

COPPER RIVER COUNTRY

REGIONAL BRANDING & MARKETING PLAN



Developing Alaska Rural Tourism (DART) Program

www.commerce.state.ak.us/oed/dart/home.htm

Project sponsored by – State Department of Commerce, Community & Economic Development, and a grant from the US Economic Development Administration

Local partners include: Prince William Sound Community College, Copper Valley Chamber of Commerce, and Copper Valley Development Association

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DEVELOPING ALASKA RURAL TOURISM: PROJECT OVERVIEW

This document is a plan for developing tourism in the Copper River Valley area. It was prepared by Agnew::Beck Consulting, working with representatives of the Copper Valley Area. An initial draft was circulated for review prior to an April, 2006 workshop; this is the revised final plan.

This project is sponsored in part through funds provided by the US Economic Development Administration and Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development's "Developing Alaska's Rural Tourism" (DART) program.

DART represents an 18-month long partnership between the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development (Commerce), the U.S. Department of Commerce's Economic Development Administration, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game, and Alaska regional economic development organizations (ARDOR's).

The project aims to utilize strategic partnerships to provide targeted technical assistance to these communities. Regions targeted for technical assistance within DART are located in rural, economically distressed geographical areas that have identified tourism development as an important piece of their regional economic development strategy.

The DART Visitor Industry Product Development Initiative was designed to provide the requisite skills necessary to enhance the business and marketing efforts of existing small businesses or assist in the creation of new tourism businesses or opportunities for residents of these communities. Facing downturns in their extractive natural resource based economies, many of the DART communities have embraced tourism as an engine for economic development and as a way to diversify their economy.

Within Alaska, "mature destinations", commonly visited by organized groups and less adventurous travelers, often act as gateways or portals for access to more undeveloped destinations. A successful tourism enterprise in one community often attracts pioneering tourists seeking "undiscovered" rustic destinations in adjacent communities, thus stimulating entrepreneurship and economic growth.

Numerous rural communities have expressed interest in developing culturally sensitive, environmentally responsible and sustainable visitor attractions and activities. Many, however, lack the resources and technical capability to accomplish their goals. Several rural areas have utilized DART to promote and develop their cultural tourism resources, Native arts and crafts sales, outdoor recreation and adventure travel, and wildlife viewing opportunities.

This 18-month project was initiated in November 2004 and has been extended until December 2006. The following are several outcomes to date:

- Completed a comprehensive tourism business and attraction inventory for Central Southeast (Petersburg, Wrangell, Coffman Cove), Copper Valley, Bethel, and Bering Straits region.

- Developed promotional literature to encourage and increase use of the IFA (Inter-Island Ferry Authority) and visitation to the Tongass National Forest communities of Wrangell, Petersburg, and Coffman Cove.
- Completed “*A Profile of Visitors to Rural Alaska*” marketing research report to gain a greater understanding of visitors to rural Alaska. Four separate studies and reports were conducted for Central Southeast, Western Alaska, Bering Strait, and the Copper River Valley.
- Conducted Internet marketing workshops in Nome and Glennallen and provided sponsorships for 18 students to attend the *Tourism in Rural Alaska* class offered through Prince William Sound Community College in Glennallen.
- Conducted several International Tourism Marketing workshops in conjunction with the Alaska Travel Industry Association (Girdwood, Fairbanks, Petersburg, Juneau, Palmer, and Valdez). Ninety small business owners were trained and 4 received scholarships to attend international trade shows (1 to German Speaking Europe, 3 to the Travel Industry Association International Powwow).
- Conducted regional tourism branding workshops in Central Southeast and Copper Valley.
- Developed a new regional tourism website for the Greater Copper Valley Chamber of Commerce and for the Central Southeast Regional Partnership (CSERP) to provide regional visitor information and information on regional activities and attractions.
- Facilitated regional tourism stakeholder meetings in Nome, Petersburg, Dillingham, Bethel and St. Lawrence Island (Gambell and Savoonga). Meeting in Bethel featured a “cultural tourism” and “tour packaging” workshop for participants.
- Conducted a 2-day website development workshop in Nome/Bering Strait and Copper Valley region designed to provide tourism business owners with the skills necessary to create and maintain their own website.
- Conducted AlaskaHost Customer Service training seminars in Barrow, Bethel and Glennallen and trained 5 AlaskaHost Trainers to teach classes in Glennallen, Bethel, Prince of Wales, and Sitka.
- Conducted a “Write Your Own Business Plan” workshop (with the Alaska Small Business Development Center) – 40 participants attended from around the Y-K Delta; at least 5 have completed a business plan. Coached two individuals whose business plans were selected to compete for the AFN Alaska Marketplace grants in 2006.
- Presented a workshop on “Starting and Operating a Bed & Breakfast” in Barrow and Bethel.
- Provided scholarships for several DART representatives to attend Alaska Travel Industry Association annual conference. It was the first time that Bethel & the Y-K Delta were represented at this important industry event.
- Alaska Department of Fish & Game designed and produced community wildlife viewing guides for Ketchikan, Sitka, Wrangell, Petersburg, Haines, Skagway, Juneau, Gustavus, and Prince of Wales Island.

- June 2006 Birding Assessment Tour was commenced to develop new birding opportunities in the Y-K Delta. The tour invited renowned birding experts and utilized local guides (both paid and volunteer). Communities included – St. Marys, Quinhagak, Scammon Bay, and Chevak.
- Completed regional branding, marketing and tourism plans for the following areas: Copper Valley, Central Southeast (Wrangell, Petersburg, Coffman Cove) and Bristol Bay.
- Provided a start-up “Visit Bristol Bay” website showcasing a few locally-run businesses. This website is in its infancy but will only grow to accommodate more businesses, interested organizations and local agencies.

Once funding has been identified and secured, the next phase of the DART project will primarily focus on two main areas. They include:

I. Tourism Business Mentorship Program: Participants will be able to work and learn under the guidance of tourism and hospitality professionals and benefit from the experience and acumen of established tourism business owners and entrepreneurs. Mentors may include representatives from the following visitor services/hospitality industry (i.e., Bed & Breakfasts, tour operators, fishing guides, artisans, restaurants/food service, retail store owners, transportation)

II. Information Infrastructure: The Information Infrastructure component of this project will focus on key visitor information improvements (i.e., kiosks, websites, and signage/interpretation), many of which were identified in the DART project.

■ INTRODUCTION

Project Background & Purpose

On November 12, 2004, the Copper Valley Development Association (CVDA), Prince William Sound Community College, and the Copper Valley Chamber of Commerce (Copper River Valley Partners) submitted a proposal to the Alaska Office of Economic Development to participate in the Developing Alaska Rural Tourism Project (DART).

The proposal included the following background:

The Copper River Valley has been targeted by entities such as the Alaska Travel Industry Association, National Park Service, and multi-national businesses such as Princess Tours as a “destination.” However, the residents and regional entities have not promoted it in this way and may be unprepared for the results of such promotion by others.

The CRV Partners requested assistance through DART to help residents prepare for increases in tourism and use it to their advantage should they so choose. In addition to requesting training assistance (business development, customer service) CRV Partners requested assistance to help them with the following objectives:

