

# SEAtrails

## Business and Marketing Plan



June 2008





# **SEAtails**

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*Prepared for:*

**SEAtails – Southeast Alaska Trail System**  
**Alaska Department of Commerce,  
Community and Economic Development**  
**Western Federal Lands Highway Division,  
Federal Highway Administration**

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*Cover photos, clockwise from left:  
El Capitan, Whale Pass; Balls Lake, Thorne Bay; Mt. Ripinsky, Haines; Alaska Marine Highway vessel*



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# Executive Summary

## Introduction

The Southeast Alaska Trail System (SEATrails) is a unique long-distance, community focused, multi-modal transportation system for residents and visitors interested in hiking, paddling, SCUBA diving, cycling, and experiencing Southeast Alaska.

The SEATrails mission is to facilitate planning, promotion, maintenance, and construction of a region-wide, Southeast Alaska trail system that will stimulate economic development, enhance quality of life, and improve transportation.

Since 2000, the agencies and volunteers involved in SEATrails have accomplished a considerable amount of work including inventorying regional recreational and cultural features, securing participation and endorsement from 19 regional communities, forming a non-profit organization and Board of Directors, completing the SEATrails Trails and Transportation Master Plan (TTMP), and developing the SEATrails website.

Partnering agencies include Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development, US Forest Service, Federal Highway Administration – Western Federal Lands, and Alaska Marine Highway System. Each of these partners offers unique services and partnering opportunities for SEATrails.

The 19 SEATrails member communities are Angoon, Coffman Cove, Craig, Gustavus, Haines, Hoonah, Hydaburg, Juneau, Kake, Ketchikan, Naukati, Pelican, Petersburg, Sitka, Skagway, Thorne Bay, Whale Pass, Wrangell and Yakutat.

The 501(c)3 non-profit organization was created in 2003 to facilitate the construction, maintenance, and promotion of the regional trail system. The non-profit has become an important mechanism for implementing the trail system goals. (A summary of accomplishments is provided in the Sustainability Strategy chapter.)

Funding is needed for a variety of SEATrails activities including continued trail system development and maintenance, marketing the trail system to residents and visitors, and ongoing communication with various target audiences including communities, agencies, and funding sources. SEATrails is likely to require continued financial support from grants while it develops other sources of income. Long-term sustainability will be most

SEATrails Communities



achievable if SEATrails can develop unrestricted revenues to cover most or all of its core operations. Potential income sources include memberships, trail fees, sales of publications, and interest from an endowment.

## Implementation Strategy

Implementation of this Business and Market Plan will give the SEATrails system the financial resources and communication network needed to achieve its mission and goals. It is anticipated that the non-profit organization developed to support the SEATrails system will assume a lead role in the implementation of the business and marketing strategies. As appropriate, additional support may be provided by the partnering agencies, communities, volunteers, and membership.

### Business Plan

#### Immediate Actions

- **Enhance Membership Program:** The current SEATrails membership program includes tiers that are comparable with similar trail membership programs. The project team recommends that SEATrails significantly increase the exposure of the program.
  - Explore creative ways to include visitors in the Individual/Family membership level.
  - Add a new category of Marketing Partner. (This could allow SEATrails to differentiate those businesses that want to receive regular communication from SEATrails about marketing opportunities.)
  - Create a category for communities that are interested in marketing benefits beyond a listing in the website (for example, inclusion in travel media outreach and serving as host for SEATrails events).
- **Solicit Donations:** SEATrails should continue to solicit donations or bequests from supporters for ongoing activities, a specific project, or directly to the SEATrails Endowment.

#### Mid-Term Actions

- **Pursue Portion of Public Trail Fees:** The project team recommends that SEATrails pursue a small fraction of the commercial user trail fees collected by public land managers including the US Forest Service, National Park Service, State Parks, and municipal governments. Fee structures, and applicable uses of the funds, vary considerable depending on the agency and location. Given the large volume of commercial trail usage in the region, even a fraction of the total amount collected could supplement SEATrails income considerably.
- **Gaming:** Under Alaska law, certain non-profit organizations are eligible to receive a portion of proceeds earned by pull-tab parlors and other gaming activities. Gaming vendors and operators are only allowed to retain a certain portion of their earnings. There are a limited number of

operators and vendors; the process is somewhat competitive and time consuming. However, several non-profit organizations in the region have had success with this program.

- **Permanent Fund Application:** The Alaska Legislature is considering allowing a “check-off box” on the Permanent Fund Application that would allow online applicants to donate directly to non-profit organizations. Coinciding with this new option, the Alaska Giving Coalition will be conducting a statewide, multi-year educational program to encourage charitable donations by Alaska residents. SEATrails should monitor development of the program and ensure that it is listed in the online form.

