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Emergency legal action aims to stop road building in Izembek Refuge

Lawsuit challenges Army Corps for violating the Clean Water Act when issuing permit

ANCHORAGE, AK—Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges and allied groups [filed a motion](#) today requesting that the court stop all road building activities in Izembek National Wildlife Refuge while their [recently filed lawsuit](#) makes its way through court. The suit, filed earlier this week in U.S. District Court, claims the Army Corps violated the Clean Water Act and other laws when issuing the main permit needed to build the road. Another [lawsuit](#)—filed in November 2025 and awaiting a decision—argues that the Secretary of the Interior violated an array of laws when trading away Izembek land to make way for a privately owned road on the narrow Izembek Isthmus.

“It makes no sense to issue permits and begin road construction while the legality of the land swap, which gave away refuge lands for purposes other than conservation is being challenged in court,” **said Marilyn Sigman, president of Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges.** “These wilderness lands were protected as a national wildlife refuge because of their extraordinary value for the conservation of migratory birds, most notably Pacific black brant, salmon, brown bears, and a caribou herd as well as to local subsistence harvests.”

The proposed road threatens the health of a vast and thriving ecosystem vital to animals like caribou and migratory birds like Brant and Emperor geese. The land trade itself endangers the integrity and health of national park, refuge, and designated wilderness areas across Alaska by allowing a political appointee to trade away federal conservation lands to private interests without transparency and oversight. Interior has repeatedly found that a road would cause long-term and irreparable damage to Izembek’s unique and ecologically important habitat.

“Interior bypassed Congress when making a backdoor deal that put the heart of the Izembek Refuge in private hands, and now the Army Corps has handed out a permit giving the greenlight for bulldozing through an area essential to the health of Izembek,” **said Michelle Sinnott, a senior staff attorney with Trustees for Alaska.** “Our lawsuits aim to hold this administration accountable for the litany of federal laws it trampled over in order to trade away irreplaceable public lands for a road, and today’s motion asks the court to stop on-the-ground harm while those cases are heard.”

A [related lawsuit](#) brought by the Native Village of Hooper Bay, the Native Village of Paimiut, Chevak Native Village, and the Center for Biological Diversity was also filed this week.

A road from King Cove to Cold Bay has been considered many times for commercial and medical reasons. The proposed privately owned road has an untold price tag, which could come from public funds and will likely be impassable or dangerous to drive during the same harsh weather conditions that impact air travel. A federally funded hovercraft was provided to the

King Cove community as a viable alternative to a road, and it successfully completed all requested medical evacuations during its operation. Despite performing how it was intended, the hovercraft operation was suspended in 2010 and sold.

Law firm Trustees for Alaska represents five clients in the case: Friends of Alaska National Wildlife Refuges, the National Wildlife Refuge Association, Alaska Wilderness League, Wilderness Watch, and Sierra Club.

Client quotes:

"The outstanding wilderness and wildlife values of Izembek must be protected from the planned road construction until the merits of our lawsuit can be heard in court," **said Kevin Proescholdt, conservation director for Wilderness Watch.** "These values are of national and international significance and should not callously be tossed aside by the Trump Administration."

"The Army Corps' decision to permit this road through the heart of the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge ignores the law and threatens one of the world's most important wetlands and wildlife habitats," **Dan Ritzman, the Lands, Water and Wildlife director for the Sierra Club's Our Wild America campaign.** "Until the courts have the opportunity to fully review these serious legal violations, construction should not move forward. We owe it to future generations to protect Izembek's globally significant wildlife, clean waters, and the subsistence resources that local communities depend on."

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