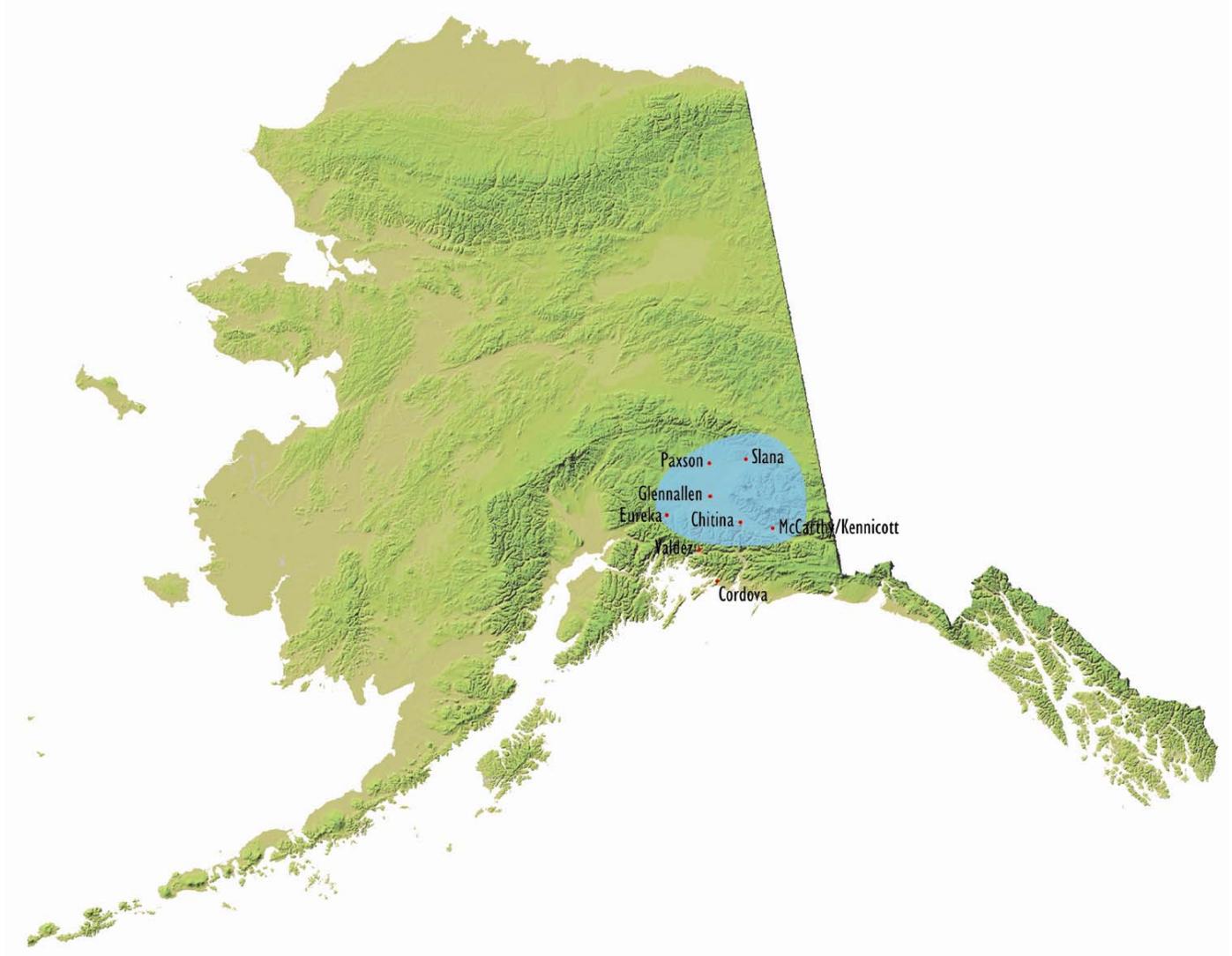
- Identify a regional identity
- Develop a regional marketing strategy

Activities in performed under the DART program (specific to the Copper River region) to date include the following:

- 20 student scholarships for participation in a tourism training class (resulting in job offers for graduates)
- AlaskaHost Training
- Community Profile Updates
- Web Design Training
- Technical Assistance to small business
- Branding Workshop I (May 2005)
- Chamber of Commerce Visitor Survey (Summer 2005)
- Rural Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (Summer 2005)
- Elements of Central Southeast branding workshops applied to Copper Basin project and included in Activity Summary
- Regional Marketing and Branding Workshop II (February 2006)
- Regional Marketing and Branding Workshop II (April 2006)

Project Area

The Copper River Valley extends from the Mat-Su Borough boundary on the west, to the Copper River watershed boundaries on the north and south, and the Canadian border on the east. This area includes the following communities: Chistochina, Chitina, Copper Center, Copperville, Gakona, Glennallen, Gulkana, Kennicott, Kenny Lake, Lake Louise, McCarthy, Mentasta, Nabesna, Nelchina/Mendelta/Eureka, Paxson/Summit Lake/Denali Highway, Sourdough, Slana, Tazlina, Tolsona, and Tonsina/Tiekel/Tsaina.



Key Participants in the Process

- Copper Valley Chamber of Commerce
- Copper Valley Development Association
- Prince William Sound Community College (PWSCC) staff and students
- Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve
- Copper River Watershed Project
- Business community

Summary of Conclusions

The two most important actions for increasing the local benefits of tourism, without creating problems for residents, are listed below:

- Improve marketing and information
 - Agree on a simple, effective marketing theme, including an agreed-upon name for the geographic area, and a tagline (or a series of taglines) summarizing the area's unique attractions.
 - Establish a business plan to disseminate this theme and carry out other marketing actions; develop an associated organizational and funding strategy so this marketing effort, even if modest, will continue on a sustained and consistent basis.
 - Correct the area's reputation – people's perception of the area is that it is difficult to get to (e.g. bad road conditions) and that there are limited activities in the area
- Improve and expand attractions
 - Increase knowledge of existing visitor services, activities and attractions.
 - Create new reasons for people passing through to slow down and spend time and money in the area.

CONTEXT – ATTRACTIONS, EXPERIENCES, PRODUCTS, THINGS TO DO



This section is a summary of what we heard from businesses and community members who attended the February 2006 workshop and from various studies such as the “Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment: Copper Valley” and “A Profile of Visitors to Rural Alaska and the Copper Basin Region.” To see a complete list of past studies, surveys, inventories and reports, see the list of references in the Appendices.

Attractions Today

Primary attractions to the Copper River Valley today are:

- The area’s dramatic, expansive scenery and wild beauty. Specific elements include:
 - Highways with spectacular views of mountains, rivers and glaciers.
 - Sense of vast landscapes
 - Dramatic mountains and volcanoes (including the greatest concentration of mountain peaks over 14,500 feet in North America)
 - Wilderness, sense of quiet
- Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve (a UNESCO World Heritage Site)
- Kennicott and McCarthy
- Road system – link between popular destinations (e.g., Valdez, Fairbanks, Haines)
- Fishing and hunting opportunities including dipnetting and subsistence fish wheels in Chitina, king and red salmon fishing along the Gulkana and Klutina Rivers, and sport and subsistence hunting (sheep, moose, bear).



Secondary attractions (a notch less spectacular and/or less used today) include:

- Adventure activities – the area provides a wide range of tour and adventure activities from sightseeing to extreme mountaineering. The scenic qualities of the Richardson and Glenn Highways attract all levels of bicyclists. The area is full of glacial-fed rivers that allow for lengthy rafting and kayaking expeditions. It is a popular Alaskan destination among mountaineers, ice climbers and experienced backpackers. Additionally, Copper

River salmon and the area’s wildlife attract both sport and subsistence fishermen and hunters from abroad.

- The National Park Service’s Wrangell-St. Elias Visitors Center in Copper Center
- Natural and cultural history – this area has a particularly interesting natural history, including volcanoes, an ancient “inland sea” and complex geology. Cultural history includes the fascinating, 10,000-year-plus history of Native settlement in the area, as well as more recent developments.
- Interesting historical and cultural attractions (beyond those in Kennicott/McCarthy) including museums, roadhouses and wildlife displays. Additionally, the Ahtna Heritage Foundation is partnering with NPS to establish an Ahtna Historical Center. Construction is expected to begin summer 2006 and be located next the NPS Visitors Center in Copper Center.
- Alaska Oil Pipeline viewing
- Wildlife – while not as consistent as Denali, wildlife viewing is decent and does attract visitors to the region and is important to visitors from the “outside.”



When asked what they liked the most about the Copper River Valley, out-of-state visitors responded with scenic beauty/outdoors, wildlife, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve/Kennicott, the remote location and the friendly people.



Summary of Spring 2005 Worksession – Participant Views

The Copper River Valley Provides:

- superlatives, which makes people ooh and ahh.
- road accessibility, which makes people visit.
- non-crowded opportunities, which makes people visit.
- non-crowded opportunities, which helps people like residents appreciate visitors.
- world class visitor opportunities, which make people like residents resist and sometimes resent visitors who take advantage of them.
- solitude, which renews people's spirits.
- a sense of adventure, which makes people exhilarated.
- history, which makes people reflect.
- a wilderness experience, which makes people challenge themselves.
- adventure, which makes people excited to be here.
- friendliness and hospitality, which makes people feel good about our area.
- nature experiences, which make people feel a source of natural understanding.
- access to wild Alaska, which makes people realize their dreams.
- the door to Alaska's wilderness, which makes people healthy and fulfilled.
- world class salmon fishing, which makes people fulfill their expectations.
- dream variation and satisfaction, which makes people leave large amounts of money.
- huge wilderness, glaciers, and mountain ranges frosted with charismatic mega fauna, which makes people humble, inspired, their need for adventure and solitude are fulfilled.
- sheep, fish, berries, and mushrooms, which makes people fed and fulfills their native experience.
- the Kennecott, which makes people curious, intrigued, and awe- inspired.
- fishing, which makes people happy.
- mountain wilderness, which makes people breathe.
- wilderness, which makes people spiritual.
- frost heaves, which makes people crash.
- space, which makes people share.
- challenge, which makes people change/grow.
- the Kennecott, which makes people consider the past compared to the present.
- long drive on gravel roads, which makes people consider scale.
- lack of electricity, which makes people ponder alternative energy.
- volcano's, which makes people appreciate their smallness.
- Ahtna culture, which makes people embrace diversity.

