

By Ms. MURKOWSKI (for herself and Mr. *Stevens*):

S . 1680 . A bill to provide for the inclusion of certain non-Federal land in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and the Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge in the State of Alaska, and for other purposes; to the Committee on Energy and Natural Resources.

Ms. MURKOWSKI. Mr. President, the Izembek and Alaska Peninsula Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness Enhancement Act authorizes a land exchange among the U.S. Department of the Interior, the State of Alaska, and the people of King Cove. King Cove is an Alaska Native village and many of its present day residents descend from the indigenous Aleut people who have lived and thrived in this isolated area of the Alaska Peninsula for over 4,000 years.

This bill provides the land for a road on which to travel to the nearest all-weather airport which is located in Cold Bay. The people of King Cove do not have a road to their airport today because a National Wildlife Refuge wilderness sits between their village and Cold Bay.

World War II prompted the construction of a major air facility at Cold Bay, which is about 25 miles north of King Cove. Today, the Cold Bay Airport with a 10,000 foot main runway and a 6,500 foot crosswind runway is one of the largest airport facilities in Alaska and is accessible 365 days a year. However, the problem for King Cove residents has always been their inability to get to the airport on a predictable basis due to constant, ever changing weather conditions, combined with King Cove's topographic constraints.

These topographic constraints are directly related to the location of King Cove's small gravel airstrip nestled between 3,000 foot volcanic peaks. To access the airstrip in King Cove, pilots must navigate a narrow opening in the mountains.

Over the past 30 years, efforts by King Cove residents attempting to reach the Cold Bay Airport have resulted in numerous small plane crashes, some fatal. Neither King Cove nor Cold Bay have the sort of hospital facilities that are found in Anchorage. When King Cove people have a serious medical condition, they need to be ``medevaced'' to Anchorage from

Cold Bay. That assumes that they can reach the airport at Cold Bay.

This legislation accomplishes the goal of providing the King Cove people with a road to the airport. It accomplishes this goal in a way that provides a net gain, rather than a net loss, to wilderness. The exchange provided for in this bill will add 61,723 acres to the Izembek and Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuges. It adds 45,456 acres of wilderness, the first new wilderness areas designated by the Congress in Alaska in a generation. Not since the passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, ANILCA, has new wilderness been designated in Alaska.

More importantly, this bill will add key areas of wildlife habitat to these two world-class wildlife refuges. Habitat for some of the largest and wildest brown bears in the world will transfer from private to public ownership. Other areas include key habitat for internationally valued waterfowl such as stellar eiders and brants.

I am sad to say that this is not a new issue for this body. The people of King Cove have been seeking justice in the form of a simple road to Cold Bay for decades. Congress attempted to make things right for the people of King Cove about a decade ago and came up with an imperfect solution.

This imperfect solution involved the construction of a 17-mile road from King Cove to a point near the border of the Izembek Refuge wilderness and a very expensive hovercraft to ferry King Cove residents across the rough waters of Cold Bay. The community has concluded that it cannot afford the cost of the hovercraft solution.

This bill will finish the job started by the Congress a few years ago. This bill provides a wonderful combination of wilderness additions in return for a small road corridor within the Izembek Wildlife Refuge to permit the current 17-mile road to be completed all the way to Cold Bay. This is the fairest and most logical process by which the King Cove residents and the nation can all benefit.

I want to commend the parties who have worked on this bill. The State of Alaska, has brought nearly 43,000 acres to this exchange. Without this land, the exchange would not be possible.

The King Cove Native Corporation, which is a Village Corporation created by the Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act, ANCSA, is donating approximately 2,500 acres of high value wetland habitat in Kinzaroff Lagoon. This lagoon is part of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and will be designated as wilderness, so that the mouth of this lagoon will be in public ownership. The corporation is also offering another 10,500 acres, which will be made part of the Alaska Peninsula Wildlife Refuge while relinquishing another 5,400 acres of their ANCSA land in the Refuge.

The only land, which will leave Federal ownership in the area, is approximately 206 acres for a narrow road to connect the existing road from King Cove to the Cold Bay Airport. The route and alignment of the road, within the corridor established by the bill, will be determined through an inclusive, cooperative planning process.

It has been suggested by some that we should not reopen this issue--it has always been so controversial. People who fought this battle before, and still have the scars to prove it, were told that putting a road in a national wildlife refuge creates a bad precedent. I have been warned that every environmental group in the Nation will line up against me if I pursue the exchange.

That may be true but this is how I see it. In the 25 years that have passed since the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act, ANILCA, became law, I think most Alaskans have come to appreciate the value of setting aside land in Alaska for preservation. That appreciation took time. Many Alaskans, as you know, resisted ANILCA.

In return, it is appropriate for Alaskans to expect the conservation system units to be good neighbors to the aboriginal communities that they border. That hasn't always been the case. The Aleut people of King Cove inhabited their lands long before there was an Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. The King Cove people steadfastly maintain that they were not consulted before the decision was made to make the land that stands between their community and the airport a wilderness. It is their contention that thousands of others across the United States, Canada, and Europe were invited by the Federal Government to make their views known in this process, yet they were denied a

voice in this most crucial decision affecting their native homeland.

To me the King Cove road isn't just a matter of transportation. It is a matter of respect for Native people. That is why I am willing to take up this cause on behalf of the Native people of King Cove. I ask my colleagues to join with me and with the Aleut people of King Cove to make their dream of a road to the airport, something that those in the Lower 48 take for granted, a reality.

I ask unanimous consent that the text of the bill be printed in the **RECORD**.