

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



A joint project of the
Alaska Regional Development Organizations
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

The Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment

was conducted by the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

in partnership with the
Alaska Regional Development Organizations

and with the generous support of the
U.S. Department of Commerce
Economic Development Administration

June 1997

Table of Contents

Introduction Page 1

Implementation Page 1

Schedule of Meetings Page 3

Regional Assessments

 Prince William Sound Page 5

 Copper Valley Page 11

 Kodiak Island Borough Page 17

 North Slope Borough Page 23

 Southeast Alaska Page 31

 Northwest Arctic Borough Page 39

 Aleutian and Pribilof Islands Page 47

 Kenai Peninsula Borough Page 55

 Matanuska-Susitna Borough Page 63

 Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula Page 71

 Lower Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Page 79

Introduction

In 1995, the Alaska Regional Development Organizations (ARDORs), a network of state-designated and regionally-empowered economic development corporations, identified tourism industry development as a common objective. Further, they concluded that a lack of basic public infrastructure was one of the greatest barriers to orderly industry development and impeded the optimum movement and accommodation of travelers within the state. This lack is particularly pronounced in rural Alaska, where tourism represents one of the few economic development opportunities available to many communities. Subsequently, the ARDORs determined that a top priority was to conduct a rural tourism infrastructure needs assessment. Although other projects could be considered, the focus of the assessment would be on “public infrastructure,” or that for which state and/or local government would have the primary responsibility.

Performance of the infrastructure needs assessment was included in a successful funding proposal submitted to the U.S. Department of Commerce, Economic Development Administration (EDA) by the Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development, Division of Trade and Development (DTD).

Concurrently, Governor Knowles’ *Marketing Alaska* Initiative recommended that the Alaska Division of Tourism (DOT) prepare a comprehensive strategic plan for tourism development using a public process that involves all affected parties, looks at the desired future condition of tourism in the state, identifies infrastructure needs and opportunities for public/private partnerships, creates an effective permitting process, considers sustainability, and creates year-round jobs for Alaskans. The information collected through this regionally-based assessment is essential to the beginning of any statewide tourism planning process and is also relevant to other state planning efforts including the Statewide Transportation Improvement Program, the Airport Improvement Program and Governor Knowles’ Trails and Recreational Access in Alaska (TRAAK) initiative.

Marketing Alaska also directed the Division of Tourism to work with the Department of Community and Regional Affairs to implement rural tourism development strategies using the recently established Rural Tourism Center as a one-stop resource for rural Alaskans interested in tourism development. The objectives of the Center, a joint venture of the division, Alaska Village Initiatives, and USDA Rural Development are to coordinate statewide rural tourism efforts, provide rural tourism assistance, and collect and share general tourism information.

The joining of these initiatives, and the financial support of the EDA, resulted in a partnership between the ARDORs, the Division of Trade and Development and the Division of Tourism to carry out a process to identify the public infrastructure needs of rural Alaska as identified by the people and organizations who are stakeholders in the regions.

Project Implementation

Successful implementation of the tourism infrastructure needs assessment project required participation from a broad spectrum of stakeholders including representatives of tourism businesses and organizations, communities and municipal agencies, public land managers and private land owners, and others who participate in or are impacted by tourism industry development in each region. The Department of Natural Resources, Division of Land, and

the Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, Division of Statewide Planning, with their planning and graphics expertise and understanding of capital improvement project processes, were involved in early discussions about the structure, content and outcomes of this effort.

The assessment was carried out through a series of regional roundtable meetings occurring from May through September 1996. A standardized format for each meeting was agreed, with flexibility for the unique requirements of individual regions. Roundtable meetings were open to the public, however, invitations were specifically sent to agencies and organizations involved in the management of tourism-impacted lands and facilities and to those having a direct interest in tourism industry development in the region. Although the summertime scheduling of these meetings made it difficult for some potential participants to attend, it was determined that this problem would exist to a greater or lesser extent no matter when they were held.

The roundtable meetings were structured to specifically accomplish three objectives. First, to identify the public infrastructure already in place. In support of this objective, Geographic Information System-generated maps of each region were produced showing existing tourism infrastructure and resources to the extent this information was available in existing GIS databases. These maps illustrated what was in place, where development opportunities might exist, and the spacial relationships between infrastructure and geographic features. At the conclusion of each meeting, these valuable reference tools were presented to the local host organization.

The second objective was to become aware of new infrastructure and attractions under development in each region. Federal, state and local organizations made brief presentations regarding their planning processes and new projects under development or in various planning stages. Private sector project developers were also encouraged to share information about their new or planned projects.

Then, recognizing what is in place and what is being planned, participants identified additional infrastructure projects that would either build on what exists, meet current industry needs, or create new industry development opportunities. A panel discussion followed to explain the criteria various funding sources use in assessing project feasibility. It was recommended that "fundability" should be considered in prioritizing projects.

Although it was suggested each region prioritize proposed projects to indicate their relative importance or the preferred sequence for implementation, some regions elected not to take this approach.

Each meeting closed with a discussion of how to move the proposed projects ahead through individual initiatives, through legislative action, and by forming partnerships among stakeholders to advocate for priority projects.

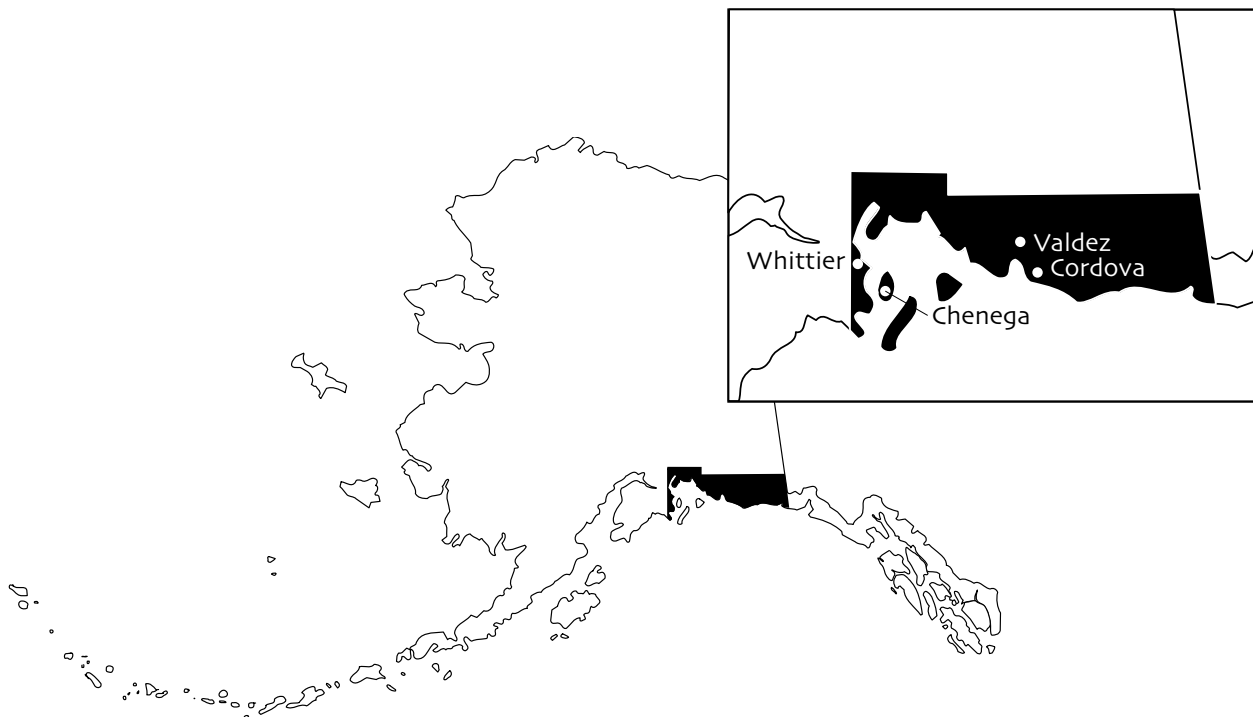
It should be noted that the projects and priorities identified in these meetings reflect the thinking of those in attendance. Although every effort was made to have broad representation of the public and private sector interests, the projects identified and the priorities given them do not necessarily represent a majority opinion of the residents of the specified region. Additionally, some areas of rural Alaska are not included in this assessment. Those are the regions in which there were no designated Alaska Regional Development Organizations at the time the meetings were conducted. These areas include the Bering Straits region, the majority of the Doyon region, and the area of the Fairbanks North Star Borough.

RURAL ALASKA TOURISM INFRASTRUCTURE NEEDS ASSESSMENT

SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

| DATE | LOCATION | LOCAL HOST ORGANIZATION | REGION REPRESENTED |
|----------|------------|---|----------------------------------|
| 05/30/96 | Anchorage | Prince William Sound Economic Development Council | Prince William Sound |
| 06/13/96 | Glennallen | Copper Valley Economic Development Council | Ahtna Corporation Region |
| 07/16/96 | Kodiak | Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference | Kodiak Island Borough |
| 07/18/96 | Barrow | Arctic Development Council | North Slope Borough |
| 08/08/96 | Juneau | Southeast Conference | Southeast Alaska |
| 08/13/96 | Kotzebue | Northwest Arctic Borough Economic Development Commission | Northwest Arctic Borough |
| 08/14/96 | Anchorage | Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference | Aleutian and Pribilof Islands |
| 08/15/96 | Soldotna | Kenai Peninsula Borough Economic Development District | Kenai Peninsula Borough |
| 08/22/96 | Wasilla | Matanuska-Susitna Resource Conservation & Development, Inc. | Matanuska-Susitna Borough |
| 09/12/96 | Dillingham | Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference | Alaska Peninsula and Bristol Bay |
| 09/17/96 | Bethel | Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council | Lower Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta |

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Prince William Sound

A joint project of the
Prince William Sound Economic Development Council
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

PRINCE WILLIAM SOUND

Sources: *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, Division of Tourism, Summer 1993; *Prince William Sound, Regional Development Strategy Update*, Prince William Sound Economic Development Council, 1995; *Rural Alaska Community Visitor Profiles*, Rural Tourism Center, June, 1996; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Anchorage, Alaska, May, 1996.

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

Located at the northernmost point of the Gulf of Alaska, Prince William Sound encompasses over 2,700 miles of coastline; 4.4 million acres of National Forest; and 10,000 square miles of protected waterways, islands, fjords and glaciers. Surrounded by the rugged coastal mountains of the Chugach Range, Prince William Sound lies at the heart of the Chugach National Forest. The region is richly forested with Western Hemlock and Sitka Spruce and its countless islands shelter large populations of sea birds. The region is well-known for its scenic beauty; abundant fish, bird and marine mammal populations; and as a prime recreation area.

Valdez, with 4,500 residents, and Cordova, with 2,600, are the population and commercial centers for the region. Most of the region's remaining population of approximately 550 are found in the coastal communities of Whittier, Chenega Bay and Tatitlek.

The region's economy is closely tied to the Trans-Alaska Pipeline Terminal and attendant services in Valdez; to commercial fishing and processing; to recreation and tourism-related activities; and to federal, state and local government services. Subsistence continues to play an important social and economic role in the communities of Chenega Bay and Tatitlek.

ACCESS

Access to Prince William Sound varies greatly by community. Cordova is the only community with daily scheduled jet service, offered as a stop-over on flights between Anchorage and Juneau. Scheduled prop airplane service is available daily between Anchorage and Valdez, while air taxi and charter service are available to other communities within the region.

The Alaska Marine Highway System provides passenger and vehicle transport service between Valdez, Cordova and Whittier. The frequency of ferry schedule varies depending on the time of year.

Highway access is available year-round to Valdez from Anchorage and from Fairbanks, via the paved Glenn and Richardson Highways. Whittier is accessed from Anchorage via the Seward Highway and the Alaska Railroad shuttle service from Portage.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

Prince William Sound is a veritable tourism treasure. The area abounds in beautiful scenery, spectacular glaciers, abundant wildlife and recreational attractions and opportunities.

A sampling of the region's tourism assets and attributes includes:

GLACIERS

- Columbia Glacier
- College Fjords
- Whittier Glacier
- Worthington Glacier
- Childs Glacier
- Sheridan Glacier

RECREATIONAL ACTIVITIES

- Sportfishing
- Kayaking
- Motor and sail boating
- Hiking and bicycling
- Camping
- Scuba diving
- River rafting
- Glacier skiing
- Day cruises
- Flightseeing

WILDLIFE

- Seabirds and bald eagles
- Whales and porpoise
- Sea otter and sea lions
- Bear
- Dall sheep and mountain goats
- Deer
- Salmon, halibut and crab

ATTRACTIONS

- Trans-Alaska Pipeline Terminus
- Native communities
- Historical sites
- Museums

SPECIAL EVENTS

- World Extreme Skiing Championship
- Prince William Sound Regatta
- Cordova Iceworm Festival
- Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival

CURRENT VISITATION TO REGION

Visitation patterns vary greatly within the region, according to the latest Alaska Visitor Statistics Program data.

Cordova received 17,200 visitors during the summer of 1993. Vacation/pleasure was the main reason most visitors traveled to Cordova (86%), while 10% traveled to visit friends and relatives and 2% traveled for a combination of business and pleasure. More than half of Cordova's visitors (55%) traveled independently, while 22% traveled on a package tour and 23% traveled as inde-package visitors. Cordova visitors overwhelmingly used air service to enter/exit Alaska (60%), while 22% used the highway and 12% used the Alaska Marine Highway System.

Valdez hosted 124,300 visitors during the summer of 1993. Vacation/pleasure was again the primary reason for most visitors to travel to Valdez (88%); while 7% traveled to visit friends and relatives and 5% traveled for combined business and pleasure. Most Valdez visitors were independent travelers (40%), while 33% traveled on a package tour and 27% traveled as inde-package visitors. Valdez visitors primarily used air to enter/exit Alaska (35%), while 22% used cruise ships and 43% used a combination of highway and ferry.

Whittier received 83,600 visitors during the summer of 1993. Vacation/pleasure was the overwhelming motivation for most visitors (90%), while 2% traveled to visit friends and relatives and 4% traveled for combined business and pleasure. Most Whittier visitors were package tour visitors (48%), while 32% were independent visitors and 20% traveled as inde-package visitors. Whittier visitors used primarily air to enter/exit Alaska (51% to 59%), while 28% used cruise ships and 21% used highway and ferry.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

One significant area for Prince William Sound tourism potential is developing better access and more carrying capacity for visitation. Basic visitor facilities, including restrooms, trails and campgrounds, need to be increased to support growth in the active recreation and ecotourism areas.

Additionally, Prince William Sound has yet to really tap its historical and Native culture assets. Development of cultural and historical attractions and activities within the three largest communities, as well as the smaller Native communities may represent good potential for capturing more visitor dollars.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

While the Prince William Sound region now enjoys a very healthy visitor industry, its further development is hindered by a lack of visitor facilities and infrastructure.

Additionally, the Prince William Sound Tourism Coalition, and other visitor organizations, do not enjoy marketing budgets as large as many of their Alaska competitors. Further, there is some feeling within the region that potential visitors still harbor negative impressions resulting from the Exxon Valdez oil spill. Marketing challenges are further exacerbated by the diversity of visitor types and travel patterns.

There are also divided opinions within the region's visitor industry as to what kinds and how much industry growth is beneficial. It is important that stakeholders in the region continue to work together to plan for an industry that can meet the diverse needs of local residents and industry participants.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

The regional cooperative marketing organization for the region is the Prince William Sound Tourism Coalition. In addition, the Valdez Convention and Visitors Bureau and local Chambers of Commerce promote individual communities within the region. Tourism development efforts are supported by the Prince William Sound Economic Development Council, an Alaska Regional Development Organization, as well as by local government bodies.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Participants from throughout the Prince William Sound region identified a variety of tourism infrastructure and attraction projects which they believe should be implemented. They opted not to prioritize these projects, but to pursue them as additional analysis and unfolding events determined the time to be appropriate.

