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Subject: Secretary Zinke Signs Agreement to Build Life-Saving Road in Alaska



For Immediate Release
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Secretary Zinke Signs Agreement to Build Life-Saving Road in Alaska



WASHINGTON, D.C. – Today, Congressional Western Caucus Chairman **Paul A. Gosar D.D.S. (AZ-04)**, House Committee on Natural Resources Chairman **Rob Bishop (UT-01)**, Vice-Chairman for Indian Affairs and Oceans **Don Young (AK-At Large)**, Chief Infrastructure and Forestry Officer **Bruce Westerman (AR-04)** and Western Caucus Member **Doug LaMalfa (CA-**

01) released the following statements after the United States Department of the Interior (DOI) signed an agreement with the Alaska Native King Cove Native Corp to build a life-saving road connecting the native village of King Cove, AK to the Cold Bay Airport:

“Today is a great day for Alaska, and an especially important day for the residents of King Cove. Secretary Zinke has done what the previous administration refused: he prioritized the lives and well-being of Alaska Natives over those of a goose,” said **Congressman Don Young**. “Sally Jewell said someone had to speak for the birds. Well Secretary Zinke has finally spoken for the people. The city of King Cove was incorporated 33 years before there was a Refuge, and the residents of that town only asked for one thing -- a road to reach the airport. I want to thank not only the Administration, but my colleagues who stood up with me on July 20th when we voted in the House to build the King Cove road. I have been working on this for 30 years, and I am proud to stand with Secretary Zinke today in finally giving King Cove their road.”

Congressman Westerman stated, “Nineteen people. The cost of decades of inaction by the federal government is 19 American lives. Expedient access to a hospital is something most Americans can fortunately take for granted. For many, emergency services are an ambulance ride away. Not for the citizens of King Cove, Alaska. Adjacent to the Aleutian Islands, the 1,000 residents of King Cove, Alaska, are connected to hospitals in the region via a small runway and a ferry. Harsh winter storms ground planes and prevent safe sea travel, cutting off residents from hospitals and necessary supplies. In truly dire emergencies, King Cove residents have but two choices – number one is to pray a boat captain will brave enormous seas or wait until the Coast Guard can dispatch a medivac helicopter. I congratulate Congressman Don Young on securing an agreement between the Interior Department and the people of King Cove to build this important road and I thank Secretary Zinke for listening to the citizens of this community.”

“Alaska has fought for too long to build a road to safety for the people of King Cove. Finally, we have an administration willing to place people ahead of dogma and special interests and do the right thing. By signing this land swap, Secretary Zinke is saving lives,” **Congressman Rob Bishop** said.

Congressman LaMalfa said, “As Chairman of the Natural Resources Subcommittee on Indian, Insular, and Alaska Native Affairs, I am happy Secretary Zinke has approved an 11 mile road connecting King Cove to the Cold Bay Airport in Alaska. The people of the Agdaagux tribe have gone far too long without proper access to a hospital, or at the very least, a road that can connect them to their local airport. My colleague from Alaska, Mr. Don Young, has worked on this issue for decades, and I applaud him for his efforts to make this life-saving road a reality.”

“Too many local residents and members of the Agdaagux Tribe have died or not received the care they deserved due to partisan politics and a failure to allow construction of a simple 11-mile gravel road. I was proud to stand shoulder to shoulder with Congressman Don Young when some Democrats were making ridiculous claims on the House Floor about King Cove. I thank the new Dean of the House for his steadfast devotion to this important cause and for fighting to ensure the people of Alaska receive the emergency services they need and deserve. I also applaud Secretary Zinke for his leadership and putting forward this carefully crafted agreement to build a short, commonsense road that will save lives,” concluded **Chairman Gosar**.

Background:

Courtesy of the Department of Interior

Today, U.S. Secretary of the Interior Ryan Zinke signed an [agreement](#) with the Alaska Native King Cove Native Corp., which is made up of tribal members from the local Agdaagux and Belkofski tribes, to build a life-saving road between the Native village and the nearby all-weather airport in Cold Bay. The village of King Cove is an isolated area in the Aleutian peninsula that currently lacks any safe and reliable ground transportation for medical evacuation in the case of an emergency. There have been 18 deaths attributed to the lack of road access, either in plane crashes or the inability to receive timely medical treatment. In a community with no hospital or doctor, King Cove residents must fly 600 miles to Anchorage for most medical procedures.

The [agreement](#) signed today begins a process between Interior and the King Cove Native Corp. of identifying land of equal value needed for a single lane, restricted-access road.

The Aleut residents of King Cove have worked for more than three decades to win federal approval of a single-lane, life-saving road corridor connecting their isolated community to the all-weather Cold Bay Airport. A small stretch of road, approximately 12 miles long, is all that is needed to link King Cove to the existing road system within the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, which is located next to an 10,000-foot runway. The corridor will provide the village with its first and only dependable ground transportation for medical emergencies.

For photos from the signing event, see [Interior's Flickr page](#).
For B-roll from the event, see [Interior's YouTube page](#).

Courtesy of the House Committee on Natural Resources

In July 2017, the House passed [H.R. 218](#), the bipartisan “King Cove Road Land Exchange Act.” Introduced by Rep. Young, the bill authorizes a land exchange between the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the State of Alaska to construct an 11-mile, one lane, non-commercial road connecting the remote community of King Cove to a modern, all-weather airport with access to emergency medical services in Cold Bay, Alaska.

Under the agreement announced by Secretary Zinke, the State of Alaska will transfer State land to be added to the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge, in exchange for the minimum acreage necessary to construct the life-saving road that the people of King Cove have sought for decades.

Provided by the Western Caucus

Since 2013 alone, 55 emergency medevacs have been required to get people in need of significant medical attention to hospitals, as there is currently no road to make these trips from King Cove to the Cold Bay Airport.

The House passed H.R. 218 on 7/20/17 by a vote of 248 – 179. This bill sought to authorize construction of a one-lane 11-mile noncommercial road to connect King Cove and Cold Bay.

Rep. Don Young put together this [awesome video](#) following passage of H.R. 218 depicting the passionate floor debate on this issue.

The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) has testified before Congress multiple times in support of this legislation and on the need to construct this road. NCAI has also passed formal resolutions of support in 2007, 2014 and 2015.

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