

Road 'Agreement' Threatens Izembek Wilderness

By Fran Mauer

*"To establish a National Wilderness Preservation System
for the permanent good of the whole people..." (The Wilderness Act)*

On January 22, 2018, Interior Secretary Ryan Zinke signed a land exchange agreement with the Alaskan native corporation of King Cove that will transfer federal lands within the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) for the purpose of constructing a road across lands that are designated as Wilderness. If this agreement is allowed to stand, it will not only result in an irretrievable loss of Wilderness and create severe impacts to wildlife and habitat, but it will also cast a dangerous shadow over the entire National Wilderness Preservation System.

On January 31, 2018, Wilderness Watch and eight other conservation organizations represented by Trustees for Alaska challenged Zinke's actions in court. The legal process is just beginning.

The Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) of 1980, which established 56 million acres of Wilderness, gives the Secretary of Interior the authority to exchange federal lands, including lands designated as Wilderness. However such an exchange must support the purposes of ANILCA. Building a road through the Izembek Wilderness is not an ANILCA purpose.

The Izembek National Wildlife Refuge is located near the tip of the Alaska Peninsula in southwest Alaska, where volcanoes, tundra, and coastal lagoons dominate the mainland. Just beyond Izembek, the Aleutian Islands extend nearly to Asia. Izembek was established first as a wildlife range in 1960. Congress re-named it a refuge and designated 300,000 acres (95 percent of it) as Wilderness in 1980.



Izembek National Wildlife Refuge. Kristine Sowl/USFWS.

Izembek NWR and Wilderness protect a unique diversity of wildlife and habitats. A major feature is Izembek lagoon, one of the world's largest eel grass beds, where nearly the entire population of Pacific brant feed and stage before migrating to winter areas in coastal Mexico. The Izembek NWR is an international cross-roads for bird migrations to Asia, the Pacific Islands, and

North and South America. The refuge is also home to brown bears, caribou, wolves, wolverine, salmon, seals, sea otters, and many other species.

Headquarters for the Izembek Refuge are located in the small community of Cold Bay (population about 50) where one of the longest airport runways in Alaska (10,400-feet long) was constructed during World War II. The Cold Bay runway is considered an "all weather" runway because it is located on the low-lying Bering Sea coastal plain where instrument guidance systems allow for safe operations during most weather conditions.

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Message from the President



Redefining "Wilderness" in a Changing World

Over the past several years, the federal agencies in charge of wilderness stewardship and administration have begun to twist the idea of Wilderness into its opposite. This had led to agency proposals that could amount to a de-facto, administrative de-designation of Wilderness. This shift could not have occurred without some muddled legalistic and philosophical underpinnings, which twist the plain meaning of language. In essence, this has been a profound reframing—some of it well intended, some of it intellectual dishonesty if not downright Orwellian—of basic Wilderness concepts and even definitions. The threat this poses to Wilderness is profound. The following examples illustrate this threat.

A couple of years ago, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service approved a timber sale in a portion of the Red Rocks Lake Wilderness in Montana, ostensibly to make the area more natural and resistant to wildfires, and to protect structures in a nearby area from future wildfires (NOTE: The agency was dead wrong from wilderness, vegetation and fire ecology, and structure protection perspectives.). Wilderness Watch learned of this decision in time to shut it down by informing agency heads they would be violating the Wilderness Act. The obvious question is how could Wilderness be more "natural" by being logged, and how does logging result in the area being "in contrast with those areas where [human] works dominate the landscape"?

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) recently proposed a massive habitat manipulation project, involving cutting down or removing native juniper trees on a few hundred thousand acres, 47,000 acres of which was within five Wildernesses in the Owyhee Canyonlands region of Idaho. Again, this project was supposedly to make the area more natural, as the BLM thinks the area has too many juniper trees. Because of public outcry, much of it generated by Wilderness Watch, BLM has indicated it will likely forego any cutting in Wilderness. However, one has to wonder how a project so antithetical to Wilderness stewardship could go so far as to be analyzed in an environmental impact statement.

The last example is not directly a Wilderness issue, but rather relates to what constitutes protecting wilderness characteristics in national forest roadless areas that are candidates for wilderness designation. Forest Service officials on the Nez Perce National Forest in Idaho used to acknowledge that logging and road building "would further reduce roadless acreages," thereby reducing the area of potential wilderness. But in a recent timber sale environmental document, the Forest Service concluded that logging and temporary roadbuilding do "not affect the ability to manage this area for wilderness" and any impacts would only be short-term. This complete reversal is stunning. One can only wonder that if logging doesn't harm the potential for wilderness designation of roadless areas, how long before the agency suggests logging in Wilderness won't harm the wilderness values of designated areas?

