

Testimony of Della Trumble
Lifelong Aleut Resident of King Cove & Community Spokesperson

Testifying Before
House Natural Resources Committee
Subcommittee on Federal Lands
Regarding
HR 218 - The King Cove Road Land Exchange Act

April 5, 2017

Good Afternoon Mr. Chairman, Congressman Young, Ranking Member Grijalva, and Members of the Subcommittee. My name is Della Trumble. I am an Aleut. I was born and raised and continue to live in King Cove, Alaska. The residents of King Cove love our community just as the Athabascan residents of your village, Congressman Young, love the community of Fort Yukon. On behalf of our 900 residents, thank you Congressman for your steadfast compassion and conviction to our transportation access issue.

Today, I am speaking on behalf of all the shareholders of the King Cove Corporation, as a member of the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove, and for all other residents of King Cove. I am also speaking as a mother, an Alaskan and as a citizen of the United States.

I am deeply connected to the land that you know as the Izembek Refuge through my ancestors, who lived and subsisted on this wilderness for 4,000 years. Our culture and respect for our natural environment will never allow us to damage the refuge. We were taught to only take what you need and to always maintain a renewable resource.

I have lived this road issue now for over 35 years of my life, as have many other people in this community. During this time, I have made over 30 trips to Washington to testify, lobby, and advocate for this road to allow for a safe, dependable and affordable transportation access from King Cove to the all-weather Cold Bay Airport. Our need for this very modest road connection to the Cold Bay Airport is essential for our medical and health needs and for our sustainable future. Who would have believed that this battle for safe access would have taken decades - a right that most people in the United States enjoy daily?

We sincerely thought the passage of the 2009 Omnibus Public Lands Act with its King Cove provision originally sponsored by our Congressman Young was the final decision needed to authorize the road. The community remains stunned over three years later by Secretary Jewell's insensitive decision to deny us the road. However, her decision did not totally surprise us. When she visited King Cove in August of 2013, she informed us she was there to "speak on behalf of the Izembek birds and animals which have no voice." These are the very birds that are being hunted by sport hunters - birds that are being sent to King Cove because hunters are only utilizing the bird for the sport and not for food.

In response to Secretary Jewell's comment, our Police Chief and life-long resident, Robert Gould, politely told the Secretary it was his responsibility to "speak on behalf of all King Cove residents who have lost loved ones or must continue to endure medical and health challenges because of the community's transportation access problem."

How much more do we need to endure, particularly when there is such a reasonable, dependable and affordable solution to our transportation access problem to the Cold Bay Airport? We desperately need the 11-mile, one-lane gravel road connecting King Cove to the Cold Bay Airport. This road connection will drastically improve our ability for emergency and routine medical and health care and significantly upgrade our overall quality-of-life. Why is this simple concept so difficult for some people to accept?

Since December 23, 2013, when Secretary Jewell said NO to our road, we have had 58 medevacs out of King Cove to the Cold Bay Airport. Thank God, for the brave men and women of the U.S. Coast Guard who were available to help out with 17 of those medevacs when no other option could work. However, we never take the assistance and availability of the Coast Guard for granted because we know it is not their mission or responsibility to risk their lives to make these heroic rescues.

When a medevac occurs, it isn't just the patient that suffers. Family members and friends agonize over their loved one's condition and safety in an environment with severe, fluctuating weather. Many people in King Cove experience fear and anxiety over traveling because of past experiences. I know first-hand how heart-

wrenching it can be when a loved one gets on a plane and things end up going terribly wrong. No mother should ever have to witness their own precious daughter crash-land at the King Cove Airstrip due to our highly unpredictable turbulence and downdrafts from the volcanic mountainous terrain surrounding the narrow valley where our 3,000' gravel runway is located. It was the scariest few minutes of my life as I sat there watching the plane be pushed downward by the wind and crash-landing on the runway without its landing gear down. It was undoubtedly a very frightening moment in my life. Similar experiences, from both flying and traveling on the water have been encountered by way too many King Cove Aleuts. It must stop. We know we are continuing to live on borrowed time with our transportation access problem.

This is not an industrial issue. There is no mine, oil field or other industrial use behind this bill. It is simply the needs of the Aleut people who lived on this land for over 4000 years which needs our Government's help.

Please know we will never quit fighting until we are successful in our quest to achieve a safe, dependable and affordable transportation solution for our residents. We know the only logical solution is a modest, non-evasive, one-lane gravel road.

Finally, we are so fortunate to have Congressman Young's commitment, common sense, and passion to help us achieve this solution. On behalf of all King Cove Aleuts and all other community residents, we respectfully ask Congress and the President to authorize the road and do so without the involvement of the Department of the Interior. Please make this right. We have fought long enough. It is time.

Mr. Chairman, I also ask that testimony from my fellow Aleuts and born and raised in King Cove, Mayor Stanley Mack and Dean Gould, President of the King Cove Village Corporation, also be added to the record of this hearing.

Thank you.