## Long-Term Actions

- **Map Sales:** For the next version of the SEATrails map, SEATrails should explore selling maps wholesale to retailers. The wholesale price would need to include the production cost, distribution cost, and a profit for SEATrails. Cost-effective printing and commitment from the retail community are critical to the success of this concept.
- **SEATrails Book and Other Retail Sales**
  - SEATrails should explore the option of printing a SEATrails book. The content can be fairly easily modified and incorporated from the website. The book could be sold wholesale to retailers and partners like the Alaska Marine Highway.
  - SEATrails currently offers merchandise on a made-to-order basis on the website. It is recommended that SEATrails develop one or two signature items and act as a wholesale distributor. SEATrails may want to select items that reinforce outdoor recreation like a water bottle, baseball cap, or visor.

## Marketing Strategy

### Immediate Strategies

- Increase exposure generated by state, regional, and community marketing programs.
- Increase published information about SEATrails in visitor guides, brochures, and websites.
- Increase SEATrails information in printed schedules and other materials developed by regional transportation providers.
- Increase SEATrails information and materials published by public land managers and agencies.
- Increase magazine and newspaper articles about SEATrails and trail-oriented recreational opportunities.
- Increase website appeal and usability.
- Leverage marketing partner presence at consumer and trade shows.
- Increase SEATrails awareness among community and business leaders.
- Request promotional support and website links from trail networks and clubs.

## **Mid-Term Strategies**

- Continue website enhancement and redevelopment.
- Develop an electronic newsletter.
- Reinforce SEATrails brand wherever possible.
- Capture ongoing feedback from target markets.
- Solicit partners to develop a biennial SEATrails conference.
- Create a photo contest.

## **Long-Term Marketing Strategies**

- Secure advertising placements in selected print and online publications.
- Attend targeted trade and consumer shows.
- Develop a professional media development strategy.

## SEATrails Mission and Goals

The Southeast Alaska Trail System (SEATrails) is a unique long-distance, community focused, multi-modal transportation system for residents and visitors interested in hiking, paddling, SCUBA diving, cycling, and experiencing Southeast Alaska. Several themes are integral to the SEATrails concept and are reflected in the vision, mission and goals:

- The nomination and management of SEATrails is controlled at the local level (along with any local, state, and federal agencies that have responsibility for a particular trail).
- By working on a regional basis, the system has more opportunities to leverage partnerships and funding opportunities.
- Economic benefits will accrue at the community level such as new business opportunities, support for existing businesses, and potential for private/public partnerships.

### Vision

SEATrails will become:

- A system of world-class trails that attracts visitors to experience Southeast and its communities.
- A collection of decentralized, locally-owned and managed trails and attractions designated by communities and supported by regional maps, website resources, interpretive facilities, signs, guide materials, and user services.
- A multi-modal “spoke and hub” access network using local trails and transport links, and regional infrastructure including Alaska’s Marine Highway System, Inter-Island Ferry Authority, Alaska-Canada highway connections, and the White Pass and Yukon Railroad via Skagway.

### Mission

The SEATrails mission is to facilitate planning, promotion, maintenance, and construction of a region-wide, Southeast Alaska trail system that will stimulate economic development, enhance quality of life, and improve transportation.

### Goals

#### Generate Economic Development

Core components:

- Enhance demand for existing and new SEATrails community businesses;
- Facilitate independent travel to SEATrails communities by providing access to information;

- Help improve SEATrails' communities economic benefit from tourism; and
- Create a more diverse, locally based economy.

### **Improve Transportation and Information**

Core components:

- Help create a multi-modal; multi-community trail system;
- Create stronger transportation links between SEATrails communities;
- Establish stronger transportation links between SEATrails communities;
- Establish a strong partnership with Alaska's Marine Highway System that benefits the system (increases ridership), benefits travelers (Euro-rail type pass), and benefits communities (more ferry visits); and
- Provide comprehensive system-wide information to visitors that is user-friendly and that encourages independent travel into Southeast.

### **Enhance the Region's Quality of Life**

Core components:

- Develop SEATrails around local communities' needs, interests, and cultures;
- Generate income based on an industry with low up front costs that leverages local resources; and
- Promote health and recreational opportunities for Southeast's residents.

### **Create a Memorable Visitor Experience: It's the Journey**

Core components:

- Create a world-class recreational trail system with its own identify, branding, and "market-niche;"
- Use strategic signage, visitor information, and interpretation to create a consistently high-quality visitor experience; and
- Feature diverse experiences, cultures, landscapes and activities that entice visitors back again and again.

### **SEATrails is Local**

Core components:

- Inclusion of local trails in SEATrails is based on continued community support and input;

- Communities “call the shots” regarding designation and management of their local SEATrails while the board and affiliated agencies provide support, marketing, and coordination;
- Protect subsistence resources and cultural historical sites from over-use; and
- Create private/public partnerships at the local level.

## **SEATrails is a System**

Core components:

- By working together SEATrails communities can more effectively brand and market their attractions and create supportive transportation links and infrastructure.
- Local trail advocates benefit from SEATrails’ regional efforts while the SEATrails system benefits from community level work;
- Agencies can create and maintain higher quality recreational opportunities on public lands they steward by cooperating with local communities and other agencies;
- Create private/public agencies at the regional level; and
- Leverage dollars.

