



United States Department of the Interior



FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE
Regional Office, National Wildlife Refuge System-Alaska
Division of Conservation Planning and Policy
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Dear Reader:

The Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange/Road Corridor Final Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) is available for your review. The Final EIS describes five alternatives and presents an evaluation of the environmental consequences of each.

Background

In the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (the Act), Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to prepare an EIS to conduct an analysis of the proposed land exchange with the State of Alaska and the King Cove Corporation. In addition, the Act required an analysis of a road corridor through Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Izembek Wilderness between the communities of Cold Bay and King Cove, Alaska.

The project planning team includes the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) as the lead agency, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, Department of Transportation - Federal Highway Administration - Western Federal Lands Division, State of Alaska, Aleutians East Borough, City of King Cove, King Cove Corporation, the Agdaagux Tribe, and the Belkofski Tribe as formal cooperators. The Environmental Protection Agency and Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council are working with the planning team, though they are not formal cooperators.

The Draft EIS was released for public comment on March 16, 2012. The comment period ended May 18, 2012. We received a total of 71,960 submissions on the Draft EIS of which 1,849 were considered unique.

Contents of the EIS

The Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange/Road Corridor Final EIS contains the proposed action; the purpose and need; five alternatives including, no action, two road alternatives, hovercraft six days a week, and ferry service; and an analysis of the effects of each alternative. A summary of public comments and our responses to substantive comments are provided in Appendix G of the final EIS.

Preferred Alternative

The Service has selected Alternative 1, the no action alternative, as the preferred alternative.

The no action alternative was selected because it is believed to best preserve the integrity of the Izembek Refuge, the majority of which is congressionally-designated Wilderness, the most protective category of public lands reserved for areas where natural processes prevail. Building a road through this area would fragment undisturbed habitat for grizzly bear, caribou, and salmon and would compromise the protections offered to hundreds of thousands of waterfowl and shorebirds that depend upon internationally significant eelgrass beds in Izembek and Kinzarof lagoons, as well as adjacent uplands of the isthmus. While the proposed land exchange would bring more acres of land into the Refuge System, the increased acreage cannot compensate for the unique values of existing refuge lands, nor can it compensate for the anticipated effects that the proposed road would have on wildlife, habitat, subsistence resources, and wilderness values of the refuge.

Next Steps in the EIS Process

We are releasing this Final EIS for a 30-day public review period. We are not soliciting public comments at this time. Following conclusion of the review period, a Record of Decision (ROD) will be signed, and it will disclose the Service's final decision. Availability of the ROD will be announced through the Federal Register, a press release, the Refuge's web site, and communications with those on our mailing list.

A copy of the final EIS is available at: <http://izembek.fws.gov/EIS.htm> or you may request a compact disc of the entire document by email, izembek_eis@fws.gov; or telephone, (907) 786-3357. If you would like more information about the refuge, please visit <http://izembek.fws.gov>.