Tourism Services

Overview

The Copper River Valley is characterized by long stretches of highway with limited services. Several small towns, including Glennallen, Copper Center and McCarthy/Kennicott offer lodging, dining and other traveler services. Relative to other parts of Southcentral Alaska, traveler services are limited.

Services Today

Glennallen is the hub of the Copper River Valley – located where the Glenn Highway meets the Richardson Highway. The town provides basic services to surrounding communities (gas, propane, lumber, hardware, mechanics, grocery, bank, etc.). Tourism-related services in Glennallen include one larger hotel, and a small collection of B&B's, rental cabins, restaurants, gift shops, grocery and convenience stores. While the hub of the CRV, Glennallen is not necessarily a tourist destination. Most Glennallen visitors are passing through as they enter or leave the state or make their way to McCarthy/Kennicott, Valdez, the Copper River or the backcountry of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve.

Visitor services for the entire Copper River Valley, including Glennallen, include those listed below:

- Accommodations ranging from the Copper River Princess Wilderness Lodge, to a larger motel in Glennallen, to rustic rental cabins, RV parks and campgrounds
- Restaurants, cafes and espresso stands
- Tours including bus, rafting, biking, flight seeing and fishing charters
- Various retail venues including native arts and crafts
- Convenience stores

A full inventory of services in the Copper River Valley was completed by the Department of Community, Commerce and Economic Development and can be found in the appendices.

Access to the Copper River Valley is most commonly by means of the road system. The paved Glenn, Richardson and Edgerton highways are the primary roads; and the secondary roads are the gravel McCarthy and Nabesna roads which bring people into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve, and the Denali Highway which runs west from Paxson to Cantwell. Additionally, communities are accessed by chartered air taxi services, the mail plane (Anchorage/Gulkana/McCarthy) and a shuttle between Glennallen and McCarthy/Kennicott.

Services Strengths

- Kennicott/McCarthy lodging, restaurants, mine and trails, tours, flightseeing
- Princess Wilderness Lodge and affiliated excursions
- Unique, if at times rustic, roadside accommodations
- NPS visitor center
- Lack of development, untraveled roads, quiet communities

Services Weaknesses (“Gap Analysis”)

Limitations and weaknesses in Copper River Valley tourism services include:

- Long travel distances and poor road conditions (long stretches with little variation in terrain, construction delays, maintenance). According to the popular travel book “Alaska’s Best Places”, much of the driving – although passing through attractive countryside – is repetitive and monotonous. Most AK visitors are traveling on a tight schedule, and do not have time for the 2-3 days minimum needed to visit this area.
- Rustic, limited “pass through” services (limited amenities and signage along roads, virtually no public rest stops, long stretches between gas stations and restaurants).
- A reputation for roads being nearly impassable (e.g., the road to McCarthy) when in fact that roads are no worse than other unpaved roads commonly used and enjoyed by travelers in other parts of Alaska (e.g., roads on Kodiak, roads from Nome).
- Costly – transportation into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve – the area’s best known single destination - is expensive.
- Lack of name recognition – this area doesn’t have a well established geographic identity (as is the case with the Kenai, Kodiak or Mat-Su Borough), nor does it have a clear identity in terms of traveler attractions. Destinations such as Dawson City and the Dalton Highway are proving to be more competitive northern “road tour” destinations.
- Unpredictable wildlife viewing opportunities, especially in contrast to Denali.
- Seasonality (few winter attractions).
- Impacts of tourism (e.g., impact of trespassing on Ahtna lands and private property).
- Lack of accessible cultural experiences.
- Limited and relatively costly tours, hotels and “adventure” businesses.

While thirty-six percent of visitors responded with “nothing” when asked what the region could do to improve the visitor experience, the next 6 most common answers on the list were:

Ways to improve the visitor experience:	% identifying
▪ transportation	19%
▪ services	13%
▪ lodging	12%
▪ food	12%
▪ tours/activities	11%
▪ information	11%

Source: A Profile of Visitors to Rural Alaska and the Copper Basin Region, McDowell Group, Feb 2006

■ CONTEXT – MARKET

Copper River Valley Trends: “Just Passing Through”

The most significant result from the recently completed Alaska Traveler Survey¹ of independent visitors to the Copper River Valley is the revelation that at least 74% of the visitors were just passing through.

It is significant that the second choice mentioned is scenic beauty at 23%. Professional researchers know that responders to questioners generally don't want to offend and may actually want to please the researcher who obviously represents the destination in question. While it is impossible without testing for response bias it is a good bet that even more than 74% of visitors were just passing through.

The Copper River Valley has not communicated the significant options for visitors in the area. Further more options are needed to get visitors to stop stay and spend.

Major motivators

When asked what you liked most about the Copper River Valley region the responses follow:

- 66% listed outdoor and scenic beauty as the most enjoyed feature.
- 21% indicated wildlife viewing
- 15% mentioned Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve/Kennicott
- 14% indicated remote location
- 8% fishing
- 7% hiking
- 4% camping/RV

Clearly the area is remote and is blessed with great viewsheds and wildlife - like much of Alaska.

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve/Kennicott is a fantastic area with little traffic in part because access is difficult or information provided makes access even more challenging than it really is. At virtually every turn guide books and the National Park Service suggest that travel in the park is rugged and dangerous.

Trip purpose

90% of visitors to the region were vacation pleasure travelers.

¹ A Profile of Visitors to Rural Alaska and the Copper Basin Region, McDowell Group, Feb 2006

Length of Stay

The average length of stay is 2.6 nights, which is huge since most visitors are just passing through. Only 39% of visitors over-nighted in the Copper River Valley. There must be a good number of visitors that have extended stays in the area to make the average this high.

Visitor Expenditures:

Rural Alaskan visitors spend an average of \$1,767 per person on an average 12.5 night stay in Alaska.

Copper basin visitors spent an average of \$152 per person in the area during their 2.6 day average stay in the region. Since most of the visitors to the Copper River basin indicated that they were just passing through, the McDowell Group broke out their spending patterns as a separate item. Visitors who are just passing through only spend \$71 per person compared to the \$152 of those that stayed longer and enjoyed the regions attractions. The clear marketing message is that it is very important economically to encourage visitors to stop stay and spend more time and money.

Visitor Origin:

78% of visitor to the Copper Basin are from the lower 48 states. Western states make up 34%, of all out of state, independent visitors, with 12% from California. Interestingly, international visitors are 22% of the visitors to the region compared to an estimated 6-7% international visitors statewide. Germany alone accounts for 6%, which may be a result of more Europeans using Whitehorse as their entry point to North America. State car rental taxes, which apply to motor home rentals, have caused a major migration of motor home rentals to Canada. It appears these visitors are driving the highway and are a significant target for the Copper River Basin. Visitor origins to the region are as follows:

Western US	34%
Midwest	19%
South	17%
East	8%
International	22%

Visitor Demographics:

Copper River Basin	Rural Alaska
Gender: 54% male; 46% female	59% male; 41 % female
Average Age: 52.1 years	50.1 years
Average party size: 2.6 people	2.7 people
Average Salary \$80,000	\$91,200
Education: 43% college degree	53% college degree

The table above shows that the Copper River Basin's visitor demographics are very similar to the statewide rural visitor. Rural Alaskan visitors are slightly more educated and have a slightly higher average salary, but as a target market these customers look nearly the same.

Information Sources/Travel Decisions

75% of Copper River Valley visitors used the Internet to research their trip. 50% used guidebooks like the Milepost. The second most important source of information was friends and family, and word of mouth. This means every business, every public facility has to offer a quality product, to every visitor, every time. Travelers are doing their planning 8.2 months before their trip and booking on average 3.9 months prior to travel.

Clearly the Internet should be a key focus of any marketing effort as these numbers are only going to grow.

Highway Travel

While travel to Alaska has steadily increased over the last 10-15 years, highway travel has declined in absolute terms, and as a percentage of all travel to Alaska. Reasons for this decline include increasing gas prices, a trend towards shorter vacations, and the active marketing by the cruise industry. In addition more visitors are flying to Alaska and renting cars to travel to the region. Rental cars are not allowed on gravel roads eliminating most of these visitors from driving the Nebesna or McCarthy roads.

Highway visitors to Alaska

Entry	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000	2001	2002	2003
Alaska, Total	117,181	125,236	116,554	114,562	124,396	119,662	117,925	115,559	112,494	114,387
Alcan, AK	58,796	61,932	57,036	55,335	63,499	65,446	59,009	58,108	55,427	57,523
Dalton Cache, AK	22,032	22,349	21,201	20,069	20,513	16,857	19,855	20,078	20,869	19,760
Skagway, AK	36,353	40,955	38,317	39,158	40,384	37,359	39,061	37,373	36,198	37,104

IMPLICATIONS OF RESEARCH FOR MARKETING

The research shows that most independent visitors are just passing through. The region must create more attractions to give visitors to slow down and spend money, and do a better job of marketing its considerable assets so visitors know there are reasons to stay. Branding projects and other marketing ideas require a long-term commitment of funds to be effective.