TRAILS AND CAMPING

- Complete a non-motorized trail from Shoup Bay State Park to Worthington Glacier with access from the Richardson Highway
- Develop a camper and tent camping site near city of Cordova for transient workers and recreational campers

CULTURE

- Build a cultural center in Cordova highlighting and interpreting the Eyak Native presence and influence in the region

PARKS

- Recognize Chugach National Forest Wilderness Study Area as the attraction and resource it is and its value to the visitor industry and local communities

TRANSPORTATION

- Develop a deep-water port facility, with the capacity to handle both cargo and passenger service, at Shepard Point near Cordova
- Construct cruiseship/ferry terminal facilities in Valdez
- Improve ferry service scheduling into Cordova
- Expand existing dock facilities in Cordova

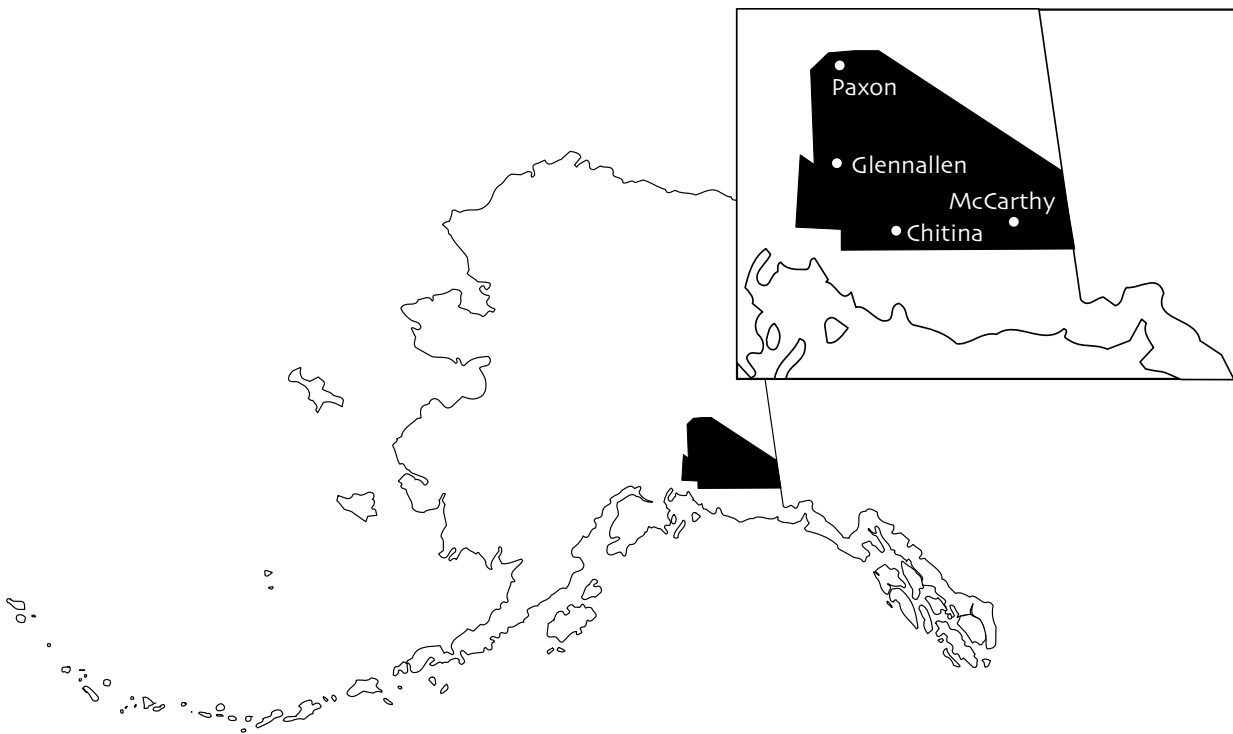
PUBLIC FACILITIES

- Expand the Prince William Sound Waste Management Plan to cover areas outside of the communities and develop a facility for handling human waste generated in western Prince William Sound
- Obtain additional weather buoys for Prince William Sound
- Complete public facilities at Dock Point in Valdez, including restrooms and interpretive signage

COMMUNICATIONS

- Establish a quality communications system throughout the region including the capacity for accurate weather information gathering and transmittal and the capacity to responding to public safety and emergency services needs

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Copper Valley

A joint project of the
Copper Valley Economic Development Council
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

COPPER VALLEY

Sources: *Ahtna Cultural Center, Market Review*, Copper River Native Association, January, 1992; *Regional Development Strategy*, Copper Valley Economic Development Council, Inc., June, 1995; *Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve, Visitor Study*, National Park Service, Summer 1995; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; *Rural Alaska Community Visitor Profiles*, Rural Tourism Center, June, 1996; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Glennallen, Alaska, June, 1996.

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

The approximately 12,000 square mile Copper Valley region in the eastern portion of southcentral Alaska is surrounded by the Alaska, Wrangell, Chugach and Talkeetna mountain ranges. The region includes over half of the Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve, the nation's largest national park, and is traversed by the Trans-Alaska Pipeline. Glennallen, 190 miles from Anchorage and 255 miles from Fairbanks, is the area's commercial hub and a service center for many of the twenty-one surrounding communities. The region's total population is approximately 3,100.

ACCESS

Access to the communities of the Copper Valley region is most commonly via the road system. The main transportation routes through the region are the paved Glenn and Richardson highways. The gravel Edgerton Highway and Nabesna Road provide access into Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. In addition, many Copper Valley communities can be reached by scheduled and chartered air taxi service.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

The Copper Valley has abundant natural, scenic beauty including the greatest concentration of mountain peaks over 14,500 feet in North America. Wildlife is also plentiful and many of the region's communities maintain a strong sense of their traditional culture. Several communities now offer visitor services, with their primary focus on catering to "rubber tire" traffic. A largely untapped asset in the area is the spectacular Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Primary attractions in the region include the Kennicott Mine, sportfishing and hunting and; in winter, dog mushing, snowmobiling and cross country skiing.

CURRENT VISITATION TO REGION

The Copper Valley region receives visitors from two primary sources: Alaskans from other communities within the state and nonresident visitors from outside Alaska.

Alaskans travel to the Copper Valley region to take advantage of the great hunting, fishing and outdoor recreation opportunities, to visit the McCarthy-Kennicott area, and in transit to other Alaska communities.

For most nonresident visitors, the region does not constitute a travel destination, but is primarily a transportation corridor to other areas of the state. The recognized "stand alone" visitor destinations within the region are McCarthy-Kennicott and Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (AVSP) data is available only for the community of Glennallen. However, since most of the visitor traffic to the region flows through Glennallen, it provides a reasonable representation of visitation to the region. According to the AVSP, more than 100,000 nonresident visitors traveled to Glennallen during the summer of 1993. Most Glennallen visitors (86%) traveled to Alaska for pleasure purposes; while only 10% traveled to visit friends and relatives and 4% traveled for business purposes. An overwhelming majority of visitors to Glennallen were independent travelers (95%). This is consistent with travel patterns for highway visitors who generally plan and make their own travel arrangements.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The greatest opportunities for tourism development in the Copper Valley region are associated with the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve. Although accessible by road, there has been little or no visitor infrastructure developed within the park, with the exception of that found in the McCarthy-Kennicott area which is reached through Chitina. Visitor services remain undeveloped along the Nabesna Road, the northern access route into the Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve.

Additional opportunities exist for development of visitor attractions and infrastructure that could encourage highway travelers to “stop, stay and spend” beyond that which currently occurs. These could include more recreational opportunities, as well as basic visitor services.

Opportunities also exist within the region to further develop its winter tourism, appealing particularly to recreationists from in-state.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The location of the Copper Valley as an intermediary stop for visitors traveling to and from other destinations is both an opportunity and a challenge. The challenge lies in the need to develop more attractions and roadside infrastructure to motivate visitors to stop for significant amounts of time.

Additionally, Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve lacks significant infrastructure within the park. Tourism would benefit from enhanced access into the park as well as attractions and activities within the park. Further development of the McCarthy-Kennicott area is hampered by its limited visitor capacity and accessibility.

These problems are compounded by a lack of marketing clout and expertise. For the region to take full advantage of its visitor assets, visitor awareness must be increased. This requires additional marketing dollars and expertise to effectively promote the area and compete with other visitor destinations within the state. One positive note is that Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve is becoming increasingly attractive to tour operators and wholesalers. As infrastructure and visitor attractions and activities are developed, marketing assistance should be available from a variety of industry sources.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

Currently, no organization focuses exclusively on tourism development and promotion within the Copper Valley area. The Copper Valley Economic Development Council, Inc., an Alaska Regional Development Organization, provides technical assistance for tourism, and other, economic sector development to individual businesses and organizations within the region. Local chambers of commerce and visitor centers focus much of their effort in the area of tourism development and promotion.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

1. DEVELOP STA-KEH CAMPGROUND

Location: Mile 129 Glenn Highway, near Glennallen

Description: RV's and other campers are currently camping without permits on land belonging to the Department of Transportation and the Bureau of Land Management. There are no public facilities at these spots. This type of camping is creating over crowding and potential public safety hazards. A campground could be built by the Gulkana River to alleviate this problem.

2. PROVISION OF PUBLIC FACILITIES: DUMP STATIONS, DUMPSTERS AND PUBLIC REST AREAS

Location: Copper River Valley

Description: Dump stations, dumpsters and rest areas with toilet facilities are needed to serve the traveling public. This will lead to a cleaner, safer environment, enhance the visitor's experience, and reduce conflict with area residents. This represents an immediate need; so while the challenges of funding are addressed, portable outhouses should be installed at the areas of greatest need; in particular, the Edgerton Highway. Both residents and tourists will benefit. The Department of Transportation, Division of Tourism and private enterprise could potentially partner on this project.

3. DEVELOP A MULTI-AGENCY TRAILS PLAN

Location: Glennallen and Surrounding Region

Description: Develop a comprehensive trails plan to enhance biking and hiking opportunities for a range of expertise and provide people an experiential connection with the area. This plan would need supporting public facilities (restrooms), planning and construction funds and cooperation from land managers and owners.

4. BUILD A WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS VALLEY RESORT

Location: Chistochina on the Glenn Highway

Description: A year-round resort, accessible by highway and air, accommodating visitors participating in a variety of National Park tours would offer a focal point for visitors and make Chistochina a visitor destination. Copper Valley businesses would make tours available to the visitors including hiking, cultural tours, snow machining, cross country skiing, mountain biking and wildlife viewing. The Chistochina Village Council is researching the feasibility of this project.

5. **CONSTRUCT WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS NATIONAL PARK & PRESERVE VISITOR INFORMATION CENTER**

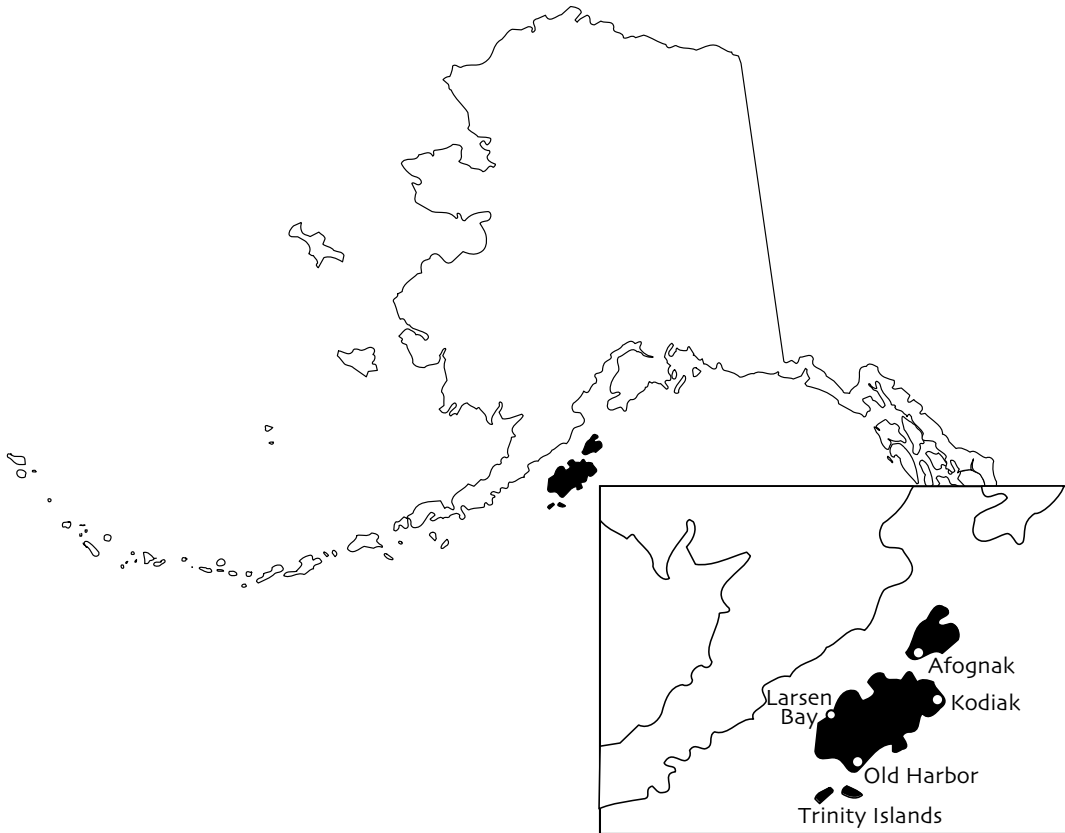
Location: Mile 107 Richardson Highway

Description: Construction of the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve Visitor Information Center will provide a destination for visitors to the Copper Valley region. Construction, dependent on federal legislative action, should begin in 1998 or 1999. The center will offer information relevant to further travel in the park and significant concession opportunities for residents of the region. Public support for the project has increased due to the need to diversify the region's economy. Final decisions related to construction will be made in August 1997.

C. ADDITIONAL PROPOSED PROJECTS

- Completion of Kennicott Diorama
- All American Historical Properties Trail
- Construction of bike path along Copper River Northwestern Railway route accessed through 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
- Establish more campgrounds
- Install passing lanes and bike trails along major highways
- Develop low-cost seasonal and hostel-type housing
- Develop and increase signage and educational brochures; informational (local and emergency services), directional and interpretive
- Do land ownership status mapping 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
- Revive and implement the Chitina Dipnet Fishery Plan
- Develop evening activities for visitors
- Develop Native Cultural Center in Glennallen, Gakona or Copper Center

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Kodiak Island Borough

A joint project of the
Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

KODIAK ISLAND BOROUGH

Sources: *Kodiak Island Region Overall Economic Development Program*, Kodiak Chamber of Commerce, 1995; *Kodiak Island Visitor Industry Survey*, Kodiak Island CVB, Draft 1996; *Marketing Plan for the Kodiak Island CVB*, Kodiak Island CVB, October, 1993; *Kodiak Island Connection Report*, SWAMC, June, 1993; *Hot Prospects: A Tourism Inventory & Assessment of Southwest Alaska*, SWAMC, October, 1991; *Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference, 1996 Overall Economic Development Program Report*, SWAMC, June, 1996; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Kodiak, Alaska, July, 1996.

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

The Kodiak Island Archipelago is located in the Gulf of Alaska about 250 air miles southwest of Anchorage. Extending from the Barren Islands on the north to Chirikof Island on the south, the region is approximately 177 miles long and 67 miles across. At 3,588 square miles, Kodiak Island is the second largest island in the U.S., exceeded only by the island of Hawaii. No point within the borough's 5,000 square miles is more than 15 miles from the sea. The area's landscape includes estuaries and lagoons; wetlands and tidelands; rocky islands and seacliffs; exposed coasts; rivers, streams and lakes; and upland areas.

The total borough population is about 15,600 with 7,600 living in the city of Kodiak; another 6,800 in nearby, road connected residential areas including the U.S. Coast Guard Support Center; and the remaining 1,200 in six Native villages located along the coast of Kodiak Island. The borough's economy is closely tied to commercial fishing, seafood processing, retail trade and government, with seafood processing accounting for about one-third of total employment. Unique historical, cultural, archaeological, recreational, and wildlife viewing opportunities also form the basis of a developing tourism industry.

ACCESS

Commercial jet service, ranging seasonally from four to eight flights daily, is available from Anchorage to the city of Kodiak. Scheduled air taxi and charter air services offer a wide variety of connections to Kodiak's outlying communities. Passenger and vehicle service is provided by the Alaska State Ferry, M/V Tustumena, which connects the city of Kodiak with Port Lions and communities of the Kenai Peninsula. Container barge companies provide land and sea shipping services to Kodiak Island.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

The primary tourism attributes and assets of Kodiak Island include an array of easily accessible public lands, sportfishing, hunting, wildlife viewing, adventure activities, historical and cultural activities, and special events.

A sampling of the region’s tourism attributes and assets includes:

PUBLIC LANDS

- Access to Katmai National Park and Preserve
- Fort Abercrombie State Park
- Buskin River State Recreation Area
- Pasagshak State Recreation Area
- Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge
- Afognak Island State Park
- Shuyak Island State Park

RECREATION

- Sportfishing lodges, charters and guided trips
- Kayaking
- Hiking and camping
- Flightseeing

HUNTING

- Hunting lodges and guided trips
- Rental cabins

WILDLIFE

- Kodiak brown bears
- Beaver and river otters
- Roosevelt elk and mountain goats
- Whales, porpoise and harbor seals
- Over 200 bird species

CULTURAL

- Dig Afognak
- Kodiak Area Native Association Museum
- Kodiak Alutiiq Dancers
- Russian churches
- Baranov Museum
- Fort Abercrombie

SPECIAL EVENTS

- Kodiak Crab Festival
- Pillar Mountain Golf Classic
- Alutiiq Week

CURRENT VISITATION TO REGION

According to Alaska Visitor Statistics Program data, Kodiak Island attracted a total of 10,700 visitors during the summer of 1993. Nearly four out of ten Kodiak visitors (38%) came to Alaska for vacation purposes. Another 21% traveled to Alaska to visit friends and relatives, while an additional 25% traveled for business and pleasure. Almost 70% of Kodiak’s visitors traveled independently, while 20% traveled on package tours and 10% traveled on an inde-package trip.

The vast majority of Kodiak Island vacation/pleasure visitors are engaging in recreational and tour activities outside the populated areas of the archipelago. The primary visitor activities within the City of Kodiak include sightseeing, cultural activities, day program recreational activities and flightseeing.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The areas of greatest potential for tourism development on Kodiak Island include increased visitation to smaller communities; further development of local arts, crafts and culture-oriented activities; and capturing a greater share of the package tour market.