## **Overview of Business and Marketing Plan Development**

The Business and Marketing Plan was developed by the McDowell Group in cooperation with the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development; SEATrails staff; and SEATrails board members. Major research tasks included the following:

- Baseline visitor research compiled from the *Alaska Visitor Statistics Program V* (conducted for the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development by the McDowell Group); airport traffic statistics; Alaska Marine Highway traffic statistics; and Cruise Line Agencies of Alaska traffic data, among other sources. Visitor traffic data can be found in the supplemental *Supporting Research* report.
- Site visits and interviews conducted with business and community leaders in Haines, Juneau, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Wrangell, Craig, Coffman Cove, Naukati, Thorne Bay, Sitka, and Skagway. A summary of recommendations and comments, as well as the list of contacts, can be found in the supplemental *Supporting Research* report.
- Facilitation and funding for two SEATrails board meetings where the project was planned and reviewed: one in Ketchikan (July 30 and 31, 2007) and one in Sitka (October 21 and 22, 2007).
- Case studies completed for three trail organizations: Pacific Crest Trail Association, the Appalachian Trail Conservancy, and Island Trails (on Prince Edward Island). Each group was profiled in terms of their structure, membership, trail access, partnerships, budget, staff,

marketing activities, and websites. Additionally, brief profiles are provided of several additional trail organizations whose programs were relevant for SEATrails. (See *Supporting Research* report.)

- Review of recently conducted website research including focus groups, survey research, a comparative analysis of travel websites, and a national phone survey of potential visitors. (See *Supporting Research* report.)
- Preparation of a Website Update Plan and implemented a number of changes to the current site. The revamped web site had technical improvements to the website such as improving the SEATrails ranking on web search engines, implementation of traffic and page popularity tracking, user-friendly improvements and new content added. New and enhanced content includes an expanded *About* section, a new *History and Board* section, *Ways to Support SEATrails* section, *Traveling and Getting Around Southeast Alaska* section, an *Itineraries* section and a *Grants and Planning* section.

## Marketing Objectives for SEATrails System

The primary marketing objective for the SEATrails system is to provide comprehensive, system-wide information to travelers that is user-friendly and encourages independent travel into Southeast Alaska. While the target audience includes both Alaska residents and visitors, the website and other communication will be designed to meet the extensive information needs of visitors.

## Assessment of Marketing Opportunities and Resources

During the development of the Business and Marketing Plan, SEATrails board members, staff and contractors conducted a significant amount of research on the current visitor market, regional transportation trends, comparable trail networks, and current trends in website marketing. Additionally, a series of site visits, interviews, and meetings were held with community leaders, adventure tour companies, outfitters and guides, and public agency representatives. The meetings helped raise awareness about SEATrails activities and invited input on future marketing and fundraising programs.

The data and implications identified during this research process were compiled in a *Supporting Research* document, also available from SEATrails. Key findings are reflected in the SEATrails marketing strategies. A sample of the research findings and implications is summarized below.

### Southeast Alaska Visitor Profile

- Hiking and nature walks represent the leading SEATrails activity among the current non-cruise visitor market (4 of 10 visitors participate). In contrast, just 5 percent go kayaking, canoeing, or biking. These relative participation rates should be kept in mind when developing itineraries and website content.
- Nearly 40 percent of the non-cruise market stays in one community during their visit to Southeast Alaska. SEATrails can stimulate regional travel with sample itineraries and by “cross-selling” communities to travelers.
- Thirty percent of regional visitors are visiting friends and family, indicating that resident education should be a strong priority for SEATrails.
- More than half of all non-cruise visitors are from Western US states, which should be taken into consideration when allocating resources for travel media support, trade shows, and other promotions.
- Marketing efforts should be focused on the leading information sources of the Internet, brochures, and travel guides/books.

## **Southeast Alaska Visitor Traffic Indicators**

- Cruise visitation is approximately 1 million visitors, while non-cruise visitation is nearly 180,000 visitors. These visitors represent potential trail users, repeat travelers, members, and purchasers of SEATrails merchandise.
- Air travel is the predominant method of travel to and from the region.
- Ferry traffic is highest in Juneau, Ketchikan, Haines, and Skagway. These key communities may be optimal for disseminating information about SEATrails.
- Visitation to regional National Parks has grown steadily, largely due to cruise market growth. National Parks, and other public lands, hold a unique attraction to visitors. SEATrails can play an important role in helping travelers understand how to spend more time in the parks and gateway communities.

## **Site Visits and Partner Meetings**

- Community and business leaders support the concept that SEATrails will partner with marketing organizations, transportation providers, and others to promote outdoor recreation and trails.
- The website is the most cost-effective way to reach visitors. Specific recommendations included sample itineraries, photo galleries, adding more travel logistics, and creating a forum for website users to provide comments and reviews.
- A wide array of suggestions were made regarding revenue generating ideas including memberships, retail sales, and sales of advertising on SEATrails website and other materials.
- The organization was encouraged to communicate to the regional resident and business community through existing membership organizations like Southeast Conference, local trail groups, and Chamber(s) of Commerce.