Budget Issues

The Copper River Valley does not have a government so traditional marketing programs funded by transient room taxes or sales taxes are not possible. The Chamber of Commerce has raised about \$60,000 a year when it has had strong support. Even at that level they did not have enough money to execute a large-enough campaign to be heard by prospective visitors. For reference, the Kenai Peninsula Borough just approved a \$77,000 contract to create a Kenai Brand, and is working to raise \$150,000 to disseminate this brand. Volunteer organizations

experience ups and downs based on the volunteer energy. It is very difficult for this area to maintain a totally volunteer effort. Below we will discuss some partnerships, which might help the area with long-term marketing.

Marketing Partners

Fairbanks and Valdez have directly expressed interest in partnering with the Copper River Valley area for marketing. The region should also work closely with the National Park Service to ensure the most positive promotion for visitation. Other partners might include Tourism North and the Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA). Funding (\$750,000) was recently given to the National Park Service, who in turn passed these funds to ATIA, for promoting Alaska's National Parks other than Denali.

Scenic Highways

The area should explore getting a scenic highway designation, which would make it possible to get grants to promote the area. Previous efforts to establish such a designation fell victim to concerns about government restrictions; a more grass roots-based initiative might be able to better explain that scenic highway designation is benign, and focuses on promotion, not regulation.

Website

A major web site that describes all of the wonderful things to do and see in the region would be extremely important. Over 75% of the visitors to the region are using the internet to research their trips which means a robust site that provides plenty of detail would be an excellent vehicle for telling the region's story. The trend is for even more use of the Internet in the future making it a key tool.

A regional web site could offer information; secure booking and optimization that are difficult for the region's many small businesses. If one-time grant money could be found to develop a major web site, it is reasonable to believe that business support in the form of advertising could keep the site updated. The Chamber is making an excellent start in this direction.

Copper River Princess Wilderness Lodge

This study is primarily focused on independent visitors, however the visitors at Princess Wilderness Lodge provide a great opportunity to help businesses reach critical mass and survive. Currently there are many tours offered from the Princess Lodge including: salmon fishing, flight-seeing, horseback riding, dogsled rides, four-wheeler rides, raft trips and fly- in trout fishing to name a few. Princess customers can provide the base market for a tour that would allow the tour to be offered to other customers.

Many of these businesses would have a hard time surviving without the critical mass provided by the package tour business. There is a great opportunity for these businesses to offer tours to independent visitors, which would create a better economy for the area. To facilitate those offerings to independents, there needs to be a more efficient way for small businesses to reach independent visitors.

Park Access

National Parks all over the nation are experiencing increased visitation. National Parks with road access are receiving significant visitation. Access problems are preventing most visitors from spending time in Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve. Air travel is expensive and road access is limited. If road access or at least the perception of the quality of road access were to improve, the park would experience an increase in visitation and the Copper River Basin would also receive many economic benefits from visitors.

Obviously the people of the region and along the McCarthy Road should decide what outcomes they would like to see. If improved access is developed, with its accompanied economic expansion, plans should be developed to accommodate visitors in a manner that benefits residents and creates minimal local problems. A study entitled “McCarthy Road Roundtable Project” was completed in 2001 that explored options to reach these goals.

Road development will require a significant level of commitment from many players if it is to happen. The State of Alaska, National Parks Services, ATIA, and business leaders in the Copper River Valley and McCarthy would need to lead the effort.

Tourism Executive Interviews

Another perspective on the challenges and opportunities facing the region is presented in this section. A study was done 2005 by the McDowell Group. As explained in the introduction to the study, “the project team interviewed senior-level cruise and tour company executives to identify currently held perceptions, needs, and issues regarding the project area. Some of the comments included in this section are ‘brutally honest.’ While some of these comments may be difficult to read or hear, it is extremely valuable to begin with a realistic understanding of what industry leaders are thinking.”

Richardson Highway Impressions

Alternative Tour Patterns

Conceptually, development of alternative tour options is appealing.

- *We are looking at the Richardson Highway now, considering the tour patterns.*
- *The highway out of Valdez is good. Thompson Pass is beautiful.*
- *We need to find other tour patterns.*
- *There could be some appeal to RV and fly-drive people.*

Long Travel Distances

The highway length is an issue.

- *The challenge for all of Alaska is the long travel distances. They think, “I want to get to the icons. Don’t make me take three days to get there.”*
- *Incredibly vast distances between points of interest.*
- *The access and distances are big and challenging.*
- *None of our coach segments is longer than 120 miles.*
- *There are long distances in a motorcoach. It helps that you can have some half-day drives. But it is not as sexy as traveling on the train.*
- *There is nothing compelling about doing the whole highway corridor.*

- *With current cruise deployment, you can't do it in less than five days. Most of the market wants a shorter program.*
- *Long days on motorcoaches are no longer acceptable. Everything is hub and spoke.*
- *Look at what Princess is doing from Whittier. They are bypassing Anchorage. It saves them the cost and the travel time. You can shorten the land tour.*

General Passenger Appeal

Scenic Beauty

Executives recognize the importance of scenic beauty to passengers.

- *They want access to what they perceive as wilderness. At the same time, they have high expectations of comfort and adventure.*
- *Our passengers are most interested in scenery and wildlife.*
- *Frankly, the scenery is stunning in many parts of the state.*

Wildlife

Perceived lack of wildlife is an issue – especially in contrast to Denali.

- *Wildlife is the number one motivator. We would go out of our way for wildlife.*
- *If they could develop a corridor with guaranteed wildlife, we'd be there.*
- *People come to Alaska because of the wildlife. They choose Alaska instead of a wildlife safari in Africa.*
- *They need boardwalks to beaver ponds, salmon in a river. Show me some tracks, some evidence of wildlife.*
- *Denali is the only place where you can be fairly assured of seeing wildlife. That is the biggest downfall of the state.*
- *Have you been to Homer? They have a flat screen TV and a remote camera. There are birds and bears. Because they can manipulate the camera themselves, people feel like they are there. It's enough for some people. If it was a fixed camera, it would just be TV.*

Historical and Cultural Attractions

Cruise lines will not develop new itineraries around historical attractions alone. They also noted a change in passengers' expectations in terms of the entertainment value of historical and cultural experiences.

- *There is a growing interest in cultural and historical tours.*
- *The fact that there are roadhouses and other historical artifacts has "teensy eensy" value.*
- *The history of man in Alaska is not why they come, although they are interested in learning a little while they are here. You have to sell them on coming to Alaska first.*
- *History is not cutting it. However, they are interested in why people live there. Our guests want to know how people live modern lives and how they are different. How do you get a caribou using a snowmachine.*
- *History needs to be delivered in an entertaining way.*
- *Make no mistake about it; they are not coming here to hear about the gold rush and the next roadhouse.*
- *They don't give a damn about the history. The Alaska Highway is gone. That age group just died.*
- *The way to deliver culture is as an educational center. You don't have to be an attraction, but you need that have that blend that makes it entertaining.*
- *The presentation is critical. Alaskans can't be objective enough about this.*

Copper Valley Impressions

Accommodations

Limited accommodations in Copper Valley are an issue – especially for larger companies.

- *It is a large national park, with lots of historical interest. They need accommodations and more activities.*
- *We used to send people to Kennicott on their own. Where would you stay? We need 20-25 rooms for a coach.*
- *We would not overnight anywhere along the Richardson.*
- *There is Princess, but only when they need you.*
- *That whole area has a great deal of potential, but there is no hotel infrastructure suitable for cruise passengers besides Princess. No competitor is going to use it.*
- *Princess has major peaks and valleys in their hotel occupancy. If you built a 200-room hotel, you would need to be full all seven nights.*
- *We have to provide a certain level of comfort and familiarity for our guests.*
- *In the past, cruises tended to be fairly tolerant (about accommodations). Not any more.*
- *The land tour experience is hopping from resort to resort.*
- *The cart is before the horse. If someone else builds a hotel, the cruise lines would be coming. But it would be a challenge. You can't have four nights full and the rest empty. Unlike Denali, their highway traffic doesn't use hotels very much.*
- *We have no assets in that area. That really drives our company.*
- *However, representatives from both small cruise lines would consider Princess for their lodging. The Lodge welcomes the business.*
- *Less than half our business at the Copper Princess is cruise tour. We market to other tour operators like Anderson and Backroads to fill the rooms.*

Tour Development Needed

Tour product development is needed, but cruise lines understand that visitor volume is a critical factor.

