

The Native Village of Hooper Bay seeks your help to protect its community from irreparable harm that could result from a proposed land exchange and road in the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness Area.

What is this about?

This is about a tribal government fighting to protect its community from potentially severe and irreparable harm that could occur from a proposed federal action.

Who is the tribal government?

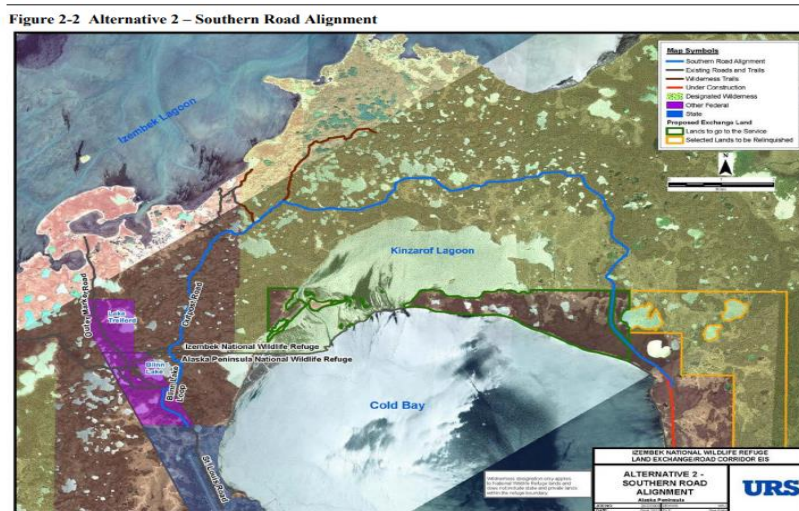
The Native Village of Hooper Bay (Tribe) is a federally recognized tribal government who represents a community of environmental justice concern, Hooper Bay, which is a community located in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta (Y-K Delta) of Alaska.

What is the proposed federal action?

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Service) has undertaken a supplemental environmental impact statement process to consider the effects of a potential exchange of lands to build a road through the Izembek National Wildlife Refuge and Wilderness Area (Refuge). The land exchange would be used to build a road corridor through the Refuge and its Izembek Isthmus, a narrow (three-mile wide) tundra and wetlands area surrounded by the Bering Sea and Pacific Ocean, which provides highly unique, crucial habitat for a number of animal species, including Pacific Black Brant and Emperor geese. As described by the Service, the road would be used for non-commercial purposes and to connect the communities of King Cove and Cold Bay.

The proposed land exchange and road has been the subject of administrative and legal proceedings for decades, with the Secretary for the Department of the Interior finding in 2013 that the land exchange and road was not in the public interest. Subsequently, under the Trump Administration, Secretary Bernhardt authorized the land exchange and road, a decision that was litigated and ultimately withdrawn by Secretary Haaland in 2023.

Shown here is the Izembek Isthmus, with one road alternative considered in the 2013 EIS:



What makes Hooper Bay a community of environmental justice concern?

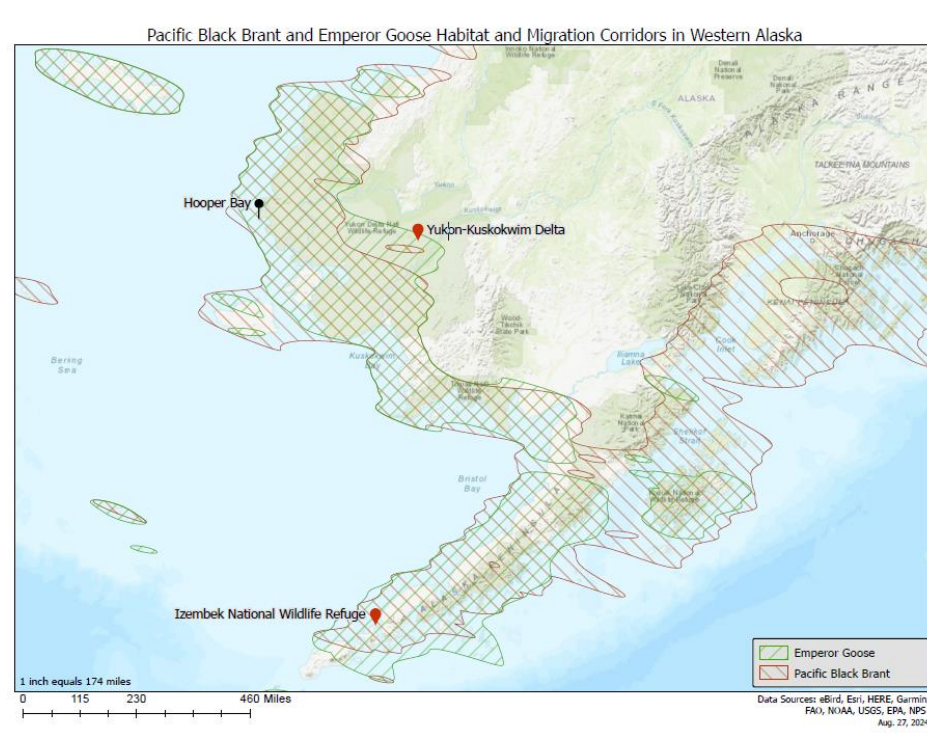
Hooper Bay is a tribal community suffering disproportionate rates of poverty, food insecurity, disease, suicide, and unemployment, among other challenges. In addition, it is experiencing substantial impacts to subsistence opportunities and culture, and to traditional ways of life, from climate change, the salmon crash, and government regulation.