## **Case Studies**

- The larger trail organizations, Pacific Crest Trail Association and Appalachian Trail Conservancy, represent well-established, multi-state trails with high name recognition among adventure travelers. The organizations rely on memberships for significant portions of their operating budgets. Their websites include updates on trail conditions, journals, online membership and donation capabilities, and retail items.
- Examination of several smaller trail organizations also provided useful examples of trail organizations membership rates, website content, and various approaches to private sector promotion.

## **Website Research**

- Search engines are the leading route for the State of Alaska travel website, reinforcing the importance of maintaining high visibility on popular search sites.

- Links from other websites are also important, reinforcing the importance of links from partner organizations.
- The initial layers of SEATrails website should emphasize compelling reasons to travel to the region like scenery, wildlife, and parks.
- Travelers have high expectations about being able to find detailed information like travel time and distances, printable maps, itineraries, and contact information for services.

## Target Markets

Broadly speaking, SEATrails has two target markets: Alaska residents and Alaska visitors. Each of these groups includes potential travelers, SEATrails members and supporters, and participants in SEATrails programs.

The Alaska resident and visitor markets can be further divided by their underlying interests and priorities. The following table shows the market segments identified by the study team as potential target markets for SEATrails.

### Overview of Target Markets

Market Segment	Geographic Segment		
	Southeast Alaska	Other Alaska	Alaska Visitor
Adventure travelers	Ferry travelers Air travelers Car/RV travelers Hunters Fishermen Kayakers Hikers	Ferry travelers Air travelers Car/RV travelers Small-ship and charter-boat travelers Hunters Fishermen Kayakers Hikers	Ferry travelers Air travelers Car/RV travelers Small-ship and charter-boat travelers Hunters Fishermen Kayakers Hikers
Business and economic development interests	Destination marketing organizations Economic development corporations Chambers of commerce Air charter services Eco-tour companies Native corporations	Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development Foundations Tour providers AMHS	Forest Service Economic Development Administration Tour Operators
Land management, conservation, and wilderness interests	Southeast Alaska Conservation Coalition	State Parks Alaska Department of Fish & Game	Park Service Forest Service Fish & Wildlife Service Sierra Club Wilderness Society

## Implications of Segmenting

The value of segmenting the market is that it provides a framework for identifying the most effective communication method for each group.

For each market segment the organization intends to pursue, SEATrails should consider:

- How large is the potential market?
- What message(s) will they respond to?
- What communication methods do they use?
- How much will it cost to get our message to them?
- How many of them are likely to respond?
- How much is each response worth?

Different segments not only have different communication needs, they are interested in different SEATrails “products.” For example, a small business may find that the most valuable benefit of SEATrails membership is the organization’s extensive marketing reach to potential travelers. A community may find SEATrails’ ability to procure resources for trail development a primary benefit. A potential adventure traveler is likely to need thorough, accurate information about attractions, transportation, and accommodations.

## Niches for SEATrails

### Primary Niche Market

While there are many potential markets for SEATrails to pursue, two markets present the greatest opportunity in terms of potential usage of the trail system and economic impacts for communities and local businesses:

- Independent travelers. SEATrails should target visitors that express interest in outdoor recreational opportunities like hiking, kayaking, biking, skiing, and/or diving. Some of these visitors may be seeking a wilderness experience, while others may prefer “soft adventure” (which combines the opportunity to experience outdoor recreation with comforts like nice accommodations and dining).
- Package adventure travel. As with independent travel, tour operators can package a wide array of experiences ranging from extended, wilderness camping trips to more luxurious travel experiences based in lodges and B & B’s.

These two markets are the most likely to utilize local accommodations and guides, rent or purchase outdoor gear, and require transportation support such as rental cars, flights, and/or ferry rides.

### Secondary Niche Market

Regional residents represent an important secondary market because of their proximity, interest in regional recreation, and familiarity with the unique challenges and opportunities associated with

Southeast travel. As with visitors, there is a wide range of interests among residents in terms of “hard” or “soft” adventure. The economic impacts associated with intra-regional travel are beneficial for regional communities and businesses providing services; however, this market does not bring new economic stimulation to the region.

## **National Scenic Byway Opportunities**

Alaska established a Scenic Byways program in 1993. Administered by the Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities, the program recognizes routes that feature scenic areas, cultural riches and recreational resources. The program begins at the local level, with formation of a grass-roots byway organization. Once the byway organization receives scenic byway designation by the state, the route becomes eligible for grant funding to enhance and promote the byway’s special qualities.