- *In addition to Kennicott, you need to develop a tour base oriented to the National Park. Not everyone will fly in. You need a range of prices and experiences.*
- *They need to develop more tour activities. If the volume increased, the activities would be developed.*
- *The tours and activities need to warrant two night stays.*
- *The focus is frequently on Kennicott/McCarthy or "what man has done." Our passengers are most interested in the scenery and wildlife. We need optional activities for people.*
- *We've had local residents up for story time in the evening. We've had the ranger presentation. The questions people ask are about the ranger. They like that she grew up there; that she wore bunny boots to her prom. They like meeting Alaskans. They want to meet real people and learn how they live. It's damn tough to live year-round in Copper Valley and they want to hear about it.*
- *I understand there are a lot of in-holdings in the park. The "back country" is not as pristine or attractive for our visitors.*
- *Show me some tracks, some evidence of wildlife. Show me glaciers.*

Other comments

- *Need a decent place for a group to eat lunch between Valdez and Fairbanks.*
- *Copper Valley has been trying to develop a regional identity. A couple of years ago, they hired someone to market the area. They couldn't pay her very much. I think that it would be great if they could get some*

- money and some momentum behind their marketing. It would frankly help us to have more tour volume in the area. We work with a lot of small operators that could use the additional business.*
- *Some of them can't make it through the winter.*
 - *We've considered pre-booking tours for the lodges the way we do for the ships. The problem with many of the small operators is will they be there next summer? Will anyone be around during the winter to manage the inventory and the sales?*
 - *I really love Alan LeMaster. He will bend over backwards to help you. He really believes in the area and what they have to offer.*

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve

Has Marketing Value

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve provides significant marketing opportunities because it is a National Park.

- *That is a beautiful area, a National Park, with lots of potential. It provides "marquee value."*
- *We have the world's largest park right next door. What do we need to do? Animals.*
- *The National Park is a great draw.*
- *When you tell people that it is a UNESCO World Heritage Site, they believe you are taking them to a "certified wilderness destination."*
- *Our guests could like Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve for a couple of days. They want access to what they perceive as wilderness. At the same time, they have high expectations of comfort and adventure.*
- *This product under-promises and over-delivers.*
- *I wouldn't take mom, dad, and the kids on a long bus tour. Plant me in Copper Valley and Denali for a couple of days.*

Requires Marketing Effort

Because a very small percentage of the market is currently aware of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve, the cruise lines anticipate a significant marketing effort ahead.

- *How do products get popular? Partner with the Park Service.*
- *There is a lack of demand now. Part of it is lack of recognition.*
- *Why are they doing this research? Not a great message to send to the current investors; they are doing research on how to attract competition.*
- *It would take a long time to develop. The investment would be five years of constant selling.*
- *Copper Valley needs an icon.*
- *This requires a high-end, niche-oriented strategy. It is a hard thing to do with only 120 days a year.*
- *Name recognition? People haven't heard of them. That's an issue.*
- *Partner with people already invested there. Leverage what's already been done. We've pitched this to a lot of people: tour operators, wholesalers... We wouldn't mind having help.*

Small Lodges

The area appeals to the small ships, which promote more intimate group sizes, adventure, and remote lodges.

- *We would consider a two-day land package in that area.*
- *Kennicott sounds like a good match for us based on the hiking, glacier trekking, and size of the lodging.*

- *I'd like to see Rich Kirkwood's place (Kennicott Glacier Lodge.)*
- *We prefer lodge-style accommodations, with private baths. Our guests want rafting, biking, mountain biking, and kayaking.*
- *We sell unique lodge opportunities.*

Access

Access into the park is a concern in terms of price, distance, and tour permits.

- *We need to be stronger partners with the National Park Service. They need to open access, allow us to create tours and facilities with quick access. The Parks are our best and finest asset.*
- *The access is not very well developed. It is a chicken and egg scenario.*
- *The main attraction is the National Park, but frankly there is very limited access. It costs over \$300 a person to fly into the park for a tour. There are a small number of people that take the long drive into the park. They seem to like it, but it is a very long day.*
- *They don't have the access or the infrastructure compared to other places in Alaska.*
- *They don't have the wildlife or the cachet of Denali.*
- *It's a huge financial commitment to get there and do optional tours.*
- *Can you get a motorcoach into McCarthy? What is the road like? Can you drive across the bridge? They need to think about the message that sends. It is a very expensive and long trip to get into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve. Take a lesson from Kluane. We get passengers into the wilderness very quickly.*

■ CONTEXT – COMMUNITY VIEWS

Community Views (what does the community want?)

Tourism impacts community life, and for tourism to really take root and succeed over the long term, residents need to have a voice in decisions about tourism growth.

Views about tourism in the Copper River Valley are diverse. PWS Community College is now preparing a survey of community views, and once this is available, the results will be included in this report. Meanwhile, the list of bullet points below gives a preliminary summary of what is known about resident views, based on the February Workshop:

- Many people in the area are neutral or actively supportive of tourism growth, but there are also substantial numbers of people who are adamantly opposed, who see tourism as more trouble than benefit.
- The McCarthy/Kennicott area in particular is a place where many residents are concerned about too much or the wrong type of tourism growth.
- Need to be realistic, growth is going to happen.
- Princess Hotel was seen as potentially disruptive, but it has brought a lot of local jobs. They offer 17 tours, almost all of which are provided locally, result was \$450,000 in annual spending. Local benefits have grown as they have shifted to two- night stays.
- In the past, Ahtna and other Native organizations have been concerned that tourism without proper infrastructure and guidance leads to trespass, damage to traditional subsistence areas, litter and other roadside problems.
- Interest in the right kind of tourism: locally controlled, home tours, real Alaskans, human contact.
- Need to try to guide growth. Goal should be most benefits, least problems, not most tourists.
- “Tourism can grow as long as it doesn’t compete with what we do, where we play.”
- *Summary* – Most people, most communities in the Copper River Valley would support expansion of tourism if it’s done right, that is, if the amount, form, location of tourism growth leads to modest numbers of respectful visitors, who help create local economic development opportunities, but do not disrupt local life. People don’t want to become a theme park.



STRATEGY SUMMARY

The Copper River region is very attractive and has a rich endowment of intrinsic natural and cultural attractions. Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve, and the McCarthy-Kennicott area are the best know and most significant of the areas draws. Most visitors to the region are “just passing through” on their way to other better known and better marketed destinations. Regional residents support tourism growth, as long as this occurs in a measured way, that brings more local opportunities, and manages growth to limit adverse impacts on communities and the area’s natural environment.

The remainder of this report describes actions to increase tourism benefits in the region, building on this understanding of attractions, market interest and community views. Three major strategies are needed:

1. Attractions
 - Improve regional products, experiences and services, focused on experience of driving through area.
 - Find ways to expand access to the National Park, which is the strongest motivation for visitors to stop and spend time and money within the region.
2. Marketing
 - Clarify the area’s identity and image – agree on a name
 - Set up a long-term marketing program to this present this image to target markets through a wide range of promotion efforts
3. Leadership – Agree on the structure of an organization that can sustain the marketing effort.

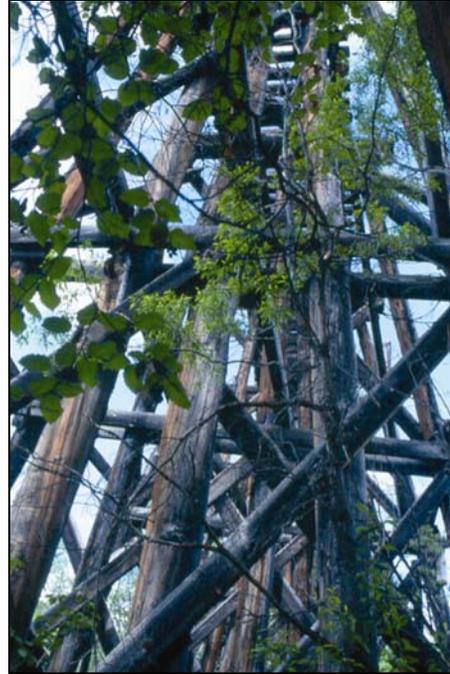


ACTION PLAN TO IMPROVE TOURISM

PART I: ACTIONS TO IMPROVE ATTRACTIONS

The often repeated advice for tourism destinations is “under-promise, over-deliver.” This section of the report explores the “delivery side” of this statement, looking at actions needed to deliver on the promises made through marketing. This information is a synthesis of previous workshops and reports prepared for the area.

Consultant Dale Fox, working on this project, when asked what single action was most needed to improve tourism prospects for the area, responded with: “product development, product development, product development.” The strongest argument for this perspective is the point mentioned previously, that is, 74% of all current out of state visitors are just passing through.



Strategies to Attract Pass Through Visitors

To increase tourism and tourism benefits in the region, tourist experiences must be improved. This subject was only explored briefly at the previous workshops and reports. Ideas suggested include those below.