Of all the potential areas for tourism development within the region, visitation to outlying villages represents one the greatest opportunities. The relatively close proximity of many of these communities to the city of Kodiak, as well as the strong cultural and recreational opportunities they represent, are assets that can be beneficially exploited. Therefore, Kodiak villages interested in tourism development have a great advantage over most small, remote villages within the state.

The region also enjoys significant areas of accessible public lands which are available for recreational uses such as hiking, sportfishing and camping.

Another asset currently under developed in the Kodiak region is the production and sale of Native arts and crafts to visitors. Very limited opportunities exist within Kodiak to purchase authentic crafts that are made within the region.

Kodiak Island has a spotty history in attracting package tour visitors to the area. Recently, however, Alaska Airlines began packaging tours to the island and is distributing these tours through major wholesalers. For this effort to be a success, the visitor industry within Kodiak must commit itself to providing a consistent mix of quality visitor experiences for this market.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The greatest tourism development challenges for the Kodiak Island Borough are in the areas of infrastructure and attraction development in smaller communities, accessibility problems due to weather, and marketing.

Visitor attractions and infrastructure within the city of Kodiak have improved rapidly in the past five years, however, challenges still exist in many of the smaller communities. While these communities have a great many assets to draw upon in attracting visitors, most have yet to develop their potential or to build the basic infrastructure necessary to accommodate visitor needs.

As a non-road accessible destination, Kodiak Island and its communities are dependent on air and water-borne transportation, both of which can often be hampered by weather. Transportation infrastructure within the region needs to be improved to help mitigate this problem. At present, there is no public transportation system available in Kodiak.

Marketing challenges facing Kodiak Island include insufficient funding to effectively compete with other visitor destinations and a concurrent lack of visitor awareness of the multitude of experiences available within the region. Kodiak is also disadvantaged by the added costs of reaching an island destination.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

The primary tourism promotion organizations for the region are the Kodiak Island Convention and Visitors Bureau and Alaska's Southwest, the tourism marketing committee of the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference (SWAMC). SWAMC, the Alaska Regional Development Organization for southwest Alaska, and the Kodiak Island Borough have both made tourism development a priority economic development activity.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

1. MARINE HIGHWAY SERVICE FACILITIES

Location: Boroughwide

Provide sufficient infrastructure to support year-round regional and interregional ferry service including docks, terminals, and public access in villages.

2. UPDATED KODIAK HARBOR PLAN

Location: City of Kodiak

Provide improved access to the Kodiak waterfront for both the public and commercial operators by updating a series of Kodiak Harbor planning documents.

3. KODIAK FISHERY MUSEUM

Location: City of Kodiak

Develop a fishery and marine museum for Kodiak that will encourage a partnership between the visitor industry and the local commercial fishing industry.

4. PUBLIC TRANSPORTATION SYSTEM

Location: Kodiak

Establish a public bus transportation system for Kodiak.

5. STREAM STOCKING PROGRAM

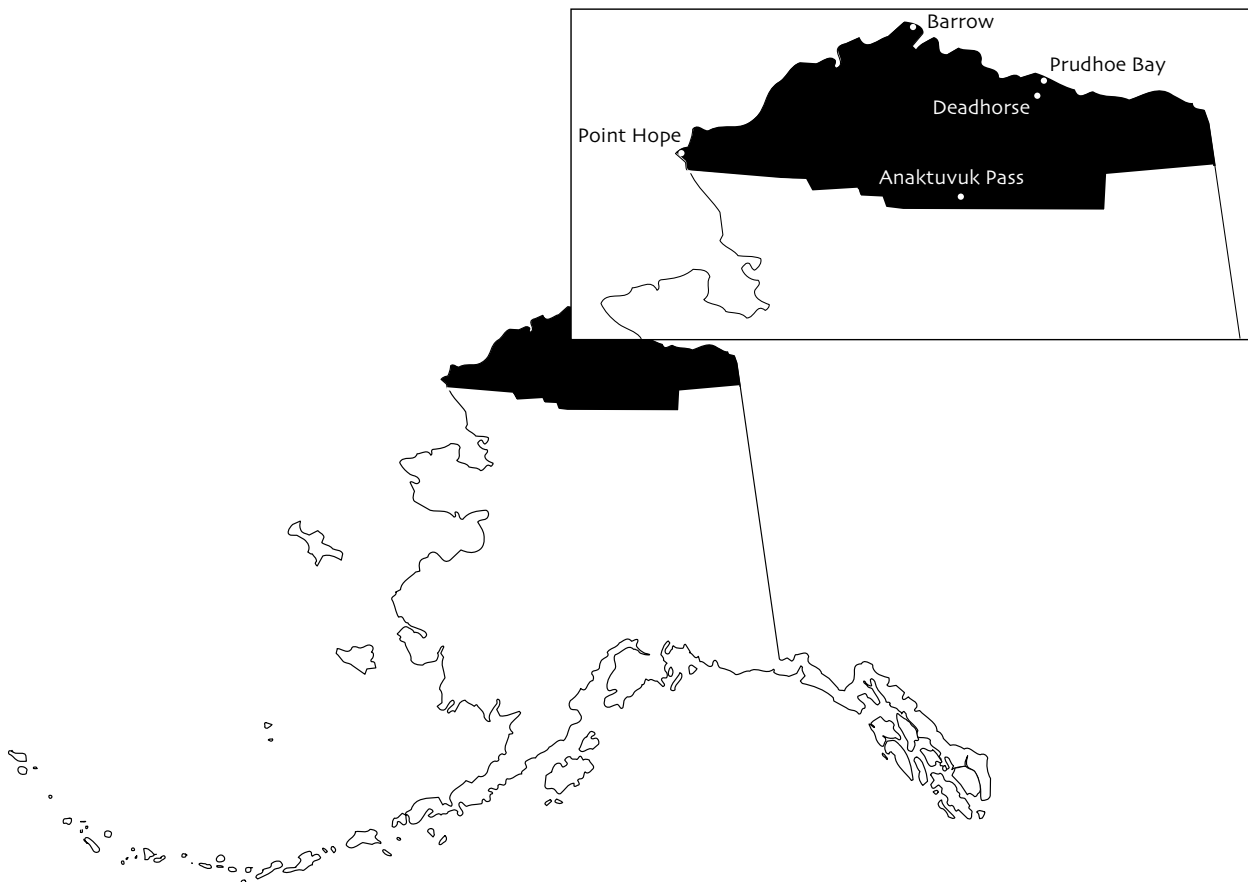
Location: Kodiak Island Borough

Implement a program to stock Kodiak Island streams with salmon to support and encourage sport fishing opportunities.

C. ADDITIONAL PROPOSED PROJECTS

- Preserve and enhance the Baranov Museum
- Continue production of the “Cry of the Wild Ram” historic drama and promote it aggressively to appropriate markets
- Develop the Ayakulik River as a prime recreation and sportfishing destination
- Construct a 2,500 foot airstrip for access to the proposed Ayakulik River sportfishing and recreation resort
- Develop boat ramps at Pasagshak, Monashka and Chiniak bays to include appropriate parking lots, restrooms and waste disposal facilities
- Develop a publicly owned and operated terminal facility at the Kodiak’s state-operated airport
- Develop or expand an existing urban trail system in the city of Kodiak
- Establish a World War II interpretive center at Fort Abercrombie Bunker
- Develop a public marina at Ayakulik Bay
- Develop a multi-purpose convention center facility for Kodiak

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



North Slope Borough

A joint project of the
Arctic Development Council
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

NORTH SLOPE BOROUGH

Sources: *North Slope Tourism Plan*, Arctic Development Council, Inc., July, 1996; *Tourism Potential for the North Slope Borough Villages*, North Slope Borough/Arctic Development Council, December, 1993; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; *Rural Alaska Community Visitor Profiles*, Rural Tourism Center, June, 1996; *Rural Alaska Tourism Assessment*, Community Enterprise Development Corporation, June, 1991; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Barrow, Alaska, July, 1996

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

The North Slope Borough encompasses a 90,000 square mile area in northernmost Alaska. It extends 650 miles from Point Hope on the Chuckchi Sea eastward to the Canadian Border, and 225 miles north from its southern boundary to Barrow, the farthest north community in North America. The borough has three distinct regions: the Coastal Plain with its treeless lowland tundra dotted with marshes, lakes, and rivers; the foothills of the Brooks Range with ridges and plateaus varying from 300 to 3,000 feet; and the rugged Brooks Range with its tallest peak at 9,050 feet separating the Arctic and Interior drainage systems.

This region is home to the vast oil reserves of Prudhoe Bay that fuel Alaska's economy. Its tundra and adjacent ocean also host an abundance of birds, mammals and vegetation which support the subsistence lifestyle of many of the region's 9,200 residents. Barrow, with a population of 4,200, is the region's seat of government and the commercial and service center for the other seven villages in the borough.

ACCESS

Scheduled and charter air service from either Barrow, Kotzebue or Fairbanks are available to every village in the region, as well as daily jet service to Barrow, Deadhorse and Prudhoe Bay. Although most villages are located on the coast or along rivers, these water routes are not widely used. The unpaved Dalton Highway traverses the region, paralleling the Trans-Alaska Pipeline from Fairbanks to Prudhoe Bay; however, there are no roads connecting any of the borough's communities.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

Among the primary tourism attributes and assets of the North Slope Borough region are its exotic location, the northern lights, the dramatic contrast of a modern petroleum industry side-by-side with the Arctic wilderness, abundant wildlife, unique scenery, national parks and wildlife refuges, and the distinct Inupiat Eskimo culture. Some specific examples include.

LOCATION

- Northernmost city in North America (the Top of the World)
- Arctic Ocean
- Arctic Circle
- Northern Lights
- Prudhoe Bay oil fields

NATIONAL PARKS AND REFUGES

- Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
- Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
- Brooks Range

WILDLIFE

- Birding
- Caribou
- Fish
- Whales

CULTURE AND HERITAGE

- Simon Paneak Memorial Museum in Anaktuvuk Pass
- Traditional arts and crafts
- Archaeological sites
- Cultural presentations
- Whaling history
- Local events

ADVENTURE

- Camping
- River trips

Most North Slope communities have hotel or lodge accommodations for guests, cafe or restaurant facilities, and local guide services. Not surprisingly, these are most plentiful and consistent with customary standards in Barrow. In general, the region's service business capacity is adequate to support some increase in local visitation, but is not positioned to accommodate large increases.

CURRENT VISITATION TO REGION

Currently, there are three primary motivators for pleasure visitation to the North Slope area: its unique location at the "top of the world," the experience of crossing the Arctic Circle, and the special qualities of its public lands. The two primary types of visitors currently motivated to visit the North Slope region are adventure travel and tour package visitors.

Adventure travelers come to the region seeking a variety of wilderness experiences including wilderness camping, river float trips, wildlife viewing, and sportfishing and/or hunting. Often the North Slope is a primary destination for this type of visitor; meaning they come to Alaska with the specific intent of visiting the region. The vast majority of these visitors come to the region via Fairbanks and generally travel to the Brooks Range, Gates of the Arctic National Park or the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge.

Packaged tour visitors commonly include the North Slope as an add-on to their primary tour itinerary (i.e., an Alaska cruise, highway RV trip, or specialty group tour). Tour visitors

travel to the region to experience its unique geographical and climatic features, to learn first-hand about Native history and culture, to view wildlife and participate in other soft adventure activities. The vast majority of these visitors purchase a "Top of the World" tour to Barrow, an oil field tour to Prudhoe Bay, or a village tour to Anaktuvuk Pass.

Any attempt to quantify types of visitation to the North Slope region is made difficult given the lack of research data currently available. The most current visitation data available is the 1993 Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (AVSP) data which aggregates the North Slope Borough with all of the Interior/North region (which includes Fairbanks). This makes it almost impossible to glean any discrete information about visitation to the Borough. Additionally, sample size issues with the AVSP cause information concerning Barrow visitation to be mostly unreliable. However, local sources estimate that approximately 20,000 - 25,000 visitors travel to the region annually and the vast majority are package tour visitors.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

According to the North Slope Tourism Plan, July 1996, and the Tourism Potential for the North Slope Borough Villages, December 1993, the greatest potential for tourism development within the North Slope Region is within the cultural heritage tourism, wilderness adventure travel, and ecotourism sectors.

The villages of the North Slope are largely populated by Inupiat Eskimos. By cultivating the unique historical and cultural qualities of these Native people there is significant potential for the communities of the northern Arctic as destinations for cultural heritage tourism. Access to historical sites and archeological digs, cultural presentations, opportunities to meet with area residents or to purchase art and crafts from the artist are attractive options to the heritage traveler and are important components of a comprehensive Native culture tour.

The proximity of the Brooks Range to the Arctic Ocean creates a combination of landscapes and habitats unique in North America. The area has exceptional wildlife and wilderness that make it an attractive destination for the adventure travel market. The Arctic National Wildlife Refuge hosts a network of river corridors that can accommodate rafting and fishing. The rich diversity of Arctic and subarctic wildlife include 140 species of birds, caribou, bears, wolves, fish and a variety of small mammals. For this active, adventure travel market, wilderness adventure programs are possible year-round. Depending on the season, tours may include guided backpack tours, raft expeditions and fishing trips, winter recreation activities, caribou and other northern climate wildlife, as well as northern lights viewing.

Ecotourism features low impact activities, environmental and cultural appreciation and sensitivity. It often focuses on the educational aspect of an experience and relies heavily on the responsible use of the natural resources in the area. In many cases, ecotourism offers a combination of adventure, cultural and natural history features. Ecotourism appeals to a growing market in the US and Europe. Since international ecotourists come primarily from heavily industrialized countries to visit destinations that offer unique, natural environments, the remote location and lack of industrialization on the North Slope should be an asset for cultivating the ecotourism market.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Tourism development on the North Slope has many challenges. Some attributes of the area which can attract visitors can also serve to keep them away; the extreme climate and the distant location, for example. The distance from major tourism corridors is a particular problem because of the additional expense and time required to reach and travel within the region.

In general, the North Slope has an underdeveloped attraction and services base - not enough established activities and attractions, outside of Barrow, for visitors once they decide to visit the region and not enough services designed to meet specific visitor needs. A related problem is the lack of a local workforce trained in hospitality industry skills. The region's low unemployment rate and the high wages offered by local government and industry also tend to make the largely seasonal tourism industry jobs uncompetitive.

At this time, the visitor market offers a limited number of potential travelers to the North Slope Borough. To some extent, this can be attributed to the fact that, for a variety of reasons, many travelers are simply not attracted to the types of experiences available on the North Slope. On the other hand, there is a significant market for what the region offers once the basic infrastructure and services are in place to insure a quality experience. To effectively reach this market, the region also needs to develop the marketing expertise and implement an organized, focused effort to identify and attract these potential visitors.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

While there are no organizations within the region focusing exclusively on tourism development or promotion, both the Arctic Development Council, the Alaska Regional Development Organization for the borough, and the North Slope Borough have included tourism development and/or promotion as a component of their overall development efforts. In addition, a key component of the newly completed North Slope Tourism Plan is the establishment of a North Slope Tourism Council to manage and direct the development and expansion of the North Slope tourism industry.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

1. DEVELOPMENT OF BARROW CULTURAL CENTER AND MUSEUM

LOCATION: Barrow

Description: This facility is being developed as a center for the preservation and practice of Inupiat culture, a venue for education in the folkways of the Inupiat people, and as a drawing card for visitors to the North Slope. Its offices will house the North Slope Borough's Inupiat Native language and history departments. The museum will be managed by an administrative director and staff; salaried and volunteer positions will be filled from the community at large.