How could the federal action harm the Tribe?

The proposed action could harm the Tribe, because, as the Service previously concluded, two bird species—Pacific Black Brant and Emperor Geese—*would* suffer *major* cumulative impacts from the land exchange and road,¹ and these two species provide crucial subsistence and cultural resources for the people of Hooper Bay.

Prior agency documents estimated 98 percent of the world’s population of Pacific Brant rely on the Refuge’s eelgrass beds to stopover and refuel during their long migration to and from Mexico. And Emperor Geese—who use the Refuge and action area as a spring and fall migration staging and/or wintering area and feed on its rich aquatic and terrestrial habitat—are endemic to the Bering Sea area and have been described by the Service as being among the most rare and vulnerable goose species on the planet. Across Bristol Bay from the Refuge, the Y-K Delta has been found to provide the primary breeding grounds for Pacific Brant (where about 75 percent of Pacific Brant have traditionally bred) and the primary breeding grounds for Emperor geese (where 80-90 percent of the global population breeds annually). Thus, “major effects” to these species during their stopover in the Refuge could have similar impacts to these species in the Y-K Delta and consequently to the people of Hooper Bay.

Shown here is a map illustrating the connection between these two species and to both the Refuge and the Y-K Delta:



¹ Service, Final Environmental Impact Statement, Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Land Exchange/Road Corridor at 4-153 to -155 (2013).

How could the agency avoid harm to the Tribe while achieving the stated need of the agency action?

The Tribe seeks a reasonable compromise that would facilitate safe and reliable transportation between King Cove and Cold Bay while avoiding potentially severe impacts to the Tribe's members. The marine ferry alternative to the proposed land exchange and road has been described by federal agencies previously as a reliable means of transportation between King Cove and Cold Bay, and there has already been substantial financial investment to develop infrastructure that could support this compromise.

How is this different than prior advocacy involving the proposed land exchange and road?

The Tribe is affirmatively engaging the Service and other federal agencies to explain how this proposed decision could cause substantial harm to Hooper Bay and to other communities in the Y-K Delta, an issue that has not been properly assessed by the agency. The Tribe is a subject matter expert on this issue, from an ecological, biological, and conservation perspective, through Indigenous Knowledge, and as the representative of a community of environmental justice concern, and it is now taking a lead role in raising concerns about the proposed land exchange and road.

Additionally, including the Tribe, five tribal governments and one village corporation have passed resolutions opposing the land exchange and road or expressing significant concerns about the project and its potential impacts on Pacific Brant and Emperor geese and advocating for the agency to fully consider the marine ferry alternative. And through its Waterfowl Conservation Committee, the Association of Village Council Presidents (a consortium representing the tribes of the Y-K Delta) also has a standing resolution opposing the land exchange and road.

How can you help the Tribe?

The Tribe seeks your assistance helping the Service and the public understand how this decision could have serious consequences for the people of Hooper Bay and how there is a reasonable compromise available that could fulfill the stated reason for the proposed action while avoiding harm to Hooper Bay. The Tribe also seeks your help in explaining to the agency that it has thus far failed to fulfill its duty—as enshrined in new Council on Environmental Quality regulations and Executive Orders—to meaningfully engage with communities of environmental justice concern.

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