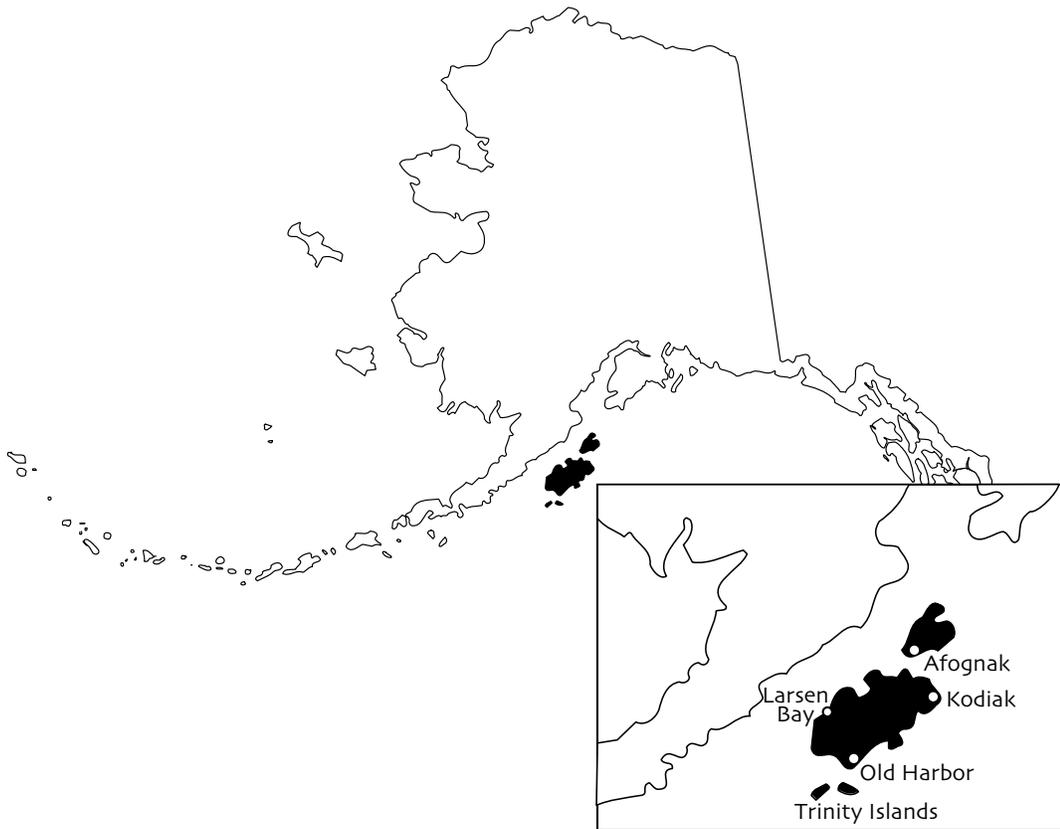


Rural Alaska Tourism Infrastructure Needs Assessment



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

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 spatial 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.

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