The development of this center has been approved with concept and design phases funded by the State of Alaska. The North Slope Borough Assembly will fund the continuation of the project. This project is supported by the community, will be appreciated by the visitor and will benefit the Inupiat people. Proponents include Jana Harcharek, Director of Communications, Ukpeagvik Inupiat Corporation.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC FACILITIES ON DALTON HIGHWAY

LOCATION: Dalton Highway Corridor

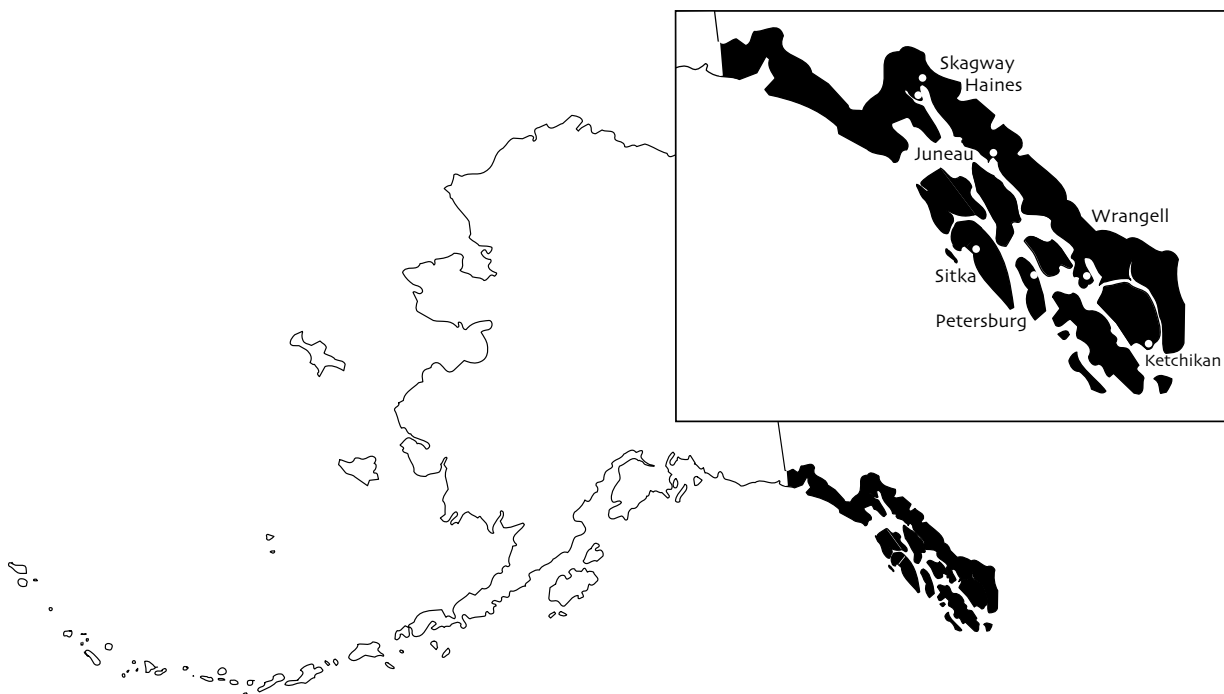
Description: Basic traveler services are currently not available on the Dalton Highway. Emergency services are provided through the generosity of Alyeska Pipeline Company. Public facilities are required if the Dalton Highway is to be promoted as a tourism destination and experience. There could be an opportunity for private enterprise to provide traveler services; the North Slope Borough, village councils could endeavor to provide visitor services (fuel, accommodations, dining). Without basic services visitors now traveling the highway can harm the environment. For development to occur, access needs to be granted to potential development sites by those managing the land. (North Slope Borough, State of Alaska, Alyeska Pipeline Company, etc.) Parties affected by development could be village residents along the highway corridor and environmental agencies. The North Slope Borough and State Department of Transportation have indicated a willingness to participate. Village councils potentially impacted by development would need to be involved in the planning process. Funding would need to be partnered through the State, Borough and private enterprise, depending on the specific project. Proponents include the North Slope Borough and the Arctic Development Council.

3. DEVELOPMENT OF PUBLIC FACILITIES IN ANAKTUVUK PASS

LOCATION: Anaktuvuk Pass

Description: Anaktuvuk Pass is currently involved in tourism with individuals and small groups visiting the community. To accommodate larger numbers of visitors, additional public facilities and visitor services (accommodations, dining, restrooms) are needed. The village has been in the planning stage of constructing a Bed & Breakfast and/or a lodge but has not decided how to proceed. Employing locals to staff these facilities is viewed as a primary reason to build them. At this point a decision needs to be made as to what facility will best meet the village's needs. The project has been presented to the North Slope Borough's mini-grant program and to a commercial lending institution. Mini-grant dollars have been set aside until the resolution of the project occurs. Then, along with private donors, the North Slope Borough mini-grant will fund the project. The State funded the planning of the facility. Proponents include the North Slope Borough.

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Southeast

A joint project of the
Southeast Conference
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

SOUTHEAST ALASKA

Sources: *Regional Development Strategy for Southeast Alaska*, Southeast Conference, June, 1996; *Southeast Alaska Visitor Profiles*, Southeast Alaska Tourism Council, October, 1994; *Wrangell Year-Round Tourism Plan*; City of Wrangell, June, 1993; *Ketchikan Visitor Study*, Ketchikan Visitors Bureau, November, 1991; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; *Rural Alaska Tourism Assessment*, Community Enterprise Development Corporation, June, 1991; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Juneau, Alaska, August, 1996

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

Commonly called Alaska's "panhandle," Southeast consists of a 550 mile strip of mountainous, glaciated mainland and the densely-forested islands of the Alexander Archipelago. Much of Southeast's 48,000 square miles of land and enclosed waterways is included in the Tongass National Forest. The region enjoys a mild, maritime climate of moderate winters and comfortable summers with generous precipitation throughout the year. About 40% of the region's 75,000 residents live in Juneau, Alaska's capital city. Another 45% live in other urban areas in the region and the remainder in rural settings.

The region is rich in natural resources including minerals, spruce and hemlock forests, and fish. Its scenic beauty and diverse recreational and cultural attractions make it a popular visitor destination.

ACCESS

Topography dictates that few Southeast communities are accessible by direct land routes. Thus travel to and within the region is achieved by a variety of transportation modes.

By water - Alaska Marine Highway System service, with greater frequency in the summer months, and privately-operated ferry service, water taxis, charter boats and cruiseships.

By air - Air service into the region and between communities ranges from jet service once to several times a day and scheduled and charter air taxi service.

By land - In southern Southeast, the border community of Hyder is accessed by the Cassiar Highway from British Columbia. In northern Southeast, there is highway access to and from Haines via the Alaska Highway and to and from Skagway via the Klondike Highway.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

Southeast Alaska enjoys a rich variety of natural tourism attributes and assets. They include the scenery; geographical features including glaciers, old growth rainforests, mountains and meadows; unique communities and villages; cultural heritage including Native, Russian and Norwegian; Gold Rush history; wildlife including birds, fish, and marine and land mammals; and national parks and monuments.

A sampling of the region’s tourism assets and attributes includes:

WILDLIFE VIEWING

- brown and black bear
- humpback and orca whales
- seals, sea lions and otter
- moose and mountain goats
- bald eagles and oyster catchers
- blacktail deer and elk

HISTORY AND CULTURAL

- Gold Rush history
- Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian history and culture
- Saxman Native Village
- Totem Heritage Center
- Sitka’s New Archangel Russian Dancers
- Norwegian heritage
- Wrangell’s petroglyphs

- Alaska’s capital city
- Alaska State Museum Festivals
- Haines’ Eagle Festival
- Petersburg’s Little Norway

FESTIVALS

- Ketchikan’s Mayfest
- Wrangell’s Tent City Days
- Sportfishing derbies

NATIONAL PARKS AND MONUMENTS

- Glacier Bay National Park and Preserve
- Admiralty Island National Monument
- Gold Rush National Historical Park
- Misty Fjords National Monument

CURRENT VISITATION TO REGION

The majority of visitors to southeast Alaska, 53% according to the Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (AVSP) data for 1993 arrive by cruiseship or smaller touring vessels. While some communities welcome their first cruise/tour passengers in late April, the majority of visitors arrive between mid-May and mid-September. Many of these passengers are traveling on 7-day round-trip cruises out of Vancouver and will visit 4 or 5 southeast Alaska ports and attractions. Others will begin their cruise in Vancouver or San Francisco and continue across the Gulf of Alaska after making an average of three stops in Southeast. Larger cruise ships generally visit Ketchikan, Juneau, Skagway, Glacier Bay and Sitka.

Smaller tour vessels tend to also visit the smaller ports including Petersburg and Wrangell and may include more visits to natural attractions such as scenic fjords and allow more time for wildlife observation and individualized activities in their itineraries.

Southeast Alaska is home to a number of adventure and ecotourism programs. Enjoyed by both independent travelers and those traveling with a guided tour group, programs may last for an afternoon or for 10 to 12 days. Kayaking, rafting, hiking and camping are generally major components of these experiences. Flightseeing (both fixed wing and helicopter) may be incorporated as well, either as transportation to a remote site or as a local tour.

Whereas cruiseship visitors are in port for several hours or a full day, independent travelers (28% of summer visitors) have the option to stay overnight in Southeast's many communities. Overnight accommodations range from hotels and motels to B & Bs, lodges, youth hostels, campgrounds and RV parks. Visitors can choose from a variety of tour options including but not limited to city sightseeing, local flightseeing, Native dance and theatrical performances, canoeing, rafting, hiking, and visiting museums and other local history attractions. Dining options range from fast food to outdoor salmon bakes to gourmet. In addition to shopping at gift shops and galleries, many visitors make purchases at local grocery, clothing, sporting goods, and drug stores.

Visitors also come to southeast Alaska for prime sportfishing opportunities. Sportfishing is available throughout the region as an independent or an organized activity lasting from a few hours to several days, using a chartered boat or lodge as home base. Sportfishing is primarily in saltwater and features the five species of salmon, halibut and Dolly Varden. Guided hunting, primarily for bear, deer and goats, attracts visitors as well.

Vacation/pleasure visitors make up 92% of Southeast's summer visitor; 3% arrive to visit friends and relatives. Business only travelers make up 2%, with the remaining 3% mixing business and pleasure. While 53% of summer visitors arrive in the state by cruiseship, 27% fly in, 14% drive and 5% arrive by ferry.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Interest in ecotourism, educational and adventure tourism continues to grow. Offering opportunities to meet the needs and interests of these niche markets are areas with considerable potential for Southeast tourism development. With a focus on what makes them unique, small communities in this diverse region could develop the infrastructure (accommodations, attractions and activities) to meet the needs of small, special interest groups and individuals.

Another area for development is in the improvement of existing infrastructure. RV campground capacity could be increased in select communities. Access to both large and small communities could be improved whether by improving existing ferry service, encouraging the development of more private ferry services or by constructing roads to eliminate the need for ferry service and shorten the travel time in certain areas.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Challenges to tourism development occurs in several areas. Among them are access, capacity and tour traffic patterns.

The frequency and cost of travel to some Southeast communities can be an obstacle to tourism development. Ferry service may be weekly. Air taxi service may be costly and only available on a charter basis. The fact that only one air carrier offers year-round jet service into Southeast works against the advantages of competitive fares. Unpredictable weather can also challenge the best laid plans of any tour operator.

Ferry capacity and scheduling continue to frustrate established tour operators who have expressed interest in spending more time in southeast Alaska with their tour groups. Often ferries cannot offer enough cabins to accommodate tour groups and ferry schedules are not made available early enough to include itineraries in tour brochures.

Given the mature nature of much of the Southeast tour product, tour traffic patterns are well established for the majority of visitor segments. This can challenge the development or introduction of new tour product for this market.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

Tourism development and promotion organizations operate throughout southeast Alaska. Most communities have a chamber of commerce and/or a convention and visitors bureau. Several smaller committees currently involved with tourism or in the process of organizing local efforts have visitor associations (Yakutat, Gustavus, Pelican). The Southeast Alaska Tourism Council (SATC) represents all of Southeast and focuses on attracting the independent traveler. One of the newest organizations is the Southeast Alaska Native Tourism Alliance (SANTA) which works with Native communities interested in developing tourism programs.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

1. A ROAD BETWEEN SITKA AND BARANOF WARM SPRINGS

LOCATION: Baranof Island

Description: A road from Sitka to Baranof Warm Springs with a BWS ferry terminal would increase the capacity and frequency of ferry service throughout the Southeast region and would eliminate 17 hours of ferry travel into and out of Sitka and promote better utilization of Marine Highway System vessels. Access to Sitka would be improved for residents and visitors, for recreation, commerce and health services. Challenges include funding for construction and maintenance and would require statewide and complete regional support. Affected parties include all southeast Alaska communities, the Department of Transportation, U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service and the tourism industry. Project partners could include the State of Alaska, business and commercial interests throughout Southeast. Funding could come from state and federal sources including Department of Transportation highway and ferry system, federal highway funds, U.S. Forest Service, tolls and commercial developers.

2. JUNEAU ACCESS

LOCATION: Northern Southeast Alaska

Description: Construct a road link between Juneau and Skagway. This would increase capacity of the Alaska Marine Highway System in Southeast, have implications for the visitor industry and create numerous job opportunities. Challenges are financial, environmental, political and technical. The project

could be opposed by “no-growth” advocates and some environmental groups but supported by most southeast and southcentral Alaska residents and our Canadian neighbors. Some funding could come from Department of Transportation, federal highway funds, tolls and other creative financing mechanisms.

3. WRANGELL MUSEUM

LOCATION: Wrangell

Description: Build a new museum in Wrangell in conjunction with the US Forest Service for interpretative services and Native cultural heritage plans. The museum would house existing collections and those anticipated to be secured under repatriation, including the possible return of Chief Shakes’ canoe from the Smithsonian. Land has been obtained and a conceptual design completed for this facility. Funding is needed and potential sources include US Forest Service economic relief monies, Native corporations, Indian Community Development Block Grant, Alaska Historical Society, State Museum or legislative appropriations. Both visitors and residents would benefit.

4. ASSURE SOUTHEAST HAS COMPETITIVE MAJOR AIR CARRIER SERVICE

LOCATION: Southeast Regionwide

Description: Southeast Alaska loses discretionary travelers to other cities with competitive air rates. Juneau rates, in particular, need to be competitive with other Alaska destinations. Communities and civic organizations need to encourage Alaska Airlines to keep rates competitive and seek additional, reliable air carriers to enter the market. Residents and visitors, local air taxi services, Juneau CVB, Juneau Economic Development Council, Southeast Conference and the entire business community could benefit from and support the project. Funding to market this concept to the major air carriers could come through the Southeast Conference, Senator Stevens, and the Alaska Committee.

5. KEEP MALASPINA ON-LINE ALONG WITH THE NEW FERRY

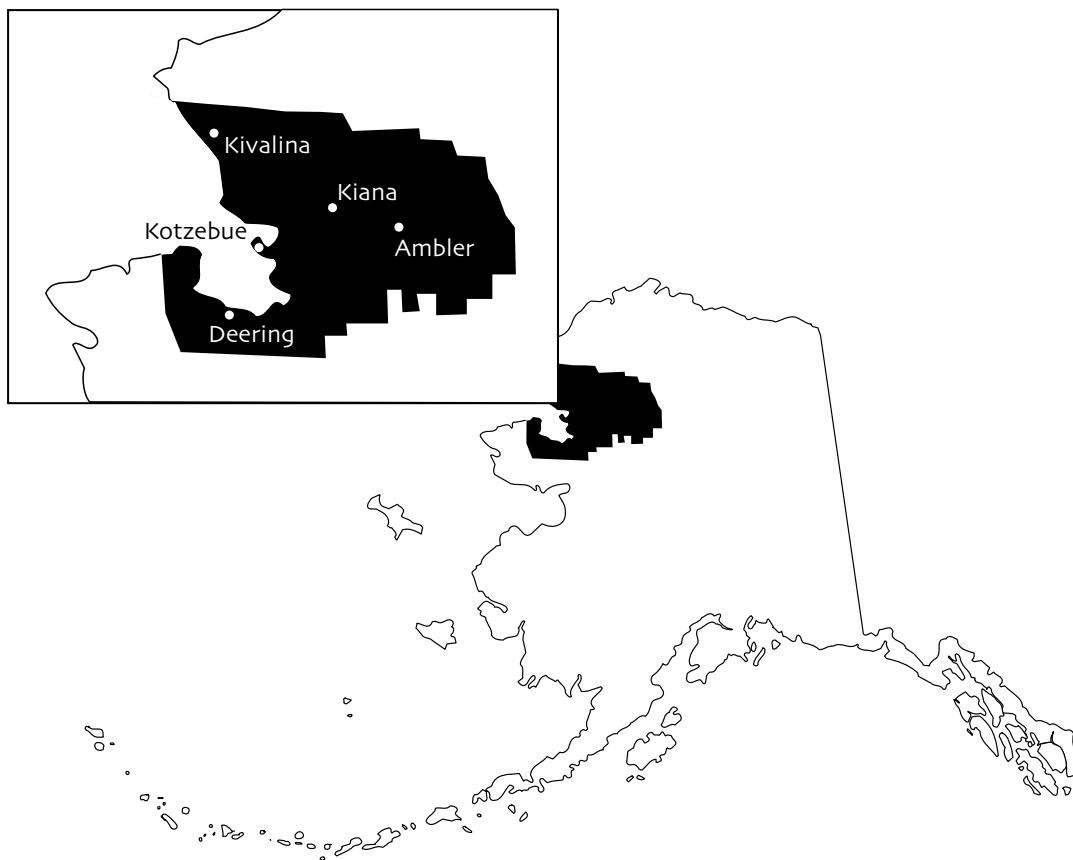
LOCATION: Ferry system

Description: Keeping the Malaspina in service, along with the entrance of the new ocean-class vessel (the Kennicott) in 1998, presents an opportunity for enhanced ferry service for independent travelers, increased commerce between communities, more capacity and regional traffic. Funding to support this level of service and for the necessary education of Alaska residents, especially in the railbelt, to the overall importance of the project are challenges. Southeast Conference could assist in these efforts.

C. ADDITIONAL PROPOSED PROJECTS

- Expand Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center and improve Steep Creek trail to include viewing platforms
- Develop bear and glacier viewing opportunities at Hyder
- Develop Prince of Wales independent traveler attractions and services including alternative ferry between Prince of Wales and Petersburg - Wrangell
- Develop and promote Wrangell natural attractions, activities and festivals including garnet festival, shorebird migration
- Complete Sitka Community House development plan
- Pursue LUD II soft adventure tourism development opportunities throughout region
- Build additional Juneau and Ketchikan RV parks and facilities
- Establish a plan to identify, protect and promote the region's historic properties and attractions including Metlakatla's "Old Council Chambers"
- Develop Bradfield road connection from Wrangell to the Cassiar Highway
- Implement recommendations of National Park Service's Sitka "Gateway City" plan
- Improve access and facilities at Eagle Beach State Recreation area near Juneau
- Enhance Benjamin Island sea lion observation opportunities
- Enhance safety and all-weather capability of 135 (commuter class) regional air carriers
- Secure borough easement and move to implement the Ward Creek trail project (Ketchikan)
- Develop high speed, passenger-only, seasonal ferry service between Sitka and Juneau as a private/public joint venture
- Expand and improve the State dock at Gustavus
- Support regional mass casualty training for air and marine incidents
- Develop "Winter Reality" tours to promote "off season" industry growth
- Implement the Sitka Harbor Drive project (seawalk, lightering facility and signage)
- Implement infrastructure recommendations in Juneau's Tourism Working Group (TWG) plan
- Package and export Juneau's Tourism Working Group process to other interested communities
- Provide increased ferry service to Hyder
- Complete development of and promote the Wrangell golf course
- Support completion of the Walden Point Road and ferry service project linking Metlakatla and Ketchikan

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Northwest Arctic Borough

A joint project of
Northwest Arctic Borough Economic Development Commission
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

NORTHWEST ARCTIC BOROUGH

Sources: *Northwest Arctic Borough Overall Economic Development Plan (OEDP)*, Northwest Arctic Borough Economic Development Commission, 1996; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; *Rural Alaska Community Visitor Profiles*, Rural Tourism Center, June, 1996; *Rural Alaska Tourism Assessment*, Community Enterprise Development Corporation, June, 1991; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Kotzebue, Alaska, August, 1996.

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

The Northwest Arctic Borough encompasses approximately 39,000 square miles on the south slope of the Brooks Range. Roughly the size of Indiana, the borough is home to about 6,700 residents, over 90% of whom are Inupiaq Eskimos living in eleven communities. Kotzebue, with 3,000 residents is the largest community and the center of government and commerce for the borough. The region's terrain is dramatic with scenic rivers and mountains, giant sand dunes, tundra and boreal forests. Local economies are still closely tied to subsistence activities. The development of rich mineral deposits, a commercial fishery and tourism-related activities, however, are all contributing to a growing cash economy.

ACCESS

Primary visitor access to Kotzebue is by daily, commercial jet service from Anchorage, with some flights routed through Nome. Smaller communities in the region are reached by scheduled and charter air taxi services based in Kotzebue, Ambler and Kiana. Freight is delivered by air cargo or barge service through Kotzebue Sound and beyond via the region's navigable river system. There is no road access between communities. During the summer, rivers often serve as highways and in the winter villagers travel by snow machine and all-terrain vehicles, using well-established trails.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

Primary tourism assets of the Northwest Arctic Borough include its national parklands, Native culture and adventure and ecotourism opportunities, as well as its "north of the Arctic Circle" allure.

More than half of all the land within the region is federally owned and protected as parks, preserves and wildlife refuges including: Noatak National Preserve, Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Kobuk Valley National Park, and the Selawik National Wildlife Refuge. Additionally, the Bering Land Bridge National Preserve and the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve are accessible from communities within the borough. These national parklands offer visitors unparalleled opportunities for wildlife viewing, kayaking and rafting, sportfishing and camping and feature a wide variety of unique archaeological sites.

Visitors to the region also have a wealth of Native cultural experiences from which to choose, including tour programs to small, traditional villages, the NANA Museum of the Arctic, Eskimo cultural performances, storytelling and opportunities to watch the creation of local arts and crafts.

CURRENT VISITATION TO THE REGION

Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (AVSP) data is available only for the community of Kotzebue. However, given that the majority of visitors to region must enter or exit from Kotzebue, these numbers are a good measure of visitation to the region as a whole. According to the latest available AVSP data, 19,000 visitors traveled to Kotzebue during the summer of 1993. Vacation/pleasure was the primary travel purpose for 17,700 of these visitors, while 1,300 traveled for business/pleasure. More than half, 54%, of Kotzebue visitors traveled on package tours; while 15% were inde-package visitors and 32% were independent visitors.

The majority of visitors to the region purchase the Kotzebue tour package from Tour Arctic. The tour includes a general community overview, a visit to the Kotzebue Culture Camp and a visit to the NANA Museum of the Arctic, which features wildlife displays and cultural presentations. Several hundred of these visitors also purchase a day trip to the village of Kiana which affords general flightseeing opportunities.

The second largest visitor market to the region is the ecotourism/adventure traveler who engages in river rafting, kayaking, camping, birdwatching or wildlife viewing.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The areas of greatest potential for tourism development in the Northwest Arctic Borough lie in finding ways to take advantage of the assets which currently are attracting visitors. In effect, to do more with what they have.

This involves developing more activities for their Kotzebue visitors both within that community and in nearby villages. It includes developing more opportunities to purchase authentic arts and crafts, more quality opportunities for quality village experiences, and more opportunities to access and experience national parklands.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Among the greatest inhibitors to tourism development for this region is the problem of access. This includes the challenge of motivating greater numbers of visitors to spend the time and dollars required to travel to the area, as well as issues related to increasing access to national park lands in the region.

Challenges in developing more tourism opportunities in smaller, Native villages include the lack of trained human resources; the overall inadequacy of visitor facilities and infrastructure; and, in some villages, remaining concerns about conflict between increased visitation and traditional lifestyles.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

Currently, there is no organization in the region that focus solely on tourism development or promotion. The majority of tour promotions for the area are conducted by NANA, the regional for-profit Native corporation, which owns and operates Tour Arctic. The Northwest Arctic Borough also include tourism infrastructure development as a component of its Overall Economic Development Plan. In addition, the Northwest Arctic Borough Economic Development Commission, the designated Alaska Regional Development Organization for the area, includes tourism development as an element of its overall economic development program.

As shown below, borough residents identified the formation of a regional tourism council as the highest priority tourism development project.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

1. FORM A REGIONAL TOURISM COUNCIL

Location: Northwest Arctic Borough

Description: With the Northwest Arctic Borough Economic Development Commission playing a lead role, proceed to examine other regional tourism development organizations for a model compatible with local needs. Involve both the public and private sectors in a process to identify the organization's mission and goals as well as a budget and management plan.

2. REHABILITATE THE OLD KIANA SCHOOL BUILDING

Location: Kiana

Description: Rehabilitate the old school building and use it as a museum and visitor information center. It would be a place to display historic photos and other culturally significant items. Local residents could work in the center and have direct contact with visitors providing a rich experience for both. Various agencies would have to be consulted to secure the building and find funds. Staff would have to be trained. Parties involved would be the National Park Service, Northwest Arctic Borough, Kiana Traditional Council, and city council. Funding sources could consist of National Park Service, University of Alaska and legislative appropriations. Other communities may be a source of information on how to structure this project.

3. ESTABLISH A MULTI-AGENCY INFORMATION CENTER

Location: Kotzebue

Description: Establish a multi-agency information center in Kotzebue for greater cost effectiveness, to promote increased cooperation among agencies and to better serve the visiting public.

4. **IMPROVE ACCESS TO CONSERVATION SYSTEM UNITS**

Location: Northwest Arctic Borough

Description: This project was proposed relative to public interest lands throughout the region, but much of the discussion centered on the need for visitor facilities and improved access to the Great Kobuk Sand Dunes which have the capacity to become a major visitor attraction. Immediately needed are trail head posting and trail improvements, a campground, and water and waste disposal facilities. Partners in this effort would include the National Park Service, NANA, the village of Kiana and the Northwest Arctic Borough.

5. **EDUCATE RESIDENTS REGARDING THE IMPACTS AND BENEFITS OF TOURISM DEVELOPMENT**

Location: Northwest Arctic Borough

Description: A significant obstacle to the growth of tourism in the region is the lack of a general understanding of the economic benefits and development opportunities the industry can bring. There is a need for an ongoing effort to educate residents regarding both the benefits and potential costs associated with this industry so informed decisions can be made regarding the types and level of development that is desirable in the region. Partners in this effort could include the Northwest Arctic Borough, NANA, the Alaska Division of Tourism, the Rural Tourism Center, the University of Alaska, and villages organizations throughout the region.

6. **CONSTRUCT A ROAD BETWEEN BORNITE AND KOBUK**

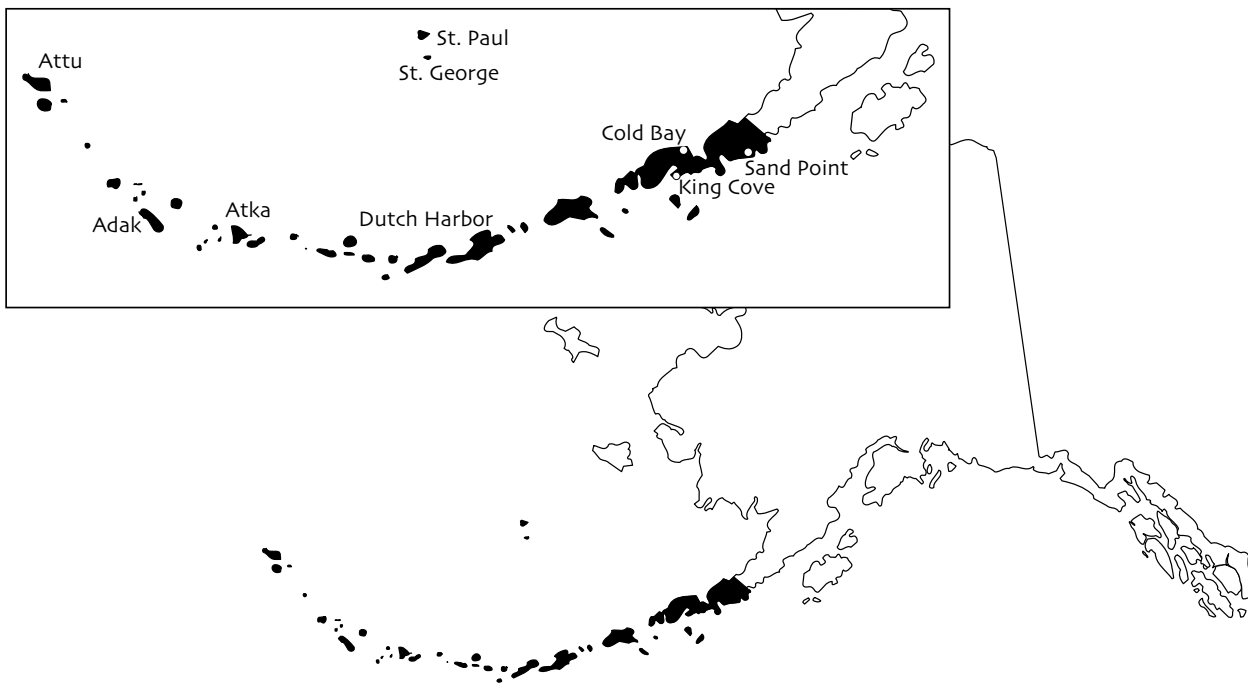
Location: Kobuk

Description: The old mine site at Bornite is believed to have excellent potential as an ecotourism camp locale. Some infrastructure is already in place and a tent or cabin camp is being designed that would support cultural and wildlife-oriented activities. A major inhibitor to development of this site is the condition of the 16-mile road from Kobuk to the Dahl Creek Airstrip. To bring it up to acceptable standards, the road needs general upgrading and brushing, replacement of a bridge span and installation of a culvert near Dahl Creek. Partners in this effort should include NANA, the village of Kobuk, the Northwest Arctic Borough and possibly the villages of Shungnak and Ambler.

C. ADDITIONAL PROPOSED PROJECTS

- Develop greater regional access flexibility
- Identify regulatory barriers to the production and sale of traditional food products
- Designate a visitor industry contact in each community
- Provide language aid cards for non-English speaking visitors
- Encourage government use of private sector accommodations and services within the region
- Develop local trails for day program use
- Develop a bike path and walking trail in Kotzebue
- Offer entrepreneurial training and on-going support for small businesses
- Add to local lodging options; particularly those that encourage interaction between residents and visitors
- Improvements to the Deering Road
- Ambler/Jade Mountain road or trail
- Review conservation unit management plans for possible revisions
- Initiate a tourism development partnering relationship with Nome
- Work with Selawik for possible tourism development
- Work with Noatak for possible tourism development

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Aleutian and Pribilof Islands

A joint project of the
Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

ALEUTIAN AND PRIBILOF ISLANDS

Sources: *Unalaska/Port of Dutch Harbor Convention & Visitors Bureau, Planning Retreat*, November, 1994; *Hot Prospects: A Tourism Inventory & Assessment of Southwest Alaska*, SWAMC, October, 1991; *Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference, 1996 Overall Economic Development Program Report*, SWAMC, June, 1996; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; *Rural Alaska Tourism Assessment*, Community Enterprise Development Corporation, June, 1991; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Anchorage, Alaska, August, 1996.

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

The dramatic, westward sweep of the Aleutian Island Archipelago, extends 1,100 miles from the Alaska Peninsula to Attu Island. The area is characterized by steep, volcanic terrain and by the windswept beauty of its nearly treeless landscape. Its concentration of 46 active volcanoes is known as the Pacific Ocean's "Ring of Fire." The Aleutians mark the meeting place of the Bering Sea and the Pacific Ocean whose waters rank among the world's richest fishing grounds for all five species of salmon, as well as for halibut, crab and pollock. The region's largest community, Unalaska-Dutch Harbor, with a population of about 4,100, is the largest international fishing port in North America. Its modern industrial economy contrasts with the rich culture and history of the Alaska Native and Russian influences that shaped this region.

North of Unalaska, in the southern Bering Sea, lie St. George and St. Paul, the Pribilof Islands. With a combined population of about 1,000, the Pribilofs comprise the largest remaining Aleut community in the world. These remote islands are known worldwide for the astonishing variety of migratory birds and sea mammals which can be seen here.

In all, fourteen communities with a combined population of about 8,000 dot the islands. The commercial fishing industry is the mainstay of the region's economy and many communities combine the benefits of a cash economy with traditional subsistence activities.

ACCESS

Overall, the communities of the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands region are among the more challenging to access in all of Alaska. Anchorage is the principal air gateway to the region. Air service ranges from daily to Dutch Harbor, St. George and St. Paul to weekly for some other communities. Charter service, however, is available on a daily basis to all communities throughout the region.

Limited passenger ferry service is offered from Kodiak to Unalaska-Dutch Harbor in the spring, summer and fall. Marine barge and container services connect many communities to Anchorage and Seattle.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

The primary attractions in the region include its national parks, historic sites, wildlife refuges, world-class birding, active volcanoes, strong Native culture, World War II history, hot springs and a wide variety of recreational and soft adventure activities. Sportfishing and hunting are also featured activities throughout the region.

Without question, the greatest tourism assets of the Pribilof Islands are their world-class seabird and wildlife viewing opportunities. Visitors come from around the globe for the unique experiences available in the Pribilof Islands; including rare migratory seabird sightings, rookeries of nesting birds and huge colonies of northern fur seals. Cultural and heritage tourism opportunities in the Pribilofs feature Aleut and Russian influences, however, their full tourism potential has yet to be realized.

In addition to spectacular scenery and wildlife viewing opportunities, the Aleutian Islands offer a variety of soft adventure and ecotourism opportunities such as kayaking, hiking, boating and camping. Cultural and heritage tourism opportunities include Aleut and Russian culture, as well as several World War II historical sites.

CURRENT VISITATION TO THE REGION

According to Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (AVSP) data, the two primary visitor destinations within the region are Unalaska-Dutch Harbor and St. Paul Island. Currently, summer visitation to these communities is an estimated 3,000 to 5,000 each. Additionally, another 7,000 to 10,000 visitors come to the region during the non-summer months. Overall, approximately 13,000 visitors come to the Aleutians annually, while an estimated 10,000 come to the Pribilof Islands.

There are currently two dominant markets for visitation to the region - business and vacation/pleasure.

Business travelers represent the bulk of current visitors to the area. AVSP and local convention and visitors bureau research indicates that business visitors who come to the area frequently add packages and tours they didn't plan to include before they began their trips.

Visitors who arrive for vacation/pleasure purposes are traveling to the region's remote lodges, primarily for hunting and fishing, as well as for wildlife tours to the Pribilofs. In recent years, the area has seen modest growth in small cruise ship visitation from ships sailing across the Gulf of Alaska to the Bering Sea or on positioning cruises en route to the Far East.

In general, visitors to southwest Alaska tend to stay longer than visitors to other parts of the state, spending much of their time in wilderness locations at remote lodges and resorts. The primary activities visitors engage in while visiting southwest Alaska include wildlife viewing, freshwater fishing, photography, casual sightseeing, hiking and birdwatching.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The greatest potential for development in the Aleutian and Pribilof region lies in doing more of what is currently motivating visitors to the area. As discussed previously, the area currently attracts "niche" visitors who are looking for birding, wildlife, ecotourism and heritage tourism opportunities.

Communities within the region must continue to examine similar niche markets and develop special appeal products which are motivating enough to convince visitors to overlook the barriers of travel to the area. Such opportunities could include further development of World War II historical sites, as well as developing tour programs targeted to airline employees and frequent flyer travelers.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Of all the regions in Alaska, the Aleutian and Pribilof Islands area faces some of the greatest challenges to tourism development, including access, infrastructure and product issues. Its sheer size and remoteness make access its single biggest challenge. The cost of travel to the area, the significant amount of time required to reach the communities and the difficulty of traveling within the region all contribute to its development obstacles.

Aggravating the situation further is the lack of infrastructure within a majority of the communities. Beyond the two primary visitor destinations of Unalaska-Dutch Harbor and St. Paul, few communities have accommodations or services capable of handling more than a few visitors at a time.

Additionally, the current lack of a critical mass of visitor products including intra-region travel options precludes the region, rather than single communities, from becoming a major visitor destination. Until a wider variety of visitor products and services are developed, visitors will most likely continue to travel to one community rather than traveling on itineraries that include several communities within the region.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

There are several organizations within the region that engage in tourism marketing and infrastructure development. These include the Unalaska-Dutch Harbor Convention and Visitors Bureau and Alaska's Southwest, the tourism marketing committee of the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference. The Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference is the Alaska Regional Development Organization for the southwest Alaska. In addition, several Native organizations, particularly the village corporation for St. Paul Island, Tanadgusix Corporation, are actively involved in marketing their local areas to visitors.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

1. LONGER PORT CALLS BY MARINE HIGHWAY SYSTEM VESSELS

Location: Aleutian Island Port of Call Communities

Description: Encourage longer port visits, additional ports, and improved docking times; not “off” hours. The Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference, Aleutian Island Borough, Department of Transportation, local communities, US Fish & Wildlife Service, village and regional corporations, and the Aleutian Coalition could support this project. Funding could come from Department of Transportation and other partnering opportunities.

2. ENCOURAGE INTRA-REGION AIR TRANSPORTATION

Location: Throughout Aleutian and Pribilof Islands

Description: Encourage a dialogue between transportation and tourism entities, including the public and private sectors, to determine viable scenarios. Seed money will be required to pursue this project.

3. DEVELOP AIR-SEA PACKAGES FOR SOUTHWEST ALASKA

Location: Regionwide

Description: No project description was provided.

4. ESTABLISH A MUSEUM FOR THE ALEUTIANS

Location: Unalaska

Description: Create a facility for the storage and display of repatriated and newly acquired artifacts and historical objects. Include the capacity to create exhibits to travel to other communities in the region. This would help promote cultural awareness, provide local education and jobs. The project should involve the City of Unalaska, Native corporations, tribal councils, and schools. Funding could come from the Economic Development Administration, private foundations, rural development agencies, and museum grants.

5. ESTABLISH AN INTER-AGENCY VISITOR CENTER FOR THE ALEUTIANS

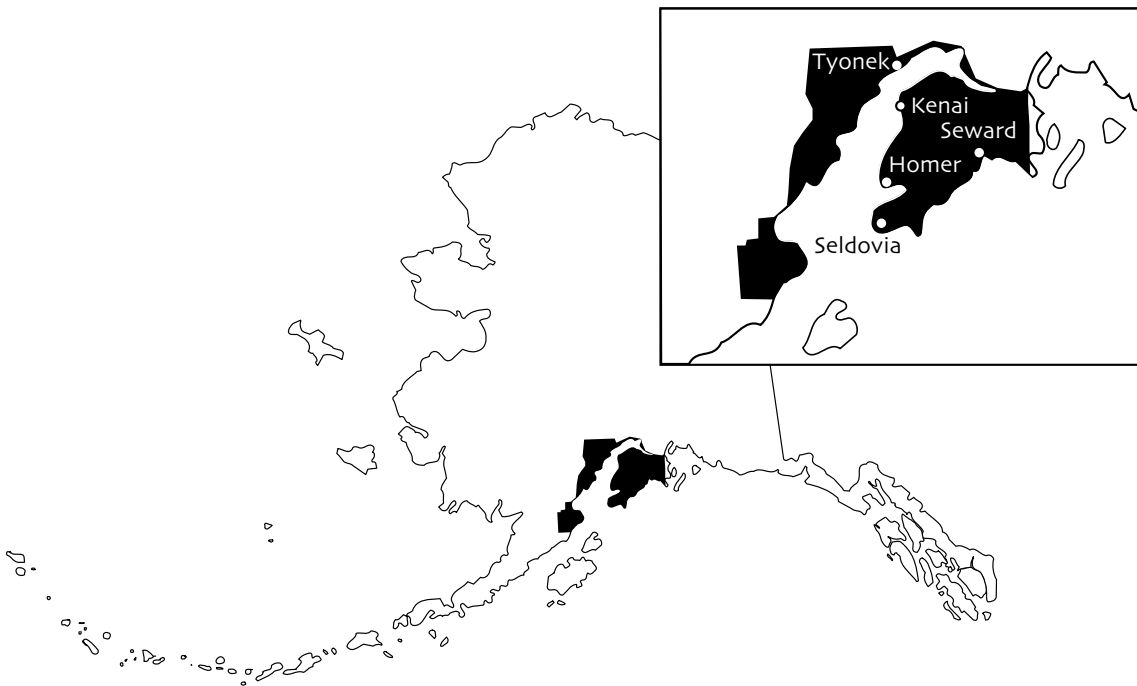
Location: Unalaska

Description: Establish an inter-agency visitor information center offering trip planning and interpretive materials regarding the history and geography, wildlife resources, people, and industrial development activities of the region. Users of this facility include tourists, fishermen and local residents. This facility could improve local visitor experiences and encourage increased patronage of Aleutian Island tourism businesses. Challenges could include achieving necessary inter-agency cooperation, securing operational funds, and the remoteness of the location. Partners would include local businesses, the Convention & Visitors Bureau, Native corporations, and state and federal agencies.

C. ADDITIONAL PROPOSED PROJECTS

- Create educational materials and programs supporting cultural resource preservation and protection
- Develop community-based trail systems; look at hut-to-hut systems as a model
- Develop a road between King Cove and Cold Bay
- Determine causes of high airfares into and within region
- Convert unused Cold Bay hatchery into a tourism-related facility

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Kenai Peninsula Borough

A joint project of the
Kenai Peninsula Borough Economic Development District
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

KENAI PENINSULA BOROUGH

Sources: *Overall Economic Development Program Update: 1995-1996*, Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District, Inc., June, 1995; *Kenai Peninsula Tourism Study*, Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District, Inc./Kenai Peninsula Borough, July, 1991; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; *Rural Alaska Community Visitor Profiles*, Rural Tourism Center, June, 1996; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Soldotna, Alaska, August, 1996.

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

The Kenai Peninsula Borough encompasses 25,600 square miles located directly south of Anchorage, Alaska's largest population center. The region is bordered on the south and east by the Gulf of Alaska and Prince William Sound. To the west are the Chigmit Mountains of the Alaska Range. The borough's 47,000 residents live in fourteen principal communities and in smaller settlements scattered along its highways.

The region is well-endowed with natural resources including seafood, forests, coal, oil and gas, and natural attractions that support recreation and tourism industry development. National parks, wildlife refuges and forests, along with over 700 registered historic and cultural sites make the peninsula a popular destination for both Alaskans and nonresident visitors.

ACCESS

The Kenai Peninsula is accessible by air, land and water. The state-maintained Seward, Sterling and Kenai Spur highways, along with connecting state and local roads, provide highway access to Resurrection Bay, the west coast of the Kenai Peninsula and the central peninsula. Access to the west side of Cook Inlet and the southern tip of the Kenai Peninsula Borough is limited to air and water. An ice road provides winter access to the Beluga area from Point McKenzie. Three public ports, four small boat harbors, twenty-three public airports and numerous private facilities provide daily air and water access to communities throughout the borough. Year-round rail service between Anchorage and Seward is provided by the Alaska Railroad. The port of Seward is the major Southcentral port of call for cruise ships and ferry service is available to Homer, Seldovia and Seward.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

The Kenai Peninsula is rich in recreational opportunities including sport fishing and hunting, wildlife viewing, canoeing and kayaking, camping and hiking. National parks and refuges offer a range of wildlife viewing and recreational opportunities. Cultural and heritage attractions include Gold Rush historic sites, Russian cultural sites and Native history and cultural sites.

A sampling of the region's tourism assets and attributes includes:

NATIONAL PARKS, REFUGES AND FORESTS

- Chugach National Forest
- Kenai Fjords National Park
- Kenai National Wildlife Refuge
- Lake Clark National Park and Preserve
- Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge

CULTURE AND HERITAGE SITES

- Hope - Gold Rush history
- Historic Kenai "old town"
- Russian churches and historic sites
- Native villages and historic sites

RECREATIONAL AREAS

- Swanson River canoe trail
- Resurrection Bay
- Resurrection Pass trail system
- Kachemak Bay
- State and federal camping areas
- Kenai River
- Turnagain Pass

WILDLIFE VIEWING OPPORTUNITIES

- Kenai Fjords
- Kachemak Bay
- Katmai flightseeing

WILDLIFE VARIETIES

- Moose
- Bear
- Wolves
- Sea Lions
- Seals
- Whales and other marine mammals

GLACIERS

- Portage Glacier
- Exit Glacier
- Harding Ice Field

SPORTFISHING

- Russian River
- Kenai River
- Homer Spit
- Anchor Point
- Deep Creek
- Resurrection Bay

SCENERY

- Volcanoes
- Kachemak Bay
- Resurrection Bay
- Turnagain Pass
- Portage Valley
- Kenai Fjords

CURRENT VISITATION TO REGION

The Kenai Peninsula has made visitor volume gains at a rate even greater than the strong statewide growth trends. Approximately 68% of all visitors to Alaska in 1993 visited the southcentral region and 43% of that number visited the Kenai Peninsula. Nonresident visitation to the Kenai Peninsula increased from 160,400 in 1989 to 244,800 in 1993; an increase of over 50% in four years.

Currently, Alaska residents represent the single largest visitor market to the Kenai Peninsula. The peninsula is effectively southcentral Alaska's playground, with residents visiting often and in large numbers. An estimated 203,119 Anchorage residents travel to the peninsula annually.

Non-resident visitors to the Kenai Peninsula are primarily independent visitors, traveling by auto and RV, and those who are visiting friends and relatives in Alaska. Currently, Seward and Cooper Landing are the only Kenai Peninsula communities that are destinations for package tour visitors.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The areas of greatest potential for tourism development on the Kenai Peninsula lie in finding ways to get current visitors to "stay longer and spend more" and to capture more of the package tour market. Currently, several peninsula communities are working on developing destination attractions which can go a long way to achieving this objective.

The Alaska Sealife Center, with a planned 1998 opening, is now under construction in Seward. The City of Kenai has taken the lead in developing a Challenger Learning Center. The southern peninsula is pursuing a North Pacific Volcano Learning Center and Homer is working with the federal government to develop an Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center. Taken individually these attractions represent modest opportunities for growth. However, collectively they represent a strong opportunity to both attract more visitors to the peninsula and entice existing markets to "stay longer and spend more."

Additionally, there is good potential in further development and improvement of trails and recreation sites, accommodations and cultural tourism attractions.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

Major challenges to tourism development on the Kenai Peninsula center on: (1) overcrowding of many existing attractions and facilities; (2) a mature Anchorage market which is unlikely to see appreciable growth and (3) the lack of significant package tour traffic.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

The primary tourism promotion organizations for the Kenai Peninsula are the Kenai Peninsula Tourism Marketing Council, the Kenai Convention and Visitors Bureau and the Soldotna/Homer/Seward Chambers of Commerce. Tourism development issues are a major priority for the Kenai Peninsula Borough Economic Development District, which is an Alaska Regional Development Organization.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Participants from throughout the Kenai Peninsula Borough identified a variety of tourism infrastructure and tourism attraction projects which they believe should be implemented. They opted not to prioritize these projects, but to pursue them as additional analysis and unfolding events determined the time to be right.

TRAILS

- Develop a paved bike trail along the Exit Glacier road
- Develop a bike-hike trail along the Old Sterling Highway between Kenai and Tern Lakes
- Develop a mountain bike trail between Jakalof and Windy Bays
- Develop a bike-hike trail from Moose Pass to Trail Lakes
- Develop more walking trails and interpretive sites on the west coast of the Kenai Peninsula

VISITOR INFORMATION CENTERS

- Develop an inter-agency visitor center in Seward
- Develop an Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center in Homer
- Maintain a Lake Clark National Park visitor center and park access services on the Kenai Peninsula

VISITOR INFORMATION/MARKETING

- Develop color-coded signage along the Seward and Sterling highways directing visitors to wildlife viewing, photo opportunities, historical and cultural sites
- Provide more interpretation of historical sites
- Produce a regional map showing the location of Kenai Peninsula visitor attractions, amenities and services
- Market the Kenai Peninsula as an overall “soft adventure” destination; de-emphasize consumptive use activities
- Conduct familiarization tours for potential tourism investment and development partners

VISITOR FACILITIES

- Build public facilities on the dock in Homer (restrooms, staging space for tour groups off busses and ships)
- Install and maintain wayside services signage (toilets, trash, water)
- Develop a low density (as opposed to elbow-to-elbow) tent camping park, possibly at Diamond Gulch site

VISITOR ATTRACTIONS

- Support development of the Alaska Sealife Center in Seward
- Support development of the North Pacific Volcano Learning Center
- Support development of the Kenai Challenger Learning Center

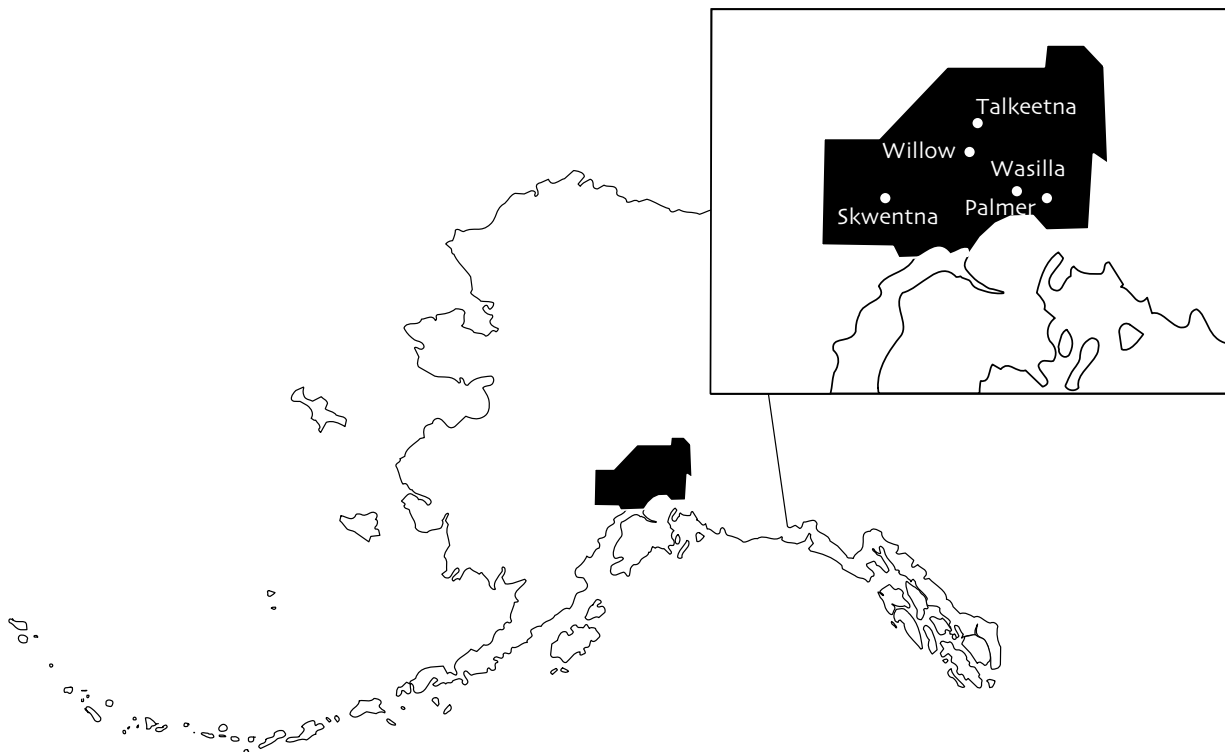
TRANSPORTATION

- Establish a public or, if necessary, a subsidized privately-operated interborough bus system to connect peninsula communities
- Support and fund high-level maintenance of the region’s highways
- Develop a commercial RV park near the west boundary of Kenai Refuge
- Secure “Scenic Corridor” designation as mechanism to protect the visual qualities along the Sterling and Seward highways

PUBLIC/PRIVATE PARTNERSHIPS

- Develop partnerships between the tourism industry and local communities to insure the most positive impacts of tourism

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Matanuska-Susitna Borough

A joint project of the
Mat-su Resource Conservation and Development, Inc.
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

MATANUSKA-SUSITNA BOROUGH

Sources: *Matanuska-Susitna Borough Regional Strategic Plan, 1995-2000*, Matanuska-Susitna Resource Conservation and Development, Inc., June, 1995; *Hatcher Pass Ski Report Financial Feasibility Study*, AIDEA, March, 1995; *Tourism Development Program*, Matanuska-Susitna Borough, December, 1983; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Wasilla, Alaska, August, 1996.

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough lies in the heart of southcentral Alaska, encompassing more than 23,000 square miles of rolling low land, mountains, lakes, rivers and streams. The area is bordered by the Alaska Range to the northwest and the Chugach Range to the east. Upper Cook Inlet and Knik Arm and the Municipality of Anchorage delineate the southern border. All of Denali State Park and approximately thirty percent of Denali National Park and Preserve are within the borough.

The majority of the borough's approximately 50,000 residents reside in a core area between the cities of Palmer and Wasilla. The balance is disbursed throughout the borough and within some twenty unincorporated communities.

ACCESS

The Matanuska-Susitna region is traversed by two major highways: the Glenn and George Parks highways. The Glenn Highway traverses the southeast corner of the borough and is the principal route to and from the Alaska Highway. The George Parks Highway traverses the borough in a north-south direction and provides access to both Denali State and Denali National parks. Both highways connect the borough to the main population centers of Anchorage and Fairbanks. The unpaved Denali Highway passes through the borough's northeast corner, providing access to and from Denali National Park from the Glenn Highway.

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is readily accessible by light plane from Anchorage and Fairbanks. In addition to civil airports at Palmer, Talkeetna and Wasilla, numerous public and private airfields and float plane bases serve the region.

Additionally, the Alaska Railroad traverses the borough, paralleling the George Parks Highway and providing year-round passenger and freight service.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

The Matanuska-Susitna Borough is rich in visitor attractions and recreation assets, the most well-known being Denali National Park and Preserve, including world-famous Mount McKinley. Denali State Park and Independence Mine State Historical Park are very popular hiking, skiing and camping locales, as are the areas around the Matanuska and Knik glaciers.

There are numerous lakes throughout the borough offering fishing, boating, swimming and waterskiing opportunities. More adventure-oriented activities such as mountain climbing, whitewater kayaking and rafting and horseback riding are also readily available.

The Matanuska-Susitna region is home to the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race headquarters, the Iron Dog Snow Machine Race and the Alaska State Fair. Heritage sites and museums are found throughout the region; including the Iditarod Park, Dorothy Page Museum, Sutton Alpine Historical Park, Knik Museum, Palmer Visitor Center and Museum, Frontier Village and the Museum of Alaska Transportation and Industry. The buildings of the agriculture colony settlement at Palmer are now on the National Register of Historic Places and plans are underway for their rehabilitation.

CURRENT VISITATION TO REGION

The region receives visitors from two primary sources: Alaskans from other communities within the state and non-resident visitors from outside Alaska.

Alaska residents travel to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough to participate in seasonal events, the plentiful recreational opportunities, and to enjoy the open spaces and natural settings. Estimates derived from Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitor Bureau studies suggest that approximately 150,000 to 180,000 resident Alaskans visit the borough annually.

Non-resident visitors primarily transit through the borough en route to other areas of the state. The only “stand alone” primary visitor destination in the region is Denali National Park. Alaska Visitor Statistics Program data shows that at least 97,000 of the borough’s non-resident visitors entered Alaska by car, camper or motor home. An estimated 75,000 non-resident visitors traveled to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough after arriving in southcentral Alaska by air or cruise ship.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

The most significant opportunities for tourism industry growth center around South Denali, Hatcher Pass, winter recreation and the development of heritage tourism.

The south side of Denali National Park and the adjoining Denali State Park offer an important opportunity to relieve the bottleneck in the national park, as well as open new experiences for visitors and Alaskans. The National Park Service, the State of Alaska, the Matanuska-Susitna and Denali boroughs, Native corporations and other interested parties are presently developing a concept plan for South Side Denali. As with most development projects in Alaska, different opinions are being expressed about the proposed extension of the Petersville Road and the construction of a visitor center overlooking the Tokositna River, affording an exceptional view of Mt. McKinley. Whatever the final proposal looks like, the improvement of visitor amenities and activities in the area are critical to the success of tourism in the region and throughout the state.

The Hatcher Pass area attracts Alaskans and out of state visitors on a year-round basis due to its outstanding scenic vistas and recreational opportunities. Numbers of visitors, however, are limited by access problems and underdeveloped services and facilities. Improved road conditions could remove rental car and RV restrictions. Both winter and summer recreation and employment opportunities would be available with the development of a ski resort. In addition to its winter use as a Nordic ski training site, Independence Mine State Historical Park has great potential for heritage tourism development with the stabilization and restoration of the historic buildings and mine tunnels and further development of interpretive trails and tours.

The winter season offers many opportunities for recreation and event-oriented activities. Much of the basic infrastructure is in place so, in many cases, development potential is tied to new or enhanced access to recreation sites, to upgraded services and improved or expanded accommodations. Making it convenient for visitors to get to recreation sites might mean offering scheduled shuttle services, improving or maintaining a road or providing winterized RVs.

Continuing to make activities available to the visitor both as observers and participants could broaden the visitor base. Dog mushing is a good example: opportunities currently exist for visitors to watch the re-start of the Iditarod Trail Sled Dog Race, to ride in the basket of a dog sled or mush the dogs themselves. Snow machining is a popular activity but it is difficult for visitors to experience. Renting machines and equipment, providing trail information or guided tours and developing new routes or trails to remote cabin or lodge sites for overnight stays could attract visitors or keep them in the region for longer stays. Cross country skiing, telemarking and snowboarding are all possible in many areas of the borough but opportunities are limited by access problems and lack of services.

Heritage tourism is a growing market segment among independent and packaged tour groups throughout the U.S. With the official Gold Rush Centennial celebration soon to begin and with major state and national promotions taking place, capitalizing on the region's mining history and restoring the Independence Mine could increase visitation. Opportunities may also exist for heritage tourism products to be developed around the Matanuska Valley's unique farming history, highlighting the historic colonization project and current agricultural influence in the region.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The borough faces a variety of challenges to tourism development. Its sheer diversity in geography, activities and attractions has led to difficulty devising a distinct marketing identity or image. Without a specific identity, determining a marketing message is very difficult. Another challenge to the marketing effort is the lack of sufficient marketing dollars to achieve significant marketing clout, to get the message out to potential visitors encouraging them to spend additional time in the area, or to base a tour there.

The region's proximity to Anchorage can be beneficial since travelers necessarily pass through the borough on their way to or from Alaska's largest city. Additionally, Anchorage is a natural market for the attractions and recreational activities in the borough. It also presents a challenge in that often the destination is Anchorage and visitors may not be inclined to linger in the borough when services and attractions are available to them in Anchorage.

Securing broad support for tourism infrastructure development in itself may present a challenge as there are strong opinions on both sides of tourism development issues throughout the region.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

The Matanuska-Susitna Convention and Visitors Bureau is the primary organization promoting tourism activities throughout the region. Denali has a visitor association which serves to create a local, collective voice for tourism related issues in the area. Local chambers of commerce are involved in the promotion of their respective member businesses, many of which are visitor service oriented. In addition, the Matanuska-Susitna Resource Conservation and Development Organization works to support economic development efforts and sustainable development of resources in the borough. It recognizes the importance and impact of tourism in the region and among its objectives lists participation in tourism issue-related workshops and training, supporting development of a ski resort at Hatcher Pass and supporting other tourism related organizations in developing tourism in the borough.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

1. IMPROVE HATCHER PASS ROAD; LITTLE SUSITNA TO WILLOW

Location: Matanuska-Susitna River Valley

Description: Create a year-round road for access to Independence Mine and Hatcher Pass from both Palmer and Willow, and improve the road from Mile 9 to 39 to insure safe travel for all vehicles, including tour busses and RVs. This would facilitate ski area development and benefit visitors and residents. Local chambers of commerce, local governments and the Matanuska-Susitna CVB could work to make this happen. Funding could come from both state and federal sources or perhaps a toll could be instated.

2. INDEPENDENCE MINE RESTORATION

Location: Hatcher Pass

Description: Stabilize and restore the historical buildings and mine tunnels, develop trails and tours, enhance this historical attraction for both residents and visitors. The project could create additional summer and winter recreational opportunities. Both public and private interests could cooperate to secure funding. State Parks would serve as the primary manager of the attraction.

3. DEVELOP ROAD FROM WILLOW TO POINT MACKENZIE

Location: West Side Cook Inlet

Description: Provide an alternative to the Parks Highway for visitors and residents traveling to and from Anchorage. This would enhance the possibility of development of Port MacKenzie and a cross Knik Arm ferry. Challenges facing this development include the high per mile cost and current lack of supporting port facilities. Funding sources could be the Department of Transportation or establishing a toll system.

4. PARKS HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS

Location: Matanuska-Susitna Valley

Description: Upgrade the highway by adding slow moving vehicle pullouts, passing lanes, bridge walkways, trailhead enhancements and rest areas. This would increase carrying capacity and make the highway more safe. Explore using existing businesses as featured rest areas and provide signage to these areas. Funding will be a challenge. A solution could be to establish an Alaska visitor arrival tax sufficient to fund visitor services. Department of Transportation would be a crucial partner and funding source.

5. GLENN HIGHWAY IMPROVEMENTS

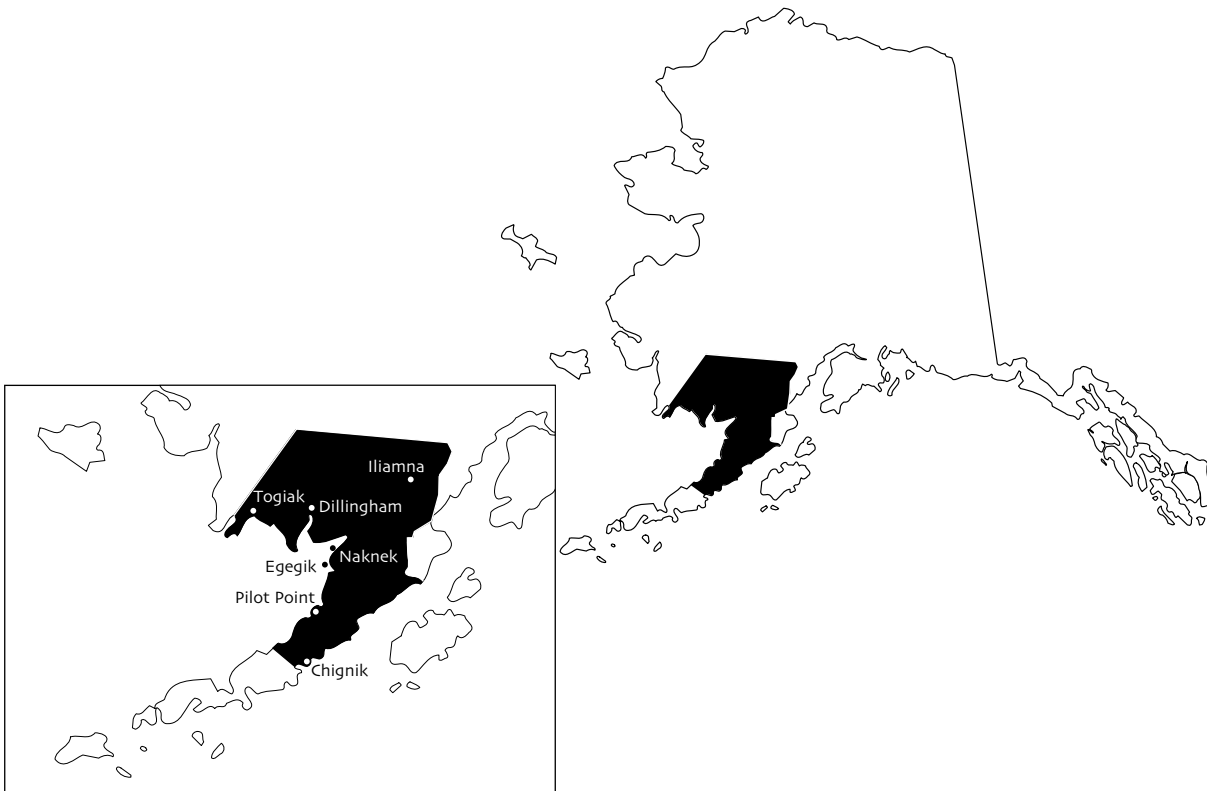
Location: Matanuska-Susitna Valley

Description: Same as for Parks Highway Improvements above.

C. ADDITIONAL PROPOSED PROJECTS

- Upgrade Burma Road from Pt. MacKenzie to South Big Lake Road
- Upgrade State Parks and Waterway’s facilities within borough
- Enhance Matanuska Glacier Park overlook
- Build a Matanuska-Susitna convention complex
- Develop snowmachine trails including one from Anchorage to Fairbanks
- Improve Matanuska-Susitna CVB rest area/visitor center
- Convert from strip development to commercial nodes
- Establish ferry system in Upper Cook Inlet
- Improve South Denali View trailhead
- Tokositna site; upgrade Petersville Road and develop small visitors center
- Big Lake Golf Course residential development
- State development of Hatcher Pass ski facility
- Initiate borough tax credit for tourism development
- Susitna River Basin Plan, enact and enforce Recreation Rivers Management Plan
- Create independent “train tours” of small towns along the railroad corridor
- Create winter activity trails throughout Matanuska-Susitna Valley
- Upgrade and maintain State Parks facilities in the Big Lake area
- Build a Knik Glacier tramway and visitors center

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Bristol Bay and Alaska Peninsula

A joint project of
Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

BRISTOL BAY AND ALASKA PENINSULA

Sources: *Bristol Bay Tourism Development: Regional Strategies and Investment Opportunities*, Bristol Bay Native Corporation, Fall, 1995; *Profiles of Tribal Communities in the Bristol Bay Region*, Bristol Bay Native Association, April, 1995; *Hot Prospects: A Tourism Inventory & Assessment of Southwest Alaska*, SWAMC, October, 1991; *Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference, 1996 Overall Economic Development Program Report*, SWAMC, June, 1996; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; *Rural Alaska Tourism Assessment*, Community Enterprise Development Corporation, June, 1991; and, *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Dillingham, Alaska, September, 1996.

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

The Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region is located in southwest Alaska. It extends about 350 miles north to south and 230 miles east to west, covering approximately 40,000 square miles, an area comparable in size to the state of Ohio. The region includes three major mountain ranges: the Kilbuck Mountains to the northwest, the Taylor Mountains to the north, and the Aleutian Range which divides the Alaska Peninsula lengthwise. Eight major river systems largely define the location of settlements. The region has the world's largest runs of sockeye salmon and one of the state's largest herring fisheries. Commercial fishing and subsistence activities are major contributors to an economy largely tied to the provision of government services.

Dillingham, with about 2,300 residents, is the region's largest population center. The remaining population of about 5,700 is disbursed among 28 communities located primarily along the region's coastline and its rivers.

ACCESS

King Salmon and Dillingham are the primary transportation and service hubs for Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region communities, with daily, year-round jet service from Anchorage. Most other communities in the region are served by daily, scheduled air taxi service. Charter air service is available to all villages on a daily basis. Except for roads between Dillingham and Aleknagik, King Salmon and Naknek, and Iliamna and Newhalen, there are no interconnecting regional roads.

Passenger ferry service is provided by the Alaska Marine Highway System from Kodiak to Chignik, Sand Point and Cold Bay on a limited spring, summer, fall schedule. Marine barge and container services connect many communities to Anchorage and Seattle.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

The Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region is a diverse area featuring extensive lake and river systems, moist tundra and volcanic landscapes and a wide variety of fish, birds, marine and land mammals. Many of these natural attractions are located in national and state parks and refuges within the region's boundaries. In addition, the Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region has a rich cultural heritage with Native, Russian and European influences. It is a cultural crossroads of three Native cultures; Yup'ik, Aleut and Dena'ina Athabaskan, each with its distinctive arts, language and lifestyle.

A sampling of the region’s tourism attributes and assets includes:

NATIONAL AND STATE PARKS, REFUGES AND SANCTUARIES

- Katmai National Park & Preserve
- Lake Clark National Park & Preserve
- Aniakchak National Preserve
- Wood Tikchik State Park
- Walrus Islands Game Sanctuary
- Togiak National Wildlife Refuge
- Becharof National Wildlife Refuge
- Alaska Peninsula National Wildlife Refuge
- Alaska Maritime Wildlife Refuge

FISH

- Five salmon species
- Rainbow trout and Dolly Varden
- Grayling
- Lake trout
- Whitefish and pike
- Shrimp and clams

WILDLIFE

- Caribou and moose
- Brown and black bear
- Wolves
- Walrus, seal lions, and whales
- Ducks, geese, cranes and swans

HERITAGE SITES

- Samuel K. Fox Museum
- Russian Orthodox churches
- King Salmon Visitor Center
- Katmai National Park & Preserve Interpretive Center
- Bristol Bay Historical Society Museum
- Accessible archeological dig sites

CURRENT VISITATION TO REGION

Tourists currently come to the Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region primarily for world class sportfishing and hunting, bear viewing in Katmai’s Valley of 10,000 Smokes, and to enjoy adventure-based activities such as taking float trips on the many rivers and streams. Tourism industry growth in the region is directly related to the substantial amounts of acreage set aside for recreational purposes. While visitor numbers are seeing consistent growth, the extent to which that can be sustained or expanded may depend on the development of additional infrastructure and services to support increased visitation.

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Many communities within the Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region would like to be more actively involved in the visitor industry. While there are some development opportunities within the existing, activity-oriented visitor base, little effort has been made to develop additional attractions or infrastructure to support industry growth and diversification within the region. A primary concern is developing attractions and activities that will generate revenue which will remain in local economies. Therefore, the communities and other development interests will need to focus on attraction and infrastructure enhancement before they can realize significant increases in the numbers, travel patterns, and kinds of visitors arriving in the region.

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

A number of challenges face the development of tourism in the Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region. They include an underdeveloped attraction and services base, with the exception of the wilderness lodge sector. In general, there is not a diverse enough offering of activities and attractions available to attract and retain visitors, and not enough services have been designed to meet the visitors' needs. A related challenge is a lack of a local workforce trained in the hospitality industry skills.

The region has also suffered from a lack of marketing expertise and currently lacks sufficient funds to support an aggressive marketing effort. Geographic location and distance from major travel corridors and business hubs is also an obstacle because of the additional cost and time required for travel to and within the region.

The Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region faces some serious challenges in appealing to more mainstream visitors who are not attracted to the region's traditional sportfishing, hunting and adventure-oriented offerings. The region lacks an identity, as well as an attraction base, that would motivate visitors to come for other than the established reasons. The region is also challenged to persuade its existing visitor market to stay in the region longer and participate in additional activities. This is primarily due to the itinerary constraints of such visitors and the underdeveloped base of attractions and activities available.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

The primary tourism promotion organization for the Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region has been Alaska's Southwest, the tourism marketing arm of the Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference. Recently, however, the Bristol Bay Visitors Council was formed to promote the region to visitors, to assist with tourism product and infrastructure development and to provide visitor industry education to regional residents and businesses.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Participants from the Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region identified a variety of tourism industry development projects which they believed should be pursued. They chose not to prioritize the projects but, rather, to group them by category.

ACCESS AND TRANSPORTATION

- Establish a shuttle service between the Dillingham airport and specific sites in and around Dillingham
- Promote affordable transportation to and within the region (consider stopover fares, "Alaska Pass" system as possible models)
- Expand Alaska Marine Highway System services into Bristol Bay

ATTRACTIONS

- Establish a Visitor Contact Center at the Dillingham airport
- Provide a permanent location at the King Salmon airport for a visitors center
- Develop a commercial fishing industry museum in Dillingham
- Restore or replace the building housing the Naknek Museum, which features the history of the Bristol Bay fishing industry
- Develop a “traditional dance house” display for the Sam Fox Museum in Dillingham
- Renovate the Dillingham Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center building
- Identify funding mechanisms for community building renovation and construction (support a regional network of visitor information, cultural and interpretive centers)

MARKETING

- Produce an interagency, interactive video on public lands including information on access, services and appropriate uses
- Establish a standardized format for the region’s printed information materials
- Develop a Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula visitors guide
- Explore additional Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula marketing opportunities
- Gain better understanding of and use current visitor demographics in regional tourism planning process
- Identify ways smaller villages can participate in industry

INVENTORY

- Inventory cultural resources and culture-based businesses in the region for (a) planned book on cultural tourism in Alaska; and (b) information for a Bristol Bay-Alaska Peninsula region tourism brochure

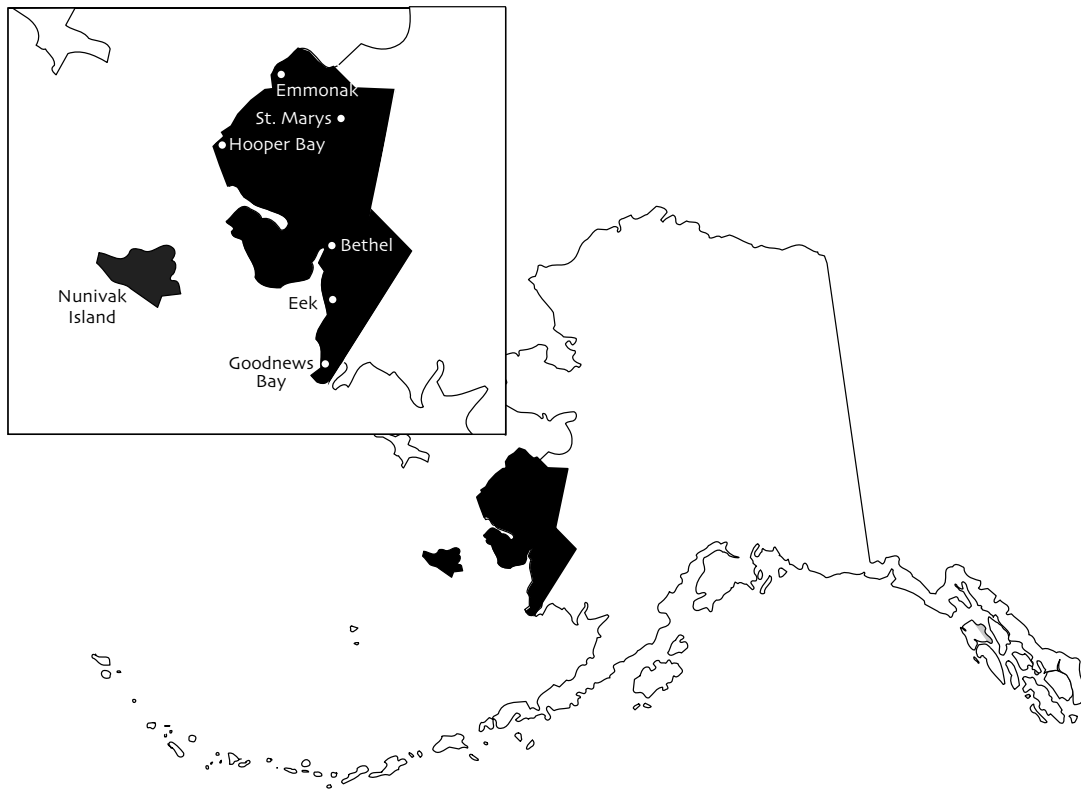
EDUCATION

- Develop educational seminars for small business operators
- Emphasize industry appropriate work force development and training

ADDITIONAL PROPOSED PROJECTS

- Develop hiking trails, campsites and public use cabins
- Develop the unique volcanic viewing opportunities of Maars, CO₂ gas springs in Becharof Lake region
- Establish pilot trails in Bristol Bay region linking villages and consider locating public use cabins along the routes
- Support establishment of a Cooperative Tourism Marketing entity for the region
- Assist Bristol Bay Visitors Council upgrade existing marketing tools
- Work with established and new tour companies to create “user-friendly” high-quality tour products in the region
- Create Brooks Camp/Naknek Lake bear watching package out of Bristol Bay
- Survey current visitors to determine ways to increase visitor stays, quality of experience, and expenditures in the region and make results available to business operators establishing and growing their businesses
- Develop ANCSA 17 (b) easements for access to federal lands from area villages
- Complete the Iliamna-Newhalen road to the community of Nondalton
- Construct a protected harbor and dock at Chignik and a road linking the communities of Chignik, Chignik Lagoon and Chignik Lake
- Construct an Iliamna Scenic Highway connecting lower Cook Inlet at Williamsport with interior southwest Alaska at Iliamna Lake

Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



Lower Yukon - Kuskokwim Delta

A joint project of the
Lower Kuskokwim and Lower Yukon Economic Development Councils
and the
Alaska Department of Commerce and Economic Development
Divisions of Trade & Development and Tourism

LOWER YUKON-KUSKOKWIM DELTA

Sources: *Lower Kuskokwim Region Tourism Marketing Plan*, UAA/CED, 1995; *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program III*, DOT, Summer 1993; *Rural Alaska Tourism Assessment*, Community Enterprise Development Corporation, June 1991; *Two Year Strategic Plan For The Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council*, LKEDC, June 1996; *Lower Yukon Regional Development Strategy*, Lower Yukon Economic Development Council, May 1996; *Association of Village Council Presidents, Overall Economic Development Plan*, FY 1995 Update, AVCP, June 1995; *Rural Tourism Infrastructure Roundtable Meeting*, Bethel, Alaska, September, 1996.

A. REGIONAL SNAPSHOT

The Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region is comprised of two sub-regions. The Lower Kuskokwim sub-region covers approximately 28,000 square miles on the southwest Alaska mainland. There are 27 communities in the region, of which Bethel, with a population of 5,200, is by far the largest. Approximately 10,000 people reside in the other 26 communities which follow the Kuskokwim River from Tuluksak to Kuskokwim Bay and extend from Platinum on the bay's southern shore to Hooper Bay on the Bering Sea coast.

The Lower Yukon sub-region encompasses approximately 22,000 square miles immediately north of the Lower Kuskokwim sub-region. Emmonak, with about 800 residents, and St. Marys, with about 500, are its transportation and service centers. Approximately 3,700 people reside in eight other communities which descend the Yukon River from Marshall and the Bering Sea coast from Kotlik on Norton Sound to Scammon Bay at the base of the Askinuk Mountains.

In general, these sub-regions consist of rolling tundra hills, lowlands and flood plains containing thousands of lakes, ponds and hummocks. There are few significant upland areas, the highest point being Mt. Oratia at 4,700 feet above sea level.

The majority of people in these regions are Yup'ik Eskimos who speak their native language fluently, with English as a second language. Subsistence hunting and fishing drive the economy of most villages with cash income used largely to support this traditional lifestyle.

ACCESS

The city of Bethel serves as the regional transportation hub for most of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and has year-round, daily jet service from Anchorage. With the exception of only a few villages, both scheduled and charter air services are available on a daily basis. There is no road system that connects communities within the region. Inter-village travel is either by air, in summer by boat along the waterways, or in winter by snowmachine and ATV on frozen rivers and trails.

PRIMARY TOURISM ATTRIBUTES AND ASSETS

The primary tourism attributes and assets of the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region include the Yukon Delta and Togiak national wildlife refuges which offers excellent birdwatching opportunities, several major waterways, a rich Yup'ik Eskimo culture, traditional arts and crafts, Eskimo dancing and storytelling, the Kusko 300 sled dog race, sportfishing, museums and historic sites.

Wildlife, waterfowl and fisheries: The Lower Kuskokwim region, in particular, is rich in wildlife, waterfowl and fisheries resources. Of note are the musk ox herds on Nunivak and Nelson Islands, the Pacific salmon and other sport fish (including all five salmon species, whitefish, rainbow trout, Arctic char and Dolly Varden) abundant throughout the Kuskokwim River drainage, and the millions of waterfowl, seabirds and shorebirds (including ducks, geese, whistling swans, snipe, curlews, sandpipers, cranes, grebes, kittiwakes, murrets and puffins) found throughout the Clarence Rhode National Wildlife Refuge, the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge and surrounding areas.

Recreational: Recreational opportunities abound throughout the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta including world class hunting, sportfishing, canoeing, kayaking and river rafting, as well as other camping and ecotourism activities. Winter recreation includes dog mushing, snow machining and cross country skiing.

Cultural: The region offers a unique opportunity to enjoy the culture and traditions of the Yup'ik Eskimos, including traditional Eskimo dancing, story telling, mask and basket making, and subsistence activities. Among the cultural events attracting a number of visitors to the region is the annual Camai Festival held in Bethel. The recently-completed Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center, also in Bethel, houses a museum and gift shop, the University of Alaska-Kuskokwim Campus library and meeting rooms. Accessible archeological dig sites offer a glimpse into the past, as do the museum housed in the Cultural Center and the historic photos displayed at the Aniak Visitors Center. The Moravian Children's home in Kwethluk is listed on the National Historic Register. A display of regional wildlife and cultural artifacts can be found at the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge headquarters building in Bethel.

CURRENT VISITATION TO REGION

Any attempt to quantify types of visitation to the Yukon-Kuskokwim region is problematic given the lack of research data currently available. The most current visitation data available is the 1993 Alaska Visitor Statistics Program data which aggregates the Yukon-Kuskokwim region with all of southwest Alaska. However, if one assumes that visitors to this area have demographics similar to overall visitors to southwest Alaska, the following applies:

VISITORS TO THE REGION INCLUDE:

| Visitors by Trip Purpose | % of Visitors |
|------------------------------|---------------|
| Vacation/Pleasure Visitors | 49.84% |
| Visiting Friends & Relatives | 9.31% |
| Business & Pleasure | 7.02% |
| Business Only | 33.83% |
| Visitors by Travel Type | % of Visitors |
| Package | 22% |
| Independent | 74% |
| Inde-Package | 4% |

What this data suggests is that the majority of visitors to the Yukon-Kuskokwim region are either traveling on vacation to the region or traveling primarily for business; relatively few visitors are visiting friends or relatives or combining business with pleasure.

Additionally, the data suggests that visitors to this area are primarily independent travelers (those visitors who make all their own arrangements) versus package tour visitors (those who purchase travel and tours bundled together).

POTENTIALS FOR DEVELOPMENT

Further opportunities for visitor industry-related development in the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta region include (by visitor type):

Business travelers: Opportunities exist for the residents of the Yukon- Kuskokwim Delta to provide additional visitor services to travelers coming to the region primarily for business purposes. These services include:

- Lodging facilities, including bed & breakfast accommodations
- Food service
- Retail sales of arts & crafts
- Transportation, inter and intra-community
- Recreational and entertainment activities

Vacation travelers: Opportunities exist for the residents of the Yukon- Kuskokwim Delta to provide visitor services to vacation or leisure travelers who visit the region for the primary purpose of touring, to participate in recreational activities or to visit friends and relatives. These services include:

- Lodging facilities, including bed and breakfast accommodations
- Food service
- Retail sales of arts & crafts
- Transportation, inter and intra-community
- Recreational activities and services including:
 - Boat, kayak and canoe rentals
 - Birding tours and wildlife viewing
 - Cross country skiing
 - Sport fishing and hunting
 - River rafting
 - Ecotourism activities
 - Culture and heritage related activities

CHALLENGES TO TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

A number of challenges face the development of tourism in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. They include an underdeveloped attraction and services base - i.e., too few established activities and attractions for visitors once they decide to visit the region and not enough services designed to meet the visitors' needs. A related challenge is the lack of a local workforce trained in hospitality industry services and skills.

Currently there is a relatively small market from which this region might draw potential visitors. To some extent, this can be attributed to the fact that, for a variety of reasons, many travelers are simply not attracted to the types of experiences available in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta. There is, however, a distinct market for what the region does offer once the basic infrastructure and services are in place to insure a quality experience.

At this time, the region also lacks the financial resources and marketing expertise which could enable it to effectively promote existing opportunities and establish a presence in the marketplace. Location and distance from the major tourism corridors and business hubs are likewise challenges, because of the additional expense and time associated with travel to and within the region.

TOURISM DEVELOPMENT AND PROMOTION ORGANIZATIONS

There are no organizations within the region focusing exclusively on tourism development or promotion. There are, however, several organizations that have included tourism development and/or promotion as a component of their overall development efforts. These include, the Lower Kuskokwim Economic Development Council, an Alaska Regional Development Organization, the Association of Village Council Presidents, the Bethel Chamber of Commerce and several local village corporations and councils.

B. PRIORITY INFRASTRUCTURE DEVELOPMENT PROJECTS

Participants from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region identified a number of infrastructure needs but only two specific infrastructure projects were submitted.

- 1. ESTABLISH AND FUND A REGIONAL TOURISM COORDINATOR POSITION**

Location: Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Service Area

Description: Examine other regional programs for appropriate models, involve all regional tourism interests in planning and decision making, identify available financial resources, prepare position description and establish minimum qualifications.

2. ESTABLISH A REGIONAL VISITORS CENTER

Location: Bethel

Description: Tourism industry development is hampered by the lack of a focal point for gathering and disseminating information about the tourism attractions and opportunities in the region. This project proposes the establishment and staffing of a joint headquarters facility for regional tourism development and marketing and chamber of commerce programs.

3. COMPLETE THE INTERIOR RIVERS ARTS & CRAFTS COOPERATIVE BUILDING

Location: Aniak

Description: Redesign and complete the building housing the Interior Rivers Arts & Crafts Cooperative and the Aniak Visitors Center to better inform visitors about the community and the region and to provide local artists with an outlet to sell their work. The challenge is identifying funds to complete the project and for ongoing operations.

ADDITIONAL PROJECTS AND NEEDS IDENTIFIED

Village Needs

- Inns and bed and breakfast facilities
- Campsites
- Improved airport services including food service, phones, and safety equipment
- Airport information kiosks
- Transportation services into villages

Bethel

- Larger supply of guest rooms with baths and phones
- Community gathering areas

Regional

- Communications network to share tourism-related information
- Small business and visitor industry workforce training
- Regional visitor information center with trained staff
- Airport improvements
- Public lands access sites

Transportation Needs

- Improved harbor and dock facilities
- Airport shelter facilities with public phones
- Visitor information signage