The Alaska Marine Highway has achieved status as an “All American Road” in the National Scenic Byway program. As an eligible non-profit organization, SEATrails can apply for grants that support the goals of the Alaska Marine Highway Scenic Byway Interpretive Plan. (An example is the community map project currently underway, which will provide detail about the cultural, recreational, scenic and historical values along the Alaska Marine Highway route in Southeast Alaska.)

The National Scenic Byways program, administered by the Federal Highway Administration, offers grants for the development and marketing of designated scenic byways. The eight grant categories are briefly described below.

1. State and Tribal Programs: an activity related to the planning, design, or development of a State scenic byway program.
2. Corridor Management Plan: development and implementation of a corridor management plan to maintain the scenic, historical, recreational, cultural, natural, and archeological characteristics of the byway, while providing for increased tourism and related amenities.
3. Safety Improvements: safety improvements needed to accommodate increased traffic and changes in the types of traffic resulting from the byway designation.
4. Byway Facilities: construction of pedestrian and bicycle facilities, rest areas, turnouts, highway shoulder improvements, overlooks, or interpretive facilities.
5. Access to Recreation: enhanced access to recreational resources such as trailheads.
6. Resource Protection: protection of scenic, historical, recreational, cultural, natural, and archeological resources adjacent to a byway.
7. Interpretive Information: development of tourist information including interpretive information about the byway.
8. Marketing Program: development and implementation of byway marketing programs.



# Sustainability Strategy

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This section includes a discussion of a sustainable funding strategy, partnership and underwriting opportunities, and unique services and opportunities provided by the partners.

## Sustainable Funding Strategy

Funding is needed for a variety of SEATrails activities including:

- Continued trail system development and maintenance;
- Marketing of the trail system to residents and visitors; and
- Ongoing communication with a variety of target audiences such as SEATrails communities, land management agencies, funding agencies, and local trail organizations.

To ensure financial sustainability while accomplishing its goals, SEATrails will need a combination of earned income and grant funding. As the trail system matures—in terms of product development and market awareness—it will become more feasible to establish an endowment that can partially or wholly support ongoing activities. Each of these concepts is briefly described below.

### Earned Income

Long-term sustainability for the trail system will be most achievable if SEATrails can develop sources of unrestricted revenues. Unrestricted revenues are those that are not tied to particular grant performance requirements, and are typically “earned” through fundraising or other business activities. Specific recommendations regarding earned income are discussed further in the Business Plan chapter.

### Grants

Especially in the early stages of implementing the *Business and Marketing Plan*, SEATrails will need to pursue grants. Sources may include regional communities, state and federal agencies, and foundations. It is important to ensure that grants are compatible with the core purpose and mission of SEATrails, rather than expanding the mission just to access a specific source of funds.

SEATrails should continue to refine its grant strategy, possibly with the help of professional grant writers and planners. Professional assistance can help to overcome the inherent challenges faced by small, new organizations of gathering the information necessary to demonstrate the specific types of impacts being sought by each new funding source.

### Endowment

An endowment is a potential future source of operational funding to support the regional trail system. Successful endowment efforts are most likely to be achieved by established, well-known organizations

that have had a chance to develop broad-based constituencies, including those with the capacity to make significant matching contributions.

Many factors affect the rate of return on an endowment. Typically, well-managed endowments are able to contribute approximately a 5 percent return on the invested funds (after inflation-proofing, reinvestment for growth, and costs for fund management). For example, SEATrails would require an endowment of approximately \$1.8 million to generate \$90,000 in annual operating funds.

## Supporting Structure

Since 2000, the agencies and volunteers involved in SEATrails have accomplished a considerable amount of work including inventorying regional recreational and cultural features, securing participation and endorsement from 19 regional communities, forming a non-profit organization and Board of Directors, completing the *SEATrails Trails and Transportation Master Plan (TTMP)*, and developing the SEATrails website.

Partnering agencies include Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development; US Forest Service; Federal Highway Administration – Western Federal Lands; and Alaska Marine Highway System.

The 19 SEATrails member communities are Angoon, Coffman Cove, Craig, Gustavus, Haines, Hoonah, Hydaburg, Juneau, Kake, Ketchikan, Naukati, Pelican, Petersburg, Sitka, Skagway, Thorne Bay, Whale Pass, Wrangell and Yakutat.

SEATrails has also garnered support from a growing coalition of public and private sector partner including: Department of Transportation and Public Facilities; Inter-Island Ferry Authority (IFA); Alaska Department of Natural Resources; Bureau of Indian Affairs; National Park Service (Rivers, Trails and Conservation Assistance Program); Southeast Conference; local trail groups (Sitka Trail Works, Juneau Trail Mix, Ketchikan Outdoor Recreation and Trails Coalition) and others.

### **Non-Profit Dedicated to Trail System Support**

In 2003, a 501(c)3 non-profit organization was created to facilitate the construction, maintenance, and promotion of the SEATrails system. The non-profit has become an important mechanism for implementing the extensive amount of footwork, communication, and planning needed to support the trail system.