Public Sector Actions

The *Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment* prepared for the area identified the following as priority infrastructure development projects for the region:

- Provision of public facilities such as dump stations, dumpsters and public rest areas (toilets). This will help reduce conflict with area residents and benefit both residents and tourists. The most immediate need is restrooms/outhouses along the Edgerton highway. Visitors and residents alike have complained about the condition of roadside areas. They are often unmaintained and unwelcoming. The local “workgroup” and residents need to pressure the legislature and seek funding to keep these areas clean and maintained so visitors are not turned away.
- Develop a multi-agency trails plan to enhance biking and hiking opportunities. Map the existing trails in the area (using the NPS map as a starting point).²

Additional proposed projects from the Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment include:

- Improve road maintenance

² A list of trails in the area can be found at: http://www.alaskayukontravel.com/copper_trails.htm

- Install passing lanes and bike trails along major highways
- Kennicott Diorama
- All American Historical Properties Trail
- Bike/hiking path along Copper River Northwestern Railway route linking Chitina and Cordova
- Tangle Lakes and Thompson Pass Trail improvements
- Lake Louise circumnavigation trail
- Reconstruction of Copper River and Northwestern Railway route from Cordova to McCarthy (a small project)
- Develop and increase signage and educational brochures; informational (local and emergency services), directional and interpretive – see more below
- Map the land ownership, with information on access and appropriate use restrictions
- Develop funding for necessary equipment acquisition and the operation of highway emergency services
- Develop alternative facilities and attractions to divert traffic from local “traditional use” sites to reduce overuse pressure and conflicts with local residents
- Develop funding sources for historic Chitina Preservation program
- Revise and implement the Chitina Dipnet Fishery Plan
- Develop the Ahtna Heritage Foundation visitor center (in progress)
- Develop more campgrounds

Private Sector Actions

- Develop more tourist accommodations, particularly lodging of sufficient size to support cruise travel (see notes in previous section for challenges related to this goal)
- Develop more low-cost seasonal and hostel-type housing
- Develop more evening activities for visitors
- Develop more campgrounds – deal with overcrowding, potential public safety hazards and trespassing problems (RVs and other campers are currently camping without permits on DOT, BLM and Ahtna land). Problems could be solved by developing campgrounds in the area, specifically the Sta-Keh Campground by the Gulkana River. Facilities such as toilets and trash cans should be provided to alleviate such problems and make the campgrounds clean and appealing to campers.
- RV parks – different views were expressed: some said there is a need for more, others said existing private spaces not full
- Provide more cultural activities, enjoyable ways to learn about the area’s history

Roadside Stories Project – “Information Infrastructure”

At the February 2006 workshop, the group talked extensively and enthusiastically about a “roadside stories” project, intended to improve the area’s attractions and to make driving through the area more interesting. This project is based on the idea that the quickest, least cost way to make the area

more attractive is through better information about area attractions, services, and cultural and natural history. A secondary goal of the project is to “give people ownership of their own stories” – take advantage of and document what people know about their environment.

Possible elements of this project are listed below:

- Put together a committee to pursue this project, seek funding and coordinate local volunteer efforts. Considering using the Copper River Stories (an interpretive project sponsored by the Copper River Watershed Project) as a launching point.
- Organize kids (through the schools) to help with documenting stories, interviewing elders, collecting photos, building signs and monuments.
- Working with tribal organizations, use project to direct visitors to appropriate locations, and to provide guidelines (like in existing Chamber of Commerce map) for appropriate visitor behavior.
- Consider tapping into Ahtna oral history efforts and BLM history projects, Ahtna place names project (see publication by Dr. Kari). Be respectful of who “owns” and who tells stories, only share Native history stories if Native residents chose to share this information.

Present stories in diverse forms. Ideally, offer a combination of written, mapped, recorded or broadcast information and physical site improvements linked to these sources. The illustrative example on the following page explains this concept.

Examples of information:

- Maps and brochures
- DVDs, CDs tied to roadside monuments
- Web-based “virtual museum”, see <http://www.cultureandrecreation.gov.au/conference1/2001/adendorff/> for an example.

"Information Infrastructure"

Copper River Country Stories - Illustrative Examples

Cultural Center:

Displays and stories tied to road-side information

Turnout with Simple Monument, Trail to Beaver Pond: From a CD, hear stories told in local voices about the river, beavers, fish, trapping, local place names

Lake Edge Rest Stop with Bathrooms, Kiosk:

Information on local services, rest areas, migrating waterfowl

Copper River Country

Turnoff with View Tower, Annotated Panoramic Photos: Views of mountains, glaciers, and rivers; information on climbing and geological history of the area

Examples of roadside improvements:

- Roadside monuments with symbols, numbers, etc., keyed to info sources
- Low-power, site-specific radio broadcasts, that could be listened to by travelers at specific points
- Interpretive signs
- Roadside pullouts – with dump stations, restrooms, trash, benches
- Interpretive sites: with boardwalks, wildlife viewing platforms
- Roadside viewing towers, to get visitors up above brush to where they can enjoy the views
- Cultural centers, offering displays, events – dance, performing arts, stories, art

In addition to improving information about the area, there is a real need to change the reality and the perception of the driving experience in the area. Steps in this direction include:

- Improve highway roadside services – the roadside improvements listed should include both a service and information function.
- Improve information on road driving conditions – in particular, dispel myths of the horrors of the McCarthy Road. Review the statements about the road in popular Alaska tour guidebooks, and send in specific corrections and clarifications, to be used in future editions. Also review the information being distributed by the Park Service and at Public Information Centers. Provide phone numbers than can be called for un updated report on road conditions.
- Scenic Byway designation – as stated above, re-start the effort to gain scenic byway designation for the Richardson Highway. This designation helps with marketing, and sets the stage for funding for many of the improvements discussed above.

PART 2: MARKETING & BRANDING

For several years, people involved in tourism in the Copper River Valley area have worked to identify a name and tagline to help give the region a clearer identity – a “brand.” The need for this effort is underlined by the fact that there is no agreed upon name for the region (Copper River Valley, Copper River Basin, Copper Valley, East Alaska...?). This section presents background information and conclusions that have come forward through this project to resolve this issue, incorporating previous discussions of goals for the region’s identity.

The most important message of this section is that, as important as it is for the region to agree upon an identity and tagline, even more important is developing a business plan and funding sources so that this message can be conveyed consistently on a sustainable basis.

Background to Branding: What is a Brand? What is Necessary for a Successful Branding Campaign?

Branding is more than just a slogan or logo, it is:

- A commitment about a place and the experiences it offers
- A message that captures people’s imagination
- A message that is true to the reality of the destination

A successful branding campaign requires:

- Consistency – repetition of a clear story over multiple years
- Dissemination – delivering the message to the right markets
- Organization – An entity responsible for sustaining the message (and the quality of the experience) over the long-term

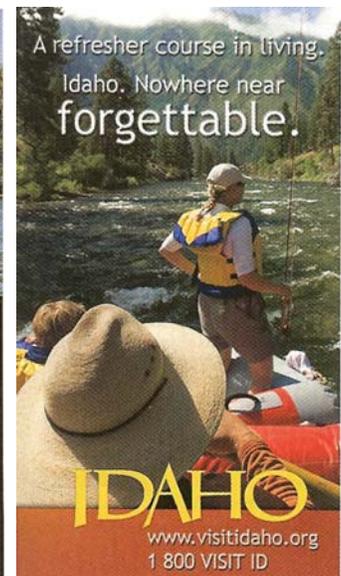
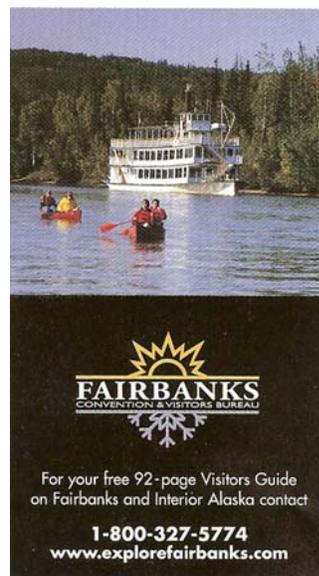
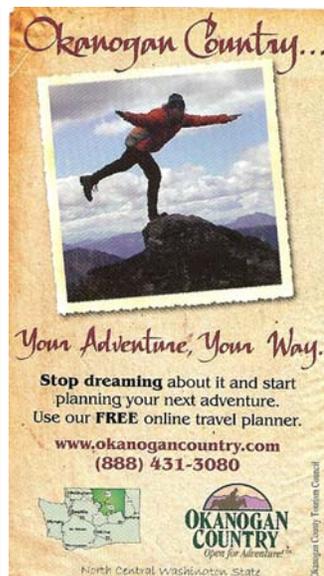
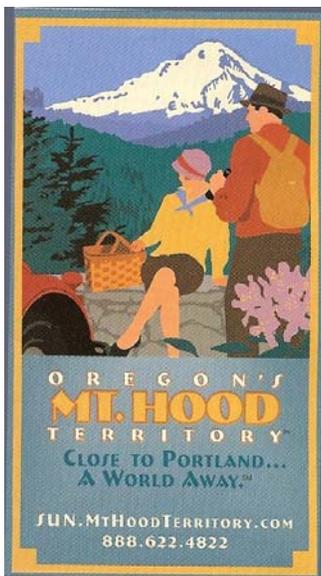
Successful Branding - Examples from Other Places

The list below is the summary of a branding slide show presented at the February ‘06 workshop. Additional information on regional branding and cooperative marketing can be found in Appendix C.