Twenty-five years ago, neither the logging in Red Rock Lakes, the Owyhee juniper clearing, or the misrepresentation of the effects of logging on the Nez Perce would have passed the laugh test for wilderness administration or even the way we thought about Wilderness.

Today, it is all too clear the National Wilderness Preservation System, and the idea of Wilderness itself, need defense. As Wilderness Watch supporters know, designation of Wilderness does not lead automatically to its protection. We need to and will remain vigilant. 🌿

—Gary Macfarlane



WILDERNESS WATCH
Keeping Wilderness Wild

The *Wilderness Watcher* is the quarterly newsletter of Wilderness Watch, America's leading conservation organization dedicated solely to protecting the lands and waters in the National Wilderness Preservation System.

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The community of King Cove (population about 950) is located 20 miles from Cold Bay on the Pacific coast side of the Alaska Peninsula. King Cove is the site of the largest seafood processing plant in Alaska. It is owned by a Japanese corporation, and operates year round. King Cove is located in a narrow fiord nearly surrounded by steep mountainous terrain. During inclement weather, the 3,800-foot long runway at King Cove is not operational due to turbulence and poor visibility. Instrument guidance systems are not feasible due to the mountainous terrain.

Proposals to build a road across the Izembek Wilderness from King Cove to Cold Bay have been raised over the past few decades. Early proposals focused on economic benefits such as transportation of fresh fish products from King Cove to distant markets via jet planes operating from Cold Bay. Later, claims were made that the road is essential for medical evacuations during inclement weather when aircraft can't land at the King Cove airport. Such claims, however, have been refuted by Dr. Peter Mjos, who served as a medical officer with the Indian Health Service for decades in the eastern Aleutians region. Dr. Mjos explained in a 2012 letter that during storm conditions, "Any vehicle or ambulance attempting to transit such conditions could be suicidal, rescue impossible and rescuers imperiled."

In 1997, Senator Ted Stevens of Alaska introduced a bill in Congress to authorize a road across the Izembek Wilderness to Cold Bay. The Clinton administration threatened a veto. Consequently, Stevens managed to get the King Cove Health and Safety Act passed in 1998, which provided \$37.5 million in taxpayer dollars for improvements to the King Cove health clinic and airport, and for the purchase of a 98 foot-long hovercraft for over-water transportation to Cold Bay. During 2007 to 2010, all medical evacuations to Cold Bay via the hovercraft were successful, however, the call for a road continued. In 2010 the hovercraft was taken out of service in King Cove by local officials, claiming operation expenses were excessive. It was later placed in service at Akutan, in the Aleutian Islands, where it was used to transport seafood workers.

In 2009, Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski succeeded in getting an amendment to the Omnibus Public Land Management Act that specified a land exchange process—involving the federal government, state of Alaska, and the King Cove native corporation—that would enable construction of a road from King Cove to Cold Bay. The Act required preparation of an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and a public interest determination by the Secretary of Interior. The record

of decision for the EIS and a public interest determination were issued in December 2013. The decision supported the no action alternative, stating:

The Service has evaluated the effects of various proposed roads through the Izembek Refuge and Wilderness in numerous analyses since 1960 and has consistently found that the impacts of building a road on the wildlife resources, habitats and designated Wilderness would create irreversible change and damage to a unique and ecologically important area and especially to designated Wilderness.

Then-Interior Secretary Sally Jewell also determined the proposed land exchange and road are not in the public interest.

Road proponents reacted by filing legal actions challenging the record of decision and public interest determination. Wilderness Watch and several other conservation organizations intervened in support of the Jewell decision. In 2014, the U.S. District Court upheld the EIS record of decision and Jewell's public interest determination. Road proponents appealed to the Ninth Circuit court, but later suspended their appeal.

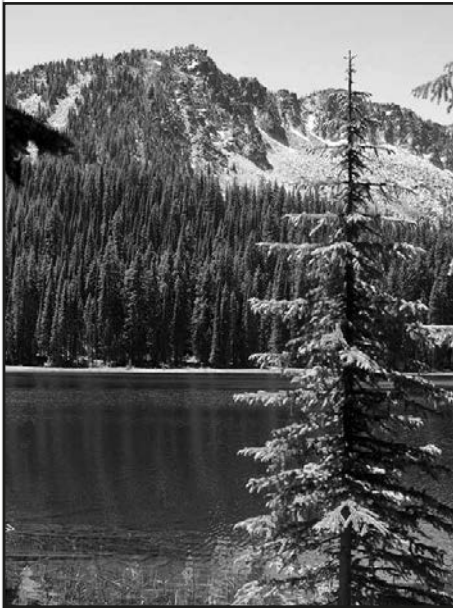
In 2015, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers issued a report that evaluated several non-road alternatives for transportation between King Cove and Cold Bay. This study found a marine ferry sufficient to negotiate the waters of Cold Bay during storms would be reliable 99 percent of the time. However, Sen. Murkowski and Alaska Representative Don Young have continued to introduce bills in Congress that mandate a road across the Izembek Wilderness. Thus far, none of these bills have been enacted.