The organization is governed by a nine-member board of directors. The agencies and volunteers involved in SEATrails have accomplished a considerable amount of work, including:

**Organizing:** SEATrails formed a non-profit entity, established by-laws, formed a board of directors and secured an AmeriCorps VISTA volunteer.

**Partnering:** SEATrails secured participation from 19 communities and endorsement from multiple federal, state and local agencies.

**Planning:** SEATrails inventoried regional recreational and cultural features, completed the Trails and Transportation Master Plan (TTMP) and developed a business and marketing plan (this document).

**Promoting:** SEATrails developed a regional trail map, developed and implemented an interactive website complete with community information and downloadable trail maps, and developed and distributed a rack card.

**Maintaining and constructing:** SEATrails secured funding and awarded trail grants to 10 communities and enabled the first design and installation of a SEATrails trailhead kiosk. SEATrails awarded more than \$119,000 in grants in 2004 and is following up in 2008 with a second round of grants.

In 2008, SEATrails will be producing community maps (subsets of their regional trail map) thanks to the award of a National Scenic Byways grant. These community maps will provide a greater level of detail about the cultural, recreational, scenic and historical values along Alaska's Marine Highway System All-American Road in Southeast Alaska. Project partners include the U.S. Forest Service, National Park Service (RTCA Program), and the Alaska Department of Commerce, Community and Economic Development and Public Facilities. Carson Dorn, Inc. is managing the project.

## **Unique Services and Opportunities from Partners**

Four organizations have demonstrated their commitment to SEATrails through a commitment of staff support, financial support, and/or program support. Each of these organizations has unique assets that can be further leveraged as the regional trail system is developed.

**Federal Highway Administration – Western Federal Lands.** The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) has provided staff support and technical assistance for SEATrails. In addition, the agency manages several programs that offer grants that SEATrails can pursue. FHWA provides funding for the National Recreational Trails Act Program. Established in 1991, this act directs the US Secretary of Transportation to allocate money to the states for providing and maintaining recreational trails. In Alaska, this program provides reimbursable, matching funds to develop and maintain recreational trails and trail-related activities for both motorized and non-motorized trail uses. (While funded through FHWA, the program is not limited to trails or trailheads located along the state highway system.) The National Scenic Byway program is funded through FHWA; in turn, this program helps support the State of Alaska Scenic Byway program. FHWA also manages a discretionary grant program. Eligible projects include transportation projects that are within, adjacent to, or provide access to Federal lands or facilities.

**State of Alaska, Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development.** The Office of Economic Development has provided staff and administrative support to SEATrails. Additionally, the department coordinates ongoing visitor research programs, management of the Alaska tourism marketing contract, *AlaskaHost* customer service training program, Developing Alaska Rural Tourism, Tourism Business Mentorship Program, the Tok Public Lands Information Center and the Alaska Film Program.

**Alaska Marine Highway System.** The State-operated ferry system provides a critical transportation link throughout the Southeast Alaska region. Because of its status as an All American Road in the National Scenic Byway program, SEATrails has been able to access grant funds that benefit the Alaska Marine Highway, local communities, and the regional trail system. Additionally, the ferry system has the unique ability to partner with SEATrails via its extensive marketing program and access to the independent visitors while they travel through the region.

**United States Forest Service.** The US Forest Service offers many avenues for SEATrails to provide information to current and prospective visitors including the regional Forest Service cabins, interpretive information provided onboard the Alaska Marine Highway and at numerous regional attractions, and through direct contact with many residents and visitors that contact the agency for permits and information. Additionally, the agency has offered administrative and planning support for the regional trail system and non-profit.

## **Other Partnership and Underwriting Opportunities**

The Southeast Alaska region is fortunate to have a number of community and regional transportation providers, destination marketing organizations, and public agencies that can help SEATrails fulfill its mission. Types of support from these organizations may include distribution of SEATrails information to residents and visitors; trail development and maintenance; and access to grants and donations.

Current and potential SEATrails supporters include:

- **Transportation Providers.** SEATrails has engaged regional transportation providers including Alaska Marine Highway System, Inter-Island Ferry Authority, and Alaska Airlines. As the Business and Marketing Plan is implemented, intra-regional transportation providers will be encouraged to participate in the program. In addition to providing essential access into and around the region, the wide array of transportation companies and agencies offer potential partnering opportunities for marketing and revenue generation.
- **State and Federal Public Agencies.** Numerous additional public agencies can provide information to the public via websites, publications, public information offices, and other resources. The array of organizations providing services and information is extensive and includes: National Park Service, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Alaska Department of Natural Resources (which houses the Alaska Division of Parks & Outdoor Recreation and the *Alaska Trails Initiative*), and Alaska Department of Transportation & Public Facilities.
- **Convention & Visitor Bureaus and Chamber(s) of Commerce.** Many communities in the region have one or both organizations. These organizations typically provide travel planning information to travelers through their websites, brochures, visitor information centers, and personal interaction with potential and actual travelers.

- **Statewide and Regional Destination Marketing Organizations.** The Alaska Travel Industry Association and the Southeast Alaska Tourism Council are non-profit organizations with a primary mission of marketing Alaska to visitors.
- **Local and Statewide Trail Organizations.** Formal (and ad hoc) trail development and advocacy groups exist in many SEATrails communities. Additionally, the statewide organization Alaska Trails is an excellent model and partner for trail-related communication, advocacy, and education. These organizations can provide valuable support for SEATrails trail development and communication regarding local trail conditions or user group conflicts.

A list of key organizations and contact information is provided at the end of the plan.



# Implementation Strategy

Implementation of this plan will give SEATrails the financial resources and the communication network needed to increase usage of the trail network, provide for continued trail system development, and stimulate the regional economy.

## Business Plan

The following recommendations are grouped into immediate, mid-term, and long-term action items according to their urgency, revenue development potential, and anticipated time for program implementation.

### Immediate Actions

#### SEATrails Membership Campaign

Nurturing an enthusiastic, committed membership is the single most important step SEATrails can take to ensure future sustainability of the trail system. The current SEATrails membership program includes tiers that are comparable with similar trail membership programs (categories are outlined in the table below). This business plan recommends systematic expansion of the membership base.

**Current SEATrails Membership Levels**

Description	Cost
Individual/family	\$25
Non-profit organization	100
Public agency	200
Business/corporation	250
Lifetime	500
Patron	2,000

Recommended actions:

- Design a membership form that can fit into a brochure stand. When appropriate, display membership forms in partner offices and information centers. Make a personal request for support when speaking to regional residents, the business community, travel industry providers, and trail volunteers.
- Explore creative ways to include visitors in the Individual/Family membership level. For example, ask for support from regional outfitters and guides to help build the membership from employee ranks and guests. Ask for support from private and public campground hosts, public land information centers, and community visitor centers in distributing information about SEATrails and the benefits of membership.

- Consider development of a Marketing Partner classification or an option to request marketing information. This could allow SEATrails to differentiate general supporters from those businesses, agencies, and non-profit organizations that want to receive communication from SEATrails about marketing opportunities.
- Develop a tiered approach to community participation in the program. Financial contributions are not a requirement for community participation; however, SEATrails recognizes that communities are the primary beneficiaries of the SEATrails program. Further, there are direct program costs associated with recruitment of new communities, maps and website content updates, and development of other marketing materials that reflect the unique attributes of each community. Suggested contribution is \$2,500 annually.

SEATrails can become a more effective regional trail system if communities are encouraged to explicitly recognize the value they receive. At this second tier, communities may gain inclusion in, or fee reductions for, specific SEATrails marketing programs, events, website features, and other program elements in exchange for formalizing their support. Revenue potential will grow as SEATrails' communication network expands, adds to its list of accomplishments, and the membership program becomes a fully developed campaign.

### **Solicit Donations**

SEATrails should continue to solicit donations or bequests from supporters for ongoing activities, a specific project, or directly to the SEATrails Endowment. This option is currently integrated into the website and membership form. The request should be incorporated into all SEATrails communications efforts including formal presentations and meetings.

### **Mid-Term Actions**

The following revenue generation actions have been grouped into the mid-term activities. While they require a commitment from SEATrails for communication and planning, they are contingent on existing programs and organizations.

### **Pursue Portion of Public Trail Fees**

In return for their contributions to trail monitoring, public education and other services, organizations similar to SEATrails have successfully negotiated a portion of the commercial user trail fees collected by public land managers, including the US Forest Service, National Park Service, State Parks, and municipal governments. Fee structures, and applicable uses of the funds, vary considerable depending on the agency and location. Given the large volume of commercial trail usage in Southeast Alaska, there is potential to provide a meaningful supplement to SEATrails income.

Program development time includes an estimated 25 to 40 hours to develop a case statement and arrange meetings with public officials. Program implementation time, if agreements are successfully negotiated, is anticipated to be minor. It could include annual reports of SEATrails activities, updated visitor and traffic indicators, or specific accounting for activities made possible by trail fees.

## **Gaming**

Under Alaska law, certain non-profit organizations are eligible to receive a portion of proceeds earned by gaming activities. Entities that conduct gaming are only allowed to retain a certain portion of their earnings. To become eligible, an entity must be incorporated, be an IRS determined non-profit, and must complete a State of Alaska permittee application.

If approved, SEATrails could conduct raffles, bingo and other forms of gaming (such as the Tanana River Ice Classic). All of the self-directed activities (raffle, bingo etc. take significant amounts of time to organize and conduct. There are extensive reporting requirements for all gaming activities that best completed by an accountant (or a person with basic accounting skills). If SEATrails were to organize a raffle, they could expect profits in the range of \$5,000 to \$20,000.

Alternatively, SEATrails may contract with a vendor or operator to conduct pull-tab sales on their behalf. Permittees must find a gaming vendor or operator willing to contract with their organization. There are a limited number of operators and vendors and the process is somewhat competitive. Income for a permittee who works through an operator to sell pull-tabs can vary greatly, but can range from \$5,000 to \$40,000 annually.

Gaming regulations can be found online on the State of Alaska website, Tax Division (<http://www.tax.alaska.gov/programs>).

If SEATrails seeks a contract with a pull-tour operator, program development time includes an estimated 40 to 60 hours to complete the application process, and identify a vendor willing to contract with a new non-profit organization. Program implementation time is estimated at 80 to 100 hours annually to complete quarterly and annual reports required by the State of Alaska.

## **Permanent Fund Application**

The Alaska Legislature is considering allowing a “check-off box” on the Permanent Fund Application that would allow online applicants to donate directly to non-profit organizations. Coinciding with this new option, the Alaska Giving Coalition will be conducting a statewide, multi-year educational program to encourage charitable donations by Alaska residents. SEATrails should monitor development of the program and ensure that it is listed in the online form. More information on the Alaska Giving Coalition can be found on the Foraker Group website: [www.forakergroup.org](http://www.forakergroup.org).

If this new program is approved, development time is estimated to be less than 10 hours to monitor the situation and complete applications. Program implementation time would be minimal.

## **Long-Term Actions**

### **Map Sales**

SEATrails has been encouraged by the Alaska Marine Highway and other organizations to produce maps that can be resold by regional retailers. Grant requirements preclude SEATrails from selling maps developed with the 2007 Scenic Byway grant. However, SEATrails will have considerable efficiencies in staff time and design costs when the next generation of maps is produced.

Producing maps and other products for resale also has advantages over other revenue generating concepts. Retailers have an incentive to promote the product (since they stand to earn a percentage). They also become advocates of the organization and its mission.

Suggested potential retail locations include private retail and tour companies, public agencies, transportation providers, Chamber(s) of Commerce, and marketing organizations. Maps could also be sold through the SEATrails website. Maps for online distribution need to be available in October for them to be useful to the largest potential audience. Maps for local distribution should be available by March.

The wholesale price would need to include the production cost, distribution cost, and a profit for SEATrails. Cost-effective printing and commitment from the retail community are critical to the success of this concept. SEATrails would need to examine printing and shipping options and competitive map prices before setting the exact retail and wholesale price; however, the price would likely range from \$12 to \$15. Revenue potential for 5,000 maps, at \$3 profit for SEATrails, would net \$15,000.

Program development time includes an estimated 120 to 150 hours to develop relationships with retailers, contact printers for bids, monitor printing process, distribute maps, and invoice project participants. Once the maps are produced and distributed, program implementation time associated with invoicing, shipping, and other accounting tasks is estimated to be less than 10 hours per month.

### **SEATrails Book**

The website content can be fairly easily modified and incorporated into a SEATrails book that can be sold on the website and sold wholesale to other retailers and partners like the Alaska Marine Highway. (Adobe Go Live was suggested as an option for converting the format.) Supplemental income could be generated by including advertising by communities and marketing partners. Publication costs will vary with design, printing, quantity, and distribution costs.

Estimated development costs range from \$800 to \$1,500, which could be offset by advertising. Gross revenue potential for 500 books, assuming SEATrails retained \$8 of the sale price, is \$4,000.

Program development time includes an estimated 160 to 180 hours to develop relationships with retailers, refine content to a book format, contact printers for bids, monitor printing process, distribute books, and invoice project participants. Once the books are produced and distributed, program implementation time associated with invoicing, shipping, and other accounting tasks is estimated to be less than 10 hours per month.

### **Other Retail Sales**

SEATrails currently offers merchandise on a made-to-order basis on the website. With increased exposure for the organization and the website, demand is likely to increase. To make a retail program more financially rewarding, SEATrails should develop one or two signature items and act as a wholesale distributor. SEATrails may want to select items that reinforce outdoor recreation like a water bottle, baseball cap, or visor. Additionally, the inclusion of the word "Alaska" may make the product more appealing to visitors. Critical elements of this approach are targeting volume sales and controlling risk. SEATrails does not want to outlay a lot of cash and retain inventory.

Costs and revenue potential will vary considerably with volume and merchandise selection. It is recommended that SEATrails investigate this concept in conjunction with development of a map or book sale program, as the organization will be developing critical relationships with retailers.

## **Marketing Strategy**

The following recommendations are grouped into immediate, mid-term, and long-term action items according to their urgency, potential for leveraging support from partners, and anticipated cost for implementation.

### **Immediate Strategies**

**Strategy: Increase exposure generated by state, regional, and community marketing programs.**

- Where possible, secure reciprocal memberships with destination marketing organizations (Convention and Visitor Bureaus and Chambers of Commerce). Complete membership applications immediately, so SEATrails contact information will be included in 2008 marketing materials such as brochures and websites.
  - Reciprocal membership benefits will vary, depending on the overall marketing program and policies of each organization