



U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Proposed Land Exchange Environmental Impact Statement Newsletter

Issue no. 1 – January 2010

Introduction

In the Omnibus Public Land Management Act of 2009 (the Act), Congress directed the Secretary of the Interior to prepare an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) under the National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) to conduct an analysis of a proposed land exchange with the State of Alaska and the King Cove Corporation and the potential construction and operation of a road between the communities of King Cove and Cold Bay, Alaska. The Act also requires the EIS contain an evaluation of a specific road corridor through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge that is identified in consultation with the State of Alaska, the City of King Cove, Alaska, and the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove, Alaska. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) is the lead agency for preparing the EIS.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

The Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and the North Creek and Pavlof units of the Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge are located at the westernmost tip of the Alaska Peninsula, and cover an area just under two million acres (see Map __). To the north of the Izembek Refuge is the Bering Sea; to the south is the Pacific Ocean. The 300,000 acre Izembek Wilderness covers much of the refuge and includes pristine streams, extensive wetlands, steep mountains, tundra, and sand dunes, and provides high scenic, wildlife, and scientific values, as well as outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation.

The King Cove Corporation is an Alaska Native Village Corporation established under the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act which granted the corporation land entitlements within and adjacent to Izembek Refuge. The State of Alaska also owns lands, submerged lands, shorelands, and tidelands within and adjacent to Izembek and Alaska Peninsula Refuges, including the Izembek State Game Refuge.

WHAT IS BEING PROPOSED?

The Act states that, if approved, the land exchange would involve the removal of approximately 206 acres within the Izembek Wilderness portion of Izembek National Wildlife Refuge for the road corridor and approximately 1,600 acres of Federal land within the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge on Sitkinak

Island (see Maps __ and __). In exchange, the Service would receive approximately 43,093 acres of land owned by the State of Alaska and approximately 13,300 acres of land owned by the King Cove Corporation. These lands are located around Cold Bay and adjacent to the North Creek Unit of Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge. The Act specifies that this land exchange is not subject to any Federal requirements for land exchanges relating to valuation, appraisal, or equalization of land.

NEPA ANALYSIS

The Service is preparing an EIS to address the potential environmental, cultural, and socio-economic impacts that could result from the proposed land exchange. The EIS process will help the Secretary of Interior decide whether or not to proceed with the exchange. As part of the process, the Service is inviting the public to provide input throughout the process of the EIS. The initial opportunity for public input is during the scoping process, which will close on May 1, 2010.

What is Scoping?

Scoping is the process of actively acquiring input from the public and other interested Federal, State, Tribal, and local agencies. Information gained during scoping assists the lead agency in identifying potential environmental issues, alternatives, and mitigation measures associated with development of the proposed project. The process provides a mechanism for “narrowing” the scope of issues so that the EIS can focus the analysis on areas of high interest and concern. Your participation in the scoping process is a vital component to preparing a sound EIS. The scoping process provides the public and agencies opportunities for meaningful involvement in the decision-making process. As the lead agency, the Service is responsible for the development of the EIS, which includes:

- A process for public participation
- Identifying project issues and concerns
- Identifying the purpose and need for the proposed action
- Describing the affected environment

- _ Developing alternatives
- _ Evaluating the effects of the alternatives for the proposed project

HOW YOU CAN BE INVOLVED

This newsletter is the first in a series of newsletters that will be issued periodically to keep the public informed about the EIS preparation and project development. This first issue offers information about the scoping process to encourage public participation and input. We will accept written comments until May 1, 2010. You can learn more attending one of our public scoping meetings.

Scoping Meeting Dates and Locations:

Washington DC Public Scoping Meeting

Thursday, March 11, 2010 – 1:00 to 4:00 p.m.
Main Auditorium, U.S. Department of the Interior,
1849 C Street NW, Washington, DC 20240

Anchorage, AK Public Scoping Meeting

__day, March __, 2010.

Location

King Cove, Cold Bay, False Pass, Sand Point, and Nelson Lagoon, AK Public Scoping Meetings

Meetings are tentatively scheduled for the last week of April, 2010. Details of these meetings will be announced locally 30 days prior, however, last minute schedule changes may occur due to weather or other unforeseen circumstances.

Public Scoping Ends May 1, 2010

The Service is requesting input from Federal, State and Tribal agencies, local governments, private organizations, refuge users, and the public to help identify the issues associated with the proposed project. Your input is important to the process. Public scoping comments can be submitted to the Service using the following methods:

- Email: izembek_eis@fws.gov;
- Fax: Attn: Stephanie Brady, (907) 786-3965;
or
- U.S. Mail: Stephanie Brady, Project Coordinator, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, 1011 East Tudor Rd., MS-231, Anchorage, AK 99503.

This is not the only opportunity you will have to comment on this project. When the EIS has been prepared and distributed, you will have an opportunity to make further comments.

PROJECT TIMELINE AND PARTNERS

EIS Step	Completion Date
Scoping	May 1, 2010
Draft EIS public review starts	March 31, 2011
Final EIS released	February 28, 2012
Record of Decision	April 30, 2012
Public Interest Finding	April 30, 2012

Project cooperators include U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, U.S. Department of Transportation (Federal Lands Highways Program), State of Alaska, Aleutians East Borough, City of King Cove, Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove, and the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council. The Service is the lead agency with final responsibility for the EIS. After the EIS is completed, the Secretary of the Interior must determine that the land exchange is in the public interest.