Now, the Izembek Wilderness faces yet another threat created by the recent Zinke land exchange agreement. Similar land exchange ploys to allow development within federal conservation areas in Alaska were attempted during the Reagan and Bush administrations. Most were unsuccessful. Wilderness Watch remains resolute in defending the Izembek Wilderness and the Wilderness Act. With the great support of our dedicated members, we will keep Wilderness wild! 🌿

Fran worked as a wildlife biologist with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Alaska. He first worked to compile biological information in support of the legislative action leading to passage of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act which set aside over 100 million acres as National Parks, Refuges, Wilderness Areas, and Wild Rivers. Following passage of the Act, he was a wildlife biologist at Arctic National Wildlife Refuge for over 20 years. An outspoken advocate for Wilderness, Fran's writings have appeared in various media sources and publications opposing proposed oil development in the Arctic Refuge. Fran is the Representative of Wilderness Watch's Alaska Chapter and a former Board member.

On the Watch

A Wilderness Win for the North Fork John Day Wilderness



U.S. Forest Service

Following an objection by Wilderness Watch, the Wallowa-Whitman National Forest withdrew a draft decision on a proposal to conduct a “prescribed fire” on up to 9,557 acres of the North Fork John Day Wilderness in Oregon. Wilderness Watch, with Blue Mountains Biodiversity Project, led a formal administrative objection to the *Ten Cent Community Fire Protection Project Final Environmental Impact Statement* (FEIS). The Forest Supervisor’s decision ended the objection process.

In our objection we noted several key points, including:

- Human-ignited fires are inconsistent with the Wilderness Act which states Wilderness should exist “in contrast” to areas where humans dominate the landscape. They also tend to burn differently than natural fires.
- The Forest Service failed to show this project was necessary for preservation of the area as Wilderness. Such intentional human manipulation would harm the area’s wild character.
- The Ten Cent project demonstrates the resistance of many wilderness managers to let nature be.

While the agency gave no specific reasons for withdrawing the draft decision, the points we raised certainly played a role in that decision. For the time being, the Forest Service will not subject this portion of the North Fork John Day

Wilderness to intensive ecological manipulation. ♪

Success: BLM drops Owyhee Canyonlands Wilderness Juniper Project



North Fork Owyhee Wilderness by BLM ID via Flickr.

The Bureau of Land Management (BLM) released its Final Environmental Impact Statement (FEIS) for its *Bruneau-Owyhee Sage-Grouse Habitat Project* in the Owyhee Canyonlands region in Idaho in February. Wilderness Watch has opposed this drastic tree-clearing project. The 2016 Draft EIS called for cutting trees across 47,000 acres of Wilderness in the Big Jacks, Little Jacks, North Fork Owyhee, Owyhee River, and Pole Creek Wildernesses. Protected in 2009 as Wilderness, the Owyhee Canyonlands complex is one of the largest intact desert ecosystems in the lower 48 states—a spectacular maze of rugged plateaus, water-filled canyons, and a sense of remoteness rivaled by few landscapes.

The BLM is proposing to cut native juniper forests to modify habitat to ostensibly benefit sage-grouse, but it’s questionable whether juniper removal would benefit anything but cows. Wilderness Watch has been advocating that BLM instead find alternatives to

killing native junipers and intensively manipulating vast areas of Wilderness; remove domestic livestock grazing in areas important to sage-grouse both within and outside the Owyhee Wildernesses; and allow natural fires to burn so that the natural ecological processes that have sustained sage-grouse and a diversity of habitats for millennia can continue to do so.

The thousands of comments Wilderness Watch members and supporters submitted made a difference—the BLM’s preferred alternative in the FEIS, C1, does not include any cutting in Wilderness. Unfortunately, C1 cuts the most acres—1,100 square miles—so while it’s a win for Wilderness, it’s the worst alternative for non-wilderness lands. A final decision is expected soon. ♪

On the Watch (continued)

Wilderness Watch Challenges Game Farming in Wasatch Wildernesses



Collared mountain goat by Tom Driggers via Flickr. Bighorn sheep capture by James Marvin Phelps via Flickr.