- **Tagline, or Experience & Landmarks** – A destination can have a very strong brand without a tagline. The strongest “brand” is distinct, memorable satisfying experience. It doesn’t hurt to have a landmark that evokes this experience, for example, the Golden Gate Bridge, Statue of Liberty, the Eiffel tower, St Louis arch.
- **Organic, or Created?** – While it is important to be true to the spirit of a place, Santa Barbara’s successful image - its red tiled roofs and Spanish-style architecture - was consciously created to lure visitors in the 1920s.
- **Words, or Experience & Reputation** – Kodiak uses “Emerald Isle” but this tagline is overshadowed by the more powerful reality of Kodiak as a place about bears and fish.
- **Delivering the Goods** – To be successful, the actual place must match the promise made in the brand. Places like Amish Country in Pennsylvania present themselves as quaint and rural. In reality, the major experience of the area is strip malls, commercial

sprawl and fast food restaurants. The place doesn't deliver on the promise in the brand; people are disappointed and visitation suffers.

- **Packaging** – The character of the experience and brand can be created by linking multiple destinations around a theme, such as the Texas bird trails. This destination took a group of disassociated small towns and wildlife viewing areas and made them into a coherent, convenient do-it-yourself “package” tour.
- **Establish a Geographic Identity/Integrate products** – A combination of destination management and marketing can create a defined geographic area, with market recognition comparable to places like National Parks. The Monteverde Cloud Forest Reserve in Costa Rica is a successful example, where visitors experience the natural environment, buy art, stay in themed accommodations, and enjoy soft adventure; Bristol Bay is working in the same direction.
- **Sustained, Supported By Residents** – The theme must resonate with the desires of residents. San Francisco residents like their Victorian houses; in Anchorage the theme of “City of Lights & Flowers” never captured the hearts of Anchorage residents.
- **Multi-sensory, Integrated Experience** – The most successful destinations integrate the place’s image with a wide range of experiences, for example, food in New Orleans, glacier ice in your drinks in Kenai Fjords National Park scenic tours.
- **More than a Tagline** – While a memorable phrase is important, marketing *images* often work just as well. The advertisements below were found in advertising sections of Sunset Magazine. They demonstrate the combination of words, typefaces, colors, photos, etc. that come together to create an image. For example, the Mt Hood image is selling the beautiful hotel that sits at the base of the mountain. The facility was built before World War II, and the ad has a character that suggests an escape to this romantic, earlier era.



- **Consistency – Yahoo! Mat-Su** resonates with the informal character of the residents and the attractions of that area. More importantly, the Mat-Su CVB has relentlessly stuck to this phrase, incorporating it into print and electronic media ads, letter heads, all sorts of collateral material, their website, etc. British Columbia’s “super, natural” campaign likewise has been in place for decades.



Developing a Brand and Identity for the Copper River Region

Target Markets

Travelers to focus marketing to include:

- Highway travelers – independent travelers driving through the area (Anchorage and Fairbanks to Valdez and McCarthy; Alaska Highway to Anchorage)
- Adventurers (bike, multi-sport tours)
- Alaska residents – coming in summer and winter
- Cruise passengers – travelers participating in a packaged tour
- International visitors
- Business travelers
- Visiting friends and family
- Sports teams

Identifying the area’s boundaries and agreeing on a name for the geographic region is a critical step. At the April 2006 workshop, meeting attendants, with the assistance of Agnew::Beck Consulting, agreed on a descriptive name for the area and developed several compelling taglines.

Notes from several previous workshops on regional names and taglines for the region can be found in Appendix C.

Geographic Label

The most popular name amongst meeting attendants was “Copper River Country.” This conclusion reflected the judgment that the term “country” was geographically accurate – the Copper River area takes in more than just the Copper River drainage. In addition, “basin,” while often used, is not a particularly poetic term. And “valley,” while also familiar descriptive,

gives images of a more enclosed landscape – which does not match the character of the area, and is the opposite of the vast spaces and wide open feeling that makes the area unique.

Tagline

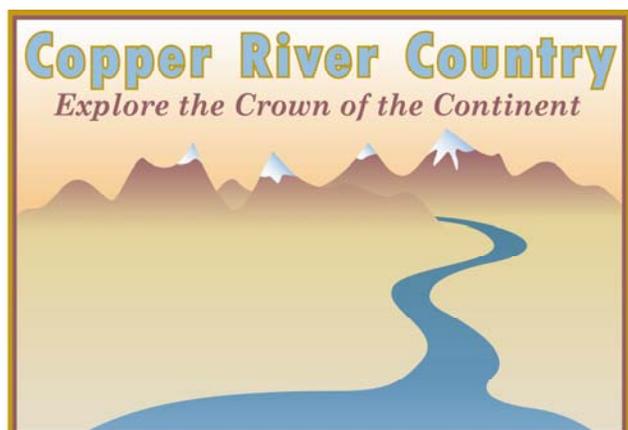
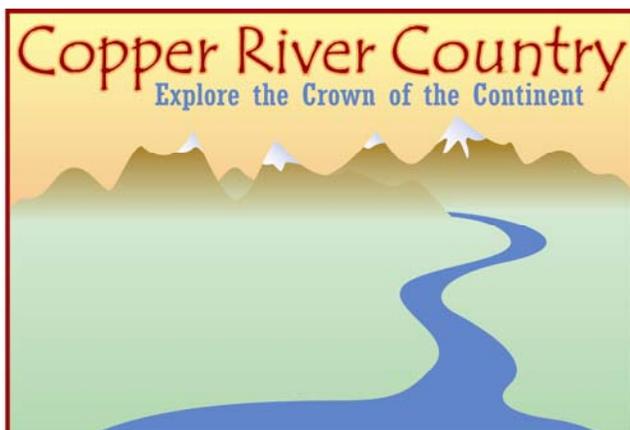
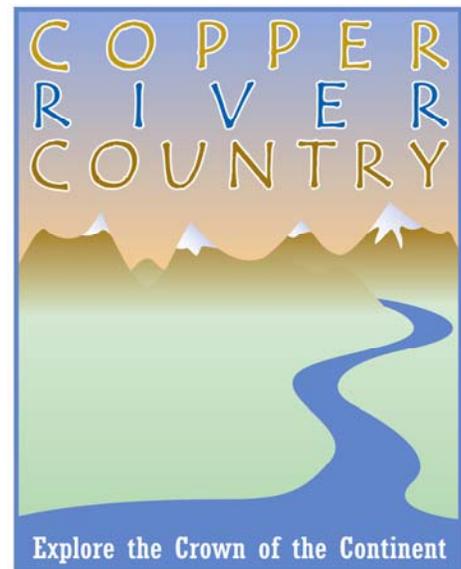
A region's tagline needs to convey key attractions, incorporates the area's strengths, emphasize the area's activities, tap into known brands, and address challenges and misconceptions. The main themes for the Copper River region that guided the tagline discussion include:

- big mountains
- salmon and rivers
- dramatic landscapes, scenery, quietness
- adventure corridor
- culture, native traditions, copper mining
- roads and transportation

The most popular single tagline among the various ideas suggested was “Explore the Crown of the Continent.” This term won over those participating because it emphasized the area's mountains, sounded good, and is being used by the National Park Service, which helps get the message out to a broader audience than the communities themselves can afford to do. Other taglines, to be used as secondary messages, include:

- Come listen to the silence
- Mountains, salmon, serenity
- Experience Alaska's Adventure corridor
- Home of Copper River salmon
- Home of Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve
- See the superlatives, feel the serenity

Seen here are preliminary branding logos and concepts.



Means to Convey the Marketing Theme

Despite the drawn out process to select a marketing theme, agreeing on the words is the easy part; what makes a branding campaign successful is getting the message out over a sustained period, in a consistent manner. This section looks into this broader topic.

