives exist. U.S. Army Corps of Engineers published a report in 2015 outlining "non-road alternatives" for transportation between King Cove and Cold Bay. That report determined that suitable options exist, including an ice-capable marine vessel, construction of a new airport and the addition of a heliport.

Stakeholder Views

H.R. 218 is opposed by numerous conservation and refuge advocacy organizations, including the National Wildlife Refuge Association, Audubon Alaska, Blue Goose Alliance, Defenders of Wildlife, Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, League of Conservation Voters, the Sierra Club and the Wilderness Society.

H.R. 218 revives an ill-advised project that has been rejected by numerous federal agencies on numerous occasions over the past thirty years. The Alaska delegation insists on dismantling the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Izembek Wilderness, despite the well-documented case against building a road through world class wetlands that support numerous populations of migratory birds and other wildlife.