Wilderness Watch and other groups have filed an objection to the Forest Service's (FS) draft decision to allow the Utah Division of Wildlife Resources (UDWR) to use helicopters to capture and collar mountain goats and bighorn sheep in the Mt. Timpanogos, Lone Peak, and Twin Peak Wildernesses in Utah. Helicopter landing is incompatible with Wilderness, harasses wildlife, and destroys the experience for wilderness visitors.

Mountain goats are a non-native exotic species in Utah that UDWR placed in the Wasatch Mountains some years ago for hunting. The project originally involved capturing only mountain goats (whose population is declining), but because they aren't native it was virtually impossible to show the project was necessary to benefit the Wildernesses. UDWR later added bighorn sheep, a native species, to the project.

The project includes up to 60 helicopter landings to pursue, capture, sample, and collar up to 20 mountain goats and 10 bighorn sheep—nearly all in Wilderness.

If the agency could justify capturing bighorns, it could do so on the roughly two-thirds of their range outside the Wildernesses. If UDWR is concerned about a decline in the mountain goat population, hunting should be limited or ended. Attempting to perpetuate a non-native species in Wilderness violates a fundamental tenet of Wilderness—that it remains untrammelled. ♪

World's First Wilderness Under Attack



Kevin Gruenwald, US Air Force

Wilderness Watch is concerned about the U.S. Air Force's proposal for up to 10,000 F-16 fighter jet "sorties" a year, including supersonic flights, over the Gila and Aldo Leopold Wildernesses and Gila National Forest in southern New Mexico. Although the proposal is unclear, it indicates serious impacts to Wilderness. The Apache Kid, Blue Range, Bear Wallow, Carlsbad Caverns, and Withington Wildernesses may also be threatened.

The Gila is the world's first designated Wilderness (administratively designated in 1924), and the largest in New Mexico. The Aldo Leopold Wilderness was once part of the administratively designated Gila. The area's mesas, rolling hills, deep canyons, high mountains, and sheer cliffs are home to wildlife such as elk, black bears, bobcats, cougars, antelope, javelina, and mule deer.

The area's wild character would no doubt be harmed by the invasion and constant noise of these thousands of military overflights, some of which could occur at low altitudes. Additionally, the Air Force is proposing to drop annually up to 15,360 flares and chaff each ("a bundle of chaff consists of approximately five million fibers"), which could land in the Wildernesses. The Air Force needs to consider a range of alternatives, including those that wouldn't harm Wilderness. ♪

On the Watch continued on page 6

Wilderness in Congress

Wilderness Watch staff spent the week of March 11-16 in Washington, DC, lobbying on a number of wilderness bills, including anti-wilderness riders to the Omnibus Appropriations. Here is an update on some of the more important measures:

• Mountain Bikes in Wilderness, HR 1349.

This bill, authored by Rep. Tom McClintock (R-CA) would open every Wilderness in the nation to mountain bikes and other mechanical transport. The bill passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee in December 2017, but over unanimous Democratic opposition as well as that of Rep. Lynn Cheney (R-WY). Since the bill moved out of committee, Rep. Greg Gianforte (R-MT) reversed his position and publicly announced his opposition to the bill. It has yet to be scheduled for consideration by the full House. There is as yet no Senate companion bill. Wilderness Watch spearheaded a sign-on letter of opposition to this bill from 133 conservation organizations from around the nation.

• SHARE Act, HR 3668.

The Sportsmen's Heritage and Recreational Enhancement (SHARE) Act, by Rep. Jeff Duncan (R-SC) contains provisions promoted by the Safari Club International that would essentially gut the 1964 Wilderness Act. These provisions would allow endless manipulations in Wilderness for any actions even remotely connected to hunting, fishing, shooting, or fish and wildlife management. The bill passed out of the House Natural Resources Committee in Sept. 2017, but a

controversial NRA-sponsored provision related to gun silencers has held up the bill from consideration by the full House.

• BWCAW Mining Bills, HR 3905 and HR 3115.

Two bills have passed the full House that would facilitate new copper-nickel sulfide mining near or next to the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in northeastern Minnesota. HR 3905 (Emmer, R-MN) would renew and award two expired federal mineral leases to Twin Metals for a massive copper-nickel mine at the doorstep of the BWCAW. HR 3115 (Nolan, D-MN) would mandate a land exchange of 6,650 acres of National Forest land to facilitate the development of the PolyMet open-pit mine. Neither bill has a Senate companion bill at this time, but HR 3115 was in play as a possible rider in the Omnibus Appropriations bill in March. Fortunately that rider did not make it into the final version.

• Interior Appropriations Grazing Rider.

A provision related to grazing appeared in both the House and Senate versions of the Interior Appropriations bill. This provision would have required the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management to make available any vacant grazing allotments to the holder of other grazing allotments that were unusable due to drought or wildfire. In some Wildernesses, grazing allotments are still on the books even though they may not have been grazed for decades. This rider would have forced those vacant allotments to be opened to grazing without any environmental review. Fortunately, this rider was also excluded from the final Omnibus Appropriations bill. 🐾

On the Watch (continued from page 5)

Sec. Zinke Fast-Tracks Mining Leases Threatening the Boundary Waters



Photo: Kevin Proescholdt

In addition to legislation in Congress, more action continues with the Boundary Waters Canoe Area Wilderness (BWCAW) in northeastern Minnesota. Just before Christmas, the Trump Administration's Department of Interior issued a new legal memorandum designed to fast-track the renewal of two expired federal mining leases on the doorstep of the BWCAW. The new legal opinion reverses previous departmental policy, and goes against an earlier decision by both the Bureau of Land Management and the U.S. Forest Service to deny the renewal of the expired leases. Twin Metals needs these two leases to develop its massive underground and above-ground copper-nickel sulfide mine at the very edge of the BWCAW.

In Minnesota, environmentalists continue to raise concerns with the draft Permit to Mine for the proposed PolyMet mine south of the BWCAW. Some of our colleague organizations have also requested a Contested Case Hearing on this permit.

A recent poll commissioned by the Campaign to Save the Boundary Waters found growing opposition to copper-nickel mining in Minnesota, both statewide and even in northeastern Minnesota. Statewide, 70 percent oppose the new mines (up from 59 percent a year ago), with only 22 percent in favor. In northeastern Minnesota's 8th Congressional District, 56 percent oppose the new copper mines, with 39 percent supporting it. The poll was conducted by a GOP-leaning professional polling firm.

In other good news, Congress included \$4 million in the final Omnibus Appropriations bill in March to begin buying state-owned school trust lands within the BWCAW from the State of Minnesota. 🐾

Foxes and Cows and Your Membership

By Jeff Smith



As you read these pages, you realize that, in many of our public wildlands these days, the foxes are guarding the hen house, and the cows are in the corn! But here's the thing. Nothing strikes more fear into the officials weakening our wilderness system than people organizing to save public lands. That's what we do when we belong to something larger than ourselves. Becoming a member of Wilderness Watch or renewing your membership means that you are joining thousands of people who are speaking in one voice about our love of Wilderness.

A long-time Alaska member took this organizing to the next level late last year when he challenged us to add new members. He offered up to \$10,000 to match all new donors' contributions. In four months, we maxed out his donation while adding hundreds of new members.

He's back this year with a \$15,000 match for new donors. So please, when you're finished reading this newsletter, put it in the hands of someone you know who loves Wilderness. Bring a new member into the fold, help us double each new donation, and strengthen our collective force protecting Wilderness. 🐾

LOVE THE WILDERNESS? Help Us Keep It Wild!
Yes! I would like to make a contribution and help defend Wilderness!

Here is an extra donation to help protect Wilderness!

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Thank you for your good work!

Wilderness Watch had two board members term-limit at our Fall 2017 board meeting—Jerome Walker and Janine Blaeloch.



Jerome Walker, a retired neurologist, served two three-year terms on our board. Jerome has been active with Wilderness Watch for a couple decades, though, including with our Georgia Chapter. He has worked to help keep the

Cumberland Island Wilderness wild and stop the National Park Service from promoting commercial driving tours and development within the Wilderness, along with other issues affecting Cumberland. Jerome notes, “Teddy Roosevelt said, ‘Speak softly and carry a big stick.’ Our big stick is the law.”

Thank you, Jerome, for helping Wilderness Watch carry that big stick.



Janine Blaeloch also term-limited at our Fall 2017 board meeting. Janine served a three-year term on our board but is a long-time colleague of Wilderness Watch through her public lands work. Janine led the Western Lands Project (WLP) for nearly 20 years, never wavering in her work

to keep public lands public—by opposing various schemes that would give or sell public lands to private interests. WLP was very successful in bringing reform and attention to public land deals. Janine notes, “Through all the years I worked with Wilderness Watch, I always knew I could trust them to make the right call on every issue and stand on principle—a rarity in the wider environmental community.”

Thank you, Janine, for standing with us.

Thank you both for your years of dedicated service to the organization and Wilderness! We look forward to continuing to work together to protect our Wilderness heritage. 🌿