Next Steps: Priority Marketing Actions

1. Finalize Regional Branding and Marking Plan

Inform the Copper River community of the conclusions of this process, through newspaper articles, radio announcements, etc. This plan will be available online for downloading, including a one page summary (Appendix ___) suitable for sharing, describing the conclusions of the branding process.

2. Develop a Sustainable Marketing Organization

Information on the proposed structure, funding options and activities for the organization, as agreed to at the April 06 workshop, can be found at the end of this section.

3. Website

The highest priority marketing action is to develop and maintain an aesthetic, coherent, easy-to-navigate website. Websites are crucial for any business or region in the world: a very high percentage of people in the present day plan vacations using the internet. Work is currently underway to upgrade the existing Chamber of Commerce site, with assistance from the DART project. This effort should incorporate the findings of this project and future communications development. Appendix G presents generalized recommendations for creating an effective website.

4. Develop Marketing Material Package

The newly minted tagline and other marketing materials needs to be assembled into a convenient graphic package that can be sent to marketing partners. This would include a set of electronic files with marketing information sized for different uses, from a 2"x2" website connection to an 8 1/2 x 11 colored advertisement. This set of materials conveying the brand can then be incorporated into signage, websites (regional and individual businesses), advertisements, brochures, maps, flyers, T-shirts etc. The first version of this package can be prepared locally. A more refined version should be developed as soon as possible. The organizations working on this project should seek funding to hire marketing consultants and graphic designers who can work with the local "workgroup" and DART representatives to craft a more refined, regional identity package.

5. Distribute Marketing Materials

Final marketing materials will need to be distributed to or incorporated into:

- a. local businesses and regional organizations
- b. tour companies (Princess, Holland America, Glacier Bay Cruiseline, Premier Alaska Tours, Cruise West, Royal Celebrity Tours, etc.),
- c. Guidebooks (Milepost, Bearfoot, Lonely Planet, Frommers) and magazines (Alaska, Sunset, National Geographic, etc.)
- d. Travel agencies and visitor bureaus such as Wrangell-St. Elias Lodging & Tours, Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA), and Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau (ACVB), Valdez
- e. Region's website, brochure and map

6. Roadside Entry Signs

One part of the marketing program is to announce to drivers that they have arrived in “Copper River Country.” Working with DOT/PF and Ahtna grand funds, construct and install 4 roadside entry signs. This effort should incorporate the branding themes and graphic styles discussed above.

7. DVD

Seek funding (state Mini-Grant program) to create a new marketing DVD (using the 1992 video as a starting point) which would feature the areas attractions and services and tell stories of the Natives and locals.

8. Develop Roadside Areas and Services

As outlined in Part 1 – Attractions, develop roadside areas with stories and interpretive information, incorporate marketing initiatives into the information.

Other Marketing Initiatives

- Provide better information about things to do, itineraries
 - Prepare a map of region (using the Chamber map as a starting point) – showing businesses, attractions, land ownership, road pull-offs. Map can be used for region’s website and for a regional brochure.
 - Improve directional signage, to help guide visitors to appropriate locations for fishing, hiking, snowmachines, etc.
 - NPS summer visitor guide
 - Trails map of the region
- Invite travel writers to region
- Sponsor familiarization trips
- Meet with tour companies and develop cooperative marketing plans (e.g., Princess, Holland America, Glacier Bay Cruiseline, Premier Alaska Tours, Cruise West, Royal Celebrity Tours)
- Update community profiles – in progress by the state?
- Improve hospitality – continue to offer the Alaska Host program
- Coordinate marketing initiatives with Valdez CVB (Sharon Crisp) and Fairbanks CVB and ARDOR (Katherine Dodge)
- Seek funding from NPS and ATIA for promotion of the area, tapping into the \$750,000 set aside for promoting Alaska’s national parks.
- Investigate options for an area-wide booking entity
- Investigate options for setting up a Geocache in the area³



³ “Geocaching is an entertaining adventure game for gps users. Participating in a cache hunt is a good way to take advantage of the wonderful features and capability of a gps unit. The basic idea is to have individuals and organizations set up caches all over the world and share the locations of these caches on the internet. GPS

Developing a Sustainable Marketing Organization

As part of the two workshops held during the later winter and spring of 2006, participants agreed to take the actions outlined below:

Structure

The first step is to formalize the partnership already in place, creating an interim organization (“Copper River Country Workgroup”) including the Chamber of Commerce, PWSCC, CVDA, NPS and several local businesses. A Memorandum of Understanding should be developed and signed specifying roles and responsibilities. This core group will have the responsibility to set deadlines and get things done. The group will agree to meet at least monthly. The process should be highly inclusive. Workgroup meetings should be well publicized, and any individual, organization or business that wants to be involved should be encouraged to sit in. A particular effort should be made to include representatives from the different communities in the region, with the option to establish community sub-committees.

Later, if more funding is available for marketing activities, a more formal regional organization could be established, perhaps building on the Chamber.

Funding a Sustainable Marketing Program

Funding for sustaining marketing is difficult in the Copper River Valley because there is no government to help create a sustainable funding source. Every other successful regional marketing organization in Alaska relies for the majority of its funding on local government taxes, typically a percentage of bed tax (see table on following page). In the absence of such support, several strategies are needed:

- Funding for one-time projects – take advantage of programs like DART, like the State Mini-grant program and grants to fund one-time projects such as website upgrade, DVD and roadside upgrades (“stories” project).
- Ongoing Responsibilities
 - Support from Local Business – Work with local business, as is currently done by the Chamber of Commerce, to slowly expand the revenue available for marketing. This can include a combination of annual membership dues, and fees for services.
 - Coordination – as is already occurring, work together with locally based organizations who can provide staff time to assist with marketing activities. Hire a Vista volunteer to augment local staff (requires matching funds, housing).
 - Chamber of Commerce
 - PWSCC
 - CVDA/ARDOR
 - NPS
 - Copper River Watershed Project
 - BLM
 - College students and interns

users can then use the location coordinates to find the caches. Once found, a cache may provide the visitor with a wide variety of rewards. All the visitor is asked to do is if they get something they should try to leave something for the cache.”

- Residents
- Copper River School District
- Media – radio, newspaper
- Partnerships – work with entities that have funding and a common interest in promoting the area. Examples include:
 - NPS, BLM, USFWS
 - State of Alaska – DNR, Parks, Lands, DOT/PF (ADF&G preparing wildlife viewing guides in DART regions)
 - Ahtna
 - Alyeska Pipeline Company
 - Other communities – Valdez, Fairbanks, McCarthy/Kennicott, Cordova, Anchorage
 - Businesses – ranging from small, local businesses to larger, cruise companies
 - State Organizations – Destination Marketing Organizations (DMO's), Alaska Travel Industry Association (ATIA); Alaska Wilderness Recreation & Tourism Association (AWRTA)

Activities

In addition to the marketing initiatives listed above, common ongoing activities of a regional marketing organization include:

- Advocacy (e.g., for infrastructure, funding, improvements to attractions)
- Liaison to state organizations, ATIA
- Ongoing website improvements, optimization
- Establish, maintain 800 toll-free number
- Attend marketing and trade shows
- Provide member services
- Develop marketing partnerships
- Develop public and media relations (press packages, press releases)
- Market to affinity groups – (e.g., bikers, kayakers, birders, cavers)
- Join marketing cooperatives
- Establish suggested itineraries
- Provide better information on attractive ways to experience area (totems)
- Grantwriting, grant management for one-time projects

Specific Implementation Plan: Who, What, When

This plan identifies a range of actions needed to increase tourism and improve marketing strategies for the greater Copper River Region. The table below summarizes the priority actions by task, a timeframe when that take would be completed and who would take the lead on each task.

Task	Timeframe	Lead
Finalize Regional Branding and Marking Plan	Summer 2006	A::B, Workgroup
Develop a Interim Marketing Organization – draft and adopt MOU’s, set up meeting schedule, elect officers	Summer 2006	Chamber of Commerce, CVDA, PWSCC, NPS, local businesses
Develop Interim Marketing Material Package	Summer 2006	Workgroup, state
Develop Refined Marketing Material Package	Summer/Fall 2006	Marketing consultant/graphic designer, workgroup, state
Upgrade the existing Chamber of Commerce website	2006	Chamber of Commerce, state, website consultant
Distribute marketing materials	Ongoing	Workgroup, state
Prepare Grant proposal for “information infrastructure” – Copper River Stories project – seek funds for coordinating compilation of local stories, preparation of information, installation of roadside info sites	Fall 2006	Workgroup, state
Carry out Copper River Stories Project	2007	Workgroup, state
Seek funding to design and install Roadside Entry Signs	2007	Workgroup, DOT/PF, Ahtna
Seek funding to develop and distribute DVD	Fall 2006 Mini-grant, 2007 implementation?	Workgroup, state mini-grant, residents
Improve and maintain roadside areas and services	Ongoing	Workgroup, state