

Testimony of
Della Trumble
President, King Cove Corporation
Before the
House Natural Resources Committee
H. R. 2801, - “The Izembek and Alaska Peninsula Refuge and Wildlife
Enhancement and King Cove Safe Access Act of 2007”
October 31, 2007

Good afternoon, Chairman Rahall, Congressman Young and other Congressional members of the House Natural Resources Committee.

My name is Della Trumble. I am an Aleut and was born and raised in King Cove, Alaska. It is my privilege this afternoon to speak to you on behalf of all the shareholders of the King Cove Corporation, of which I am the President. I am also speaking as a member of the Agdaagux Tribe of King Cove, and for all other residents of King Cove.

I speak to you today as an Aleut, a mother, a shareholder, an Alaskan and a citizen of the United States. I am deeply connected to the land that you know as the Izembek Refuge through my ancestors, who have lived and subsisted on this wilderness for 4,000 years. They speak through me today in asking for your support of H.R. 2801.

My father came from the village of Belkofski, about 20 miles from King Cove. This village has since ceased to exist, in part because of its remote location and difficult access, which made living there impossible. “Disappearing” villages are phenomena that our Aleut culture has had to endure. We have lost a number of villages because of isolation and the lack of transportation that other Americans including Indigenous residents of the lower 48 take for granted.

As a mother, and on behalf of my ancestors, I look to the future of the lands that are the Izembek Refuge. I ask you to hear me now in a way that we were not heard when this wilderness designation was first established many years ago.

As an Aleut, and a U.S. citizen, I remain puzzled and angered by the fact that the designation of these lands as wilderness were made without a single public hearing in King Cove. The records state that meetings were held in Cold Bay and Anchorage, and not in King Cove – the community most affected by the decision to create wilderness.

No one from the federal government ever let us tell our story and why the wilderness would cut us off from the outside world with no hope of protecting our life, health, safety and quality of life. That is why we continue to fight for a just and fair solution to this problem. The passage of H.R. 2801 will provide that solution.

I would be proud to show you the beautiful community that is King Cove, nestled between sea and volcanic mountains. Gale force winds and fog can dominate our weather. One result is that air travel between our community airstrip, located between two mountain peaks, and the all-weather airport in Cold Bay, is delayed or canceled about half of the time. This may sound like a minor inconvenience, unless of course it happens on a day when a child becomes suddenly very ill, or a fisherman is injured, or an elder is found unconscious. Then it is anguish, and for some families in King Cove, it has brought tragedy. Since 1979, eleven people have died flying between King Cove and Cold Bay in bad weather.

Even today, pregnant women must leave town and temporarily relocate to Anchorage for 6-9 weeks before their due date for fear of unpredictable weather, premature labor and complications. We think about this all the time because in a town as small as King Cove, we know who is facing this situation. In fact, my niece was born at sea on the galley table of a fishing vessel. Her mother's premature labor forced her to endure a dangerous 3-hour ocean voyage because of high winds and blizzard conditions.

Because predicable, dependable, affordable and safe transportation access in and out of King Cove is essential for our sustainable future and a major enhancement to our quality-of-life, it continues to be our most important priority. We have advocated for decades now to have this access to the Cold Bay airport - an airport that King Cove residents helped to build in World War II.

As President of the King Cove Corporation, I take these responsibilities seriously. I recognize that I have a duty to our shareholders to pursue those actions that will improve the quality of their lives and the lives of future generations in ways that are direct, quantifiable and which reflect our deep and abiding connection to the land. It is my intent here today to do just that with my testimony in favor of H.R. 2801.

We come before you today not with our "hat in hand." We are offering more than 18,000 acres of King Cove Corporation lands as part of the land transfer proposal that is contained in this legislation. This land is very important to our shareholders and the nation. It is some of the most valuable wildlife habitat in the area. It is accessible to the Cold Bay Airport, and it is highly valued by the Fish and Wildlife Service as a key addition to the Alaska Peninsula and the Izembek Refuge complex.

Some of our critics suggest that most of our lands, and those being offered by the State of Alaska do not have equal value to the land we are seeking for our road easement. This is simply not true.

We also hear and this Committee will probably hear today that this land is not threatened and therefore not necessary to add to the Refuge and Wilderness Systems. That is insulting to us. The Aleuts have been good stewards of all this land for 4,000 years. Are we to be punished because we have been good stewards of our land?

Congress rejected that same argument in 1980 when the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act was passed. Most of the Izembek Refuge and more than 50 million acres of "non-threatened" lands were turned into wilderness in 1980 by this Committee

under ANILCA. Nevertheless, Congress deemed these "non-threatened" lands as necessary for protection in the wilderness system. Such statements are confusing to us.

These King Cove Corporation lands are important to us, both culturally and for subsistence, but the need for safe, reliable and affordable travel for our Aleut indigenous people is even more important.

The federal government's objective for the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in the early 1970's was the settling of all aboriginal land claims throughout the state in order to access the oil wealth in northern Alaska. Now, we are proposing to return a significant portion of those lands to the federal government to resolve this transportation access problem that another arm of the federal government created for us.

Please let our voices be heard this time. We are here today in good faith to ask that the value of this land exchange is given an objective and thorough review. Please pass H.R. 2801 so our people can finally have the access they deserve.

Thank you for your time, Mr. Chairmen and members of the committee. I'll be happy to take any questions that you have.