King Cove Road Fact Sheet

- The Aleut community of King Cove (Pop. 965) has maintained for the past 35 years that a one-lane, gravel road to the all-weather airport in neighboring Cold Bay is the only safe, reliable and affordable means to transport patients in medical emergencies.

- King Cove's airstrip, set at the base of two volcanic mountains, is closed an average of 100 days a year by dangerously high winds and foul weather. Nearby Cold Bay has a 10,000 foot, all-weather runway with an instrument approach system built by the U.S. Military during World War II.

- At least 19 deaths have been attributed to the lack of a land route to Cold Bay, either because of plane crashes or an inability to get timely medical treatment, including four people who died in a 1980 medevac crash. With only a small clinic and no full-time physician, residents of King Cove must travel 600 miles to Anchorage for most medical procedures, including for childbirth, trauma and minor injury.

- Without land access, the only alternative to evacuate a patient during bad weather is to call the U.S. Coast Guard to send a rescue helicopter from as far away as Kodiak at a cost to U.S. taxpayers of as much as $210,000 a trip.

- The full length of the proposed road would be about 30 miles (of which 19 miles already exist), but only about 11 miles of new road is needed within the refuge to connect with Cold Bay. The land required for the road (206 acres) is less than 1 percent of the total refuge.

- In 1998, Congress appropriated funds for a $9-million hovercraft for King Cove. It was operated by the Aleutians East Borough until 2010, when the Borough said it could no longer afford the more than $1 million a year in operating costs. The hovercraft also failed to function in the rough waters of the North Pacific Ocean that separate King Cove and Cold Bay 30 percent of the time.

- Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R – Alaska) sponsored a provision in the Omnibus Public Lands Act of 2009 ordering a land exchange. It was passed by Congress and signed by the President. An environmental impact statement (EIS) followed. On Feb. 5, 2013, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service recommended a no action alternative in the final EIS. Environmentalists argued a road through the wilderness would set a bad precedent. King Cove residents argue that saving lives would set a good precedent.

- On Aug. 30, 2013, U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell visited King Cove for about four hours. She toured the clinic and then listened to dozens of stories from residents about dangerous medevacs. Afterward she told residents, "I've listened to your stories. Now I have to listen to the animals."

- On Dec. 23, 2013, U.S. Interior Secretary Sally Jewell rejected the land exchange (56,393 acres) and the proposed road. The Interior Department cited concerns that a road through the area would be disruptive to

birds and other wildlife. King Cove residents say this is another example of Interior's flawed logic, especially if one considers the following three bullet points:

- The Izembek refuge actively promotes the area's world-class hunting opportunities, particularly for brown bear and waterfowl. The refuge has some of the highest daily sport hunting bag limits anywhere – six Canada geese, two black brant, eight puddle ducks, and 15 sea ducks. That's 31 birds per day, per hunter. The ptarmigan limit is another 20 birds per day.

- The Izembek Refuge – including federally designated wilderness areas – already contains nearly 70 miles of road built by the U.S. Military during World War II, some 50 miles of which continue to be maintained and used today by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The National Wildlife Refuge System has more than 4,900 miles of roads nationally.

- The federal government would have received more than 200 times the number of acres needed for the road, including 2,300 acres of eelgrass beds – 20 times more migratory bird feeding habitat than would potentially be lost through the exchange. That land exchange would have removed 206 acres from the Izembek refuge for the road and 1,600 acres from the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge on Sitkinak Island south of Kodiak. In exchange, the refuge would have received 43,093 acres of stand land and 13,300 acres of land owned by the King Cove (Native) Corporation (56,393 acres vs. 1,806 acres.)

- On June 4, 2014, King Cove tribes, the corporation, the city and the Aleutians East Borough sued Interior Secretary Sally Jewell and other federal officials over the environmental impacts and the road issue. The plaintiffs contend that the final environmental impact statement was flawed and inadequate. In addition, they maintain that Secretary Jewell violated the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 by failing to make a public interest finding regarding whether or not the "no action" alternative was in the best interest of the United States.

- On June 18, 2015, a 2016 Interior appropriations bill, drafted by Sen. Murkowski, was passed out of the Senate Appropriations Committee. It contained language advancing an equal-value land transfer that would have allowed construction of a short, single-lane, non-commercial use, gravel road between King Cove and Cold Bay to provide residents with reliable access to medical care in emergencies. The language would have removed the proposed road corridor from the wilderness portion of the refuge. The language was ultimately not included in the final year-end budget deal agreed to by Congress.

- On Sept. 8, 2015, U.S. District Court Judge Holland ruled against the King Cove Group and determined there was no violation of NEPA (National Environmental Policy Act) or of the OPLMA (Omnibus Public Lands Management Act). The judge acknowledged that Secretary Jewell based her decision on the environmental impacts of the road and ignored the public health and safety impacts. King Cove remains determined to keep fighting for a life-saving access road to the all-weather Cold Bay Airport.

- In July 2016, Senators Lisa Murkowski, Dan Sullivan and Congressman Don Young introduced identical bills (S. 3204 and H.R. 5777) in both chambers of Congress which includes an equal value land transfer in exchange for construction of a short, single-lane, non-commercial road linking remote King Cove to the nearby all-weather Cold Bay airport.