

TO: Editorial and Opinion Writers

FROM: Emilie Surrusco, Spokesperson Alaska Wilderness Political Fund

RE: GOV. PALIN'S OTHER ALASKAN BOONDOGGLE

DATE: September 24, 2008

Alaska Governor Palin may be taking heat for a "Road to Nowhere" that is under construction in her state, but there's another road she's backing that has conservationists far more concerned. The provision for a "Golden Gravel Road" is part of a public lands package moving through Congress.

American taxpayers should say no to the newest boondoggle, offered up by Alaskan Senators Ted Stevens (R-AK), Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), and Representative Don Young (R-AK). Along with Governor Sarah Palin, they are seeking another outrageous pork project for their state – building a multi-million-dollar gravel road to connect two small Alaskan towns, destroying a Wetland of International Importance in the process.

EXPENSIVE AND UNNECESSARY. The proposed project would construct a road straight through federally designated Wilderness in Izembek National Wildlife Refuge to connect the villages of King Cove and Cold Bay. Proponents argue the road is necessary to ensure the health and safety of King Cove's 800 or so residents. However, Congress already poured \$37.5 million into the community to meet these needs in the King Cove Health and Safety Act of 1998. This legislation provided residents with millions of dollars to upgrade their medical facilities and purchase a hovercraft, which can currently transport people to nearby Cold Bay in about 20 minutes. This same community is now arguing they need another huge federal project to build a road connecting these same two towns – arguing, in fact, that their hovercraft is too expensive to maintain. Instead they'd rather have American taxpayers foot the bill for a "golden gravel road" through globally significant Wilderness lands on a National Wildlife Refuge, a project that will cost millions of dollars to build and millions more to maintain.

ENVIRONMENTALLY DEVASTATING. Studies show roads cause harm to ecosystems and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has consistently found that it would cause significant long-term damage. The importance of Izembek Refuge's wildlife habitats was acknowledged in 1998's King Cove Health and Safety Act, which specifically prohibited building a road through this federally protected Wilderness. The Izembek National Wildlife Refuge contains internationally important wetlands, which provide feeding and resting grounds for millions of migrating birds. The lagoons and wetlands are relied on by virtually the entire world populations of Pacific black brants and emperor geese, along with bald eagles and federally threatened Steller's eiders. Brown bears, caribou, wolves, and wolverines also use refuge habitats. The Izembek road would cut directly through the heart of these biologically vital areas.

American taxpayers should encourage their Senators to keep the expensive, environmentally devastating, and unnecessary Izembek road proposal out of any public lands package bill, and to vote against legislation that includes this newest Alaskan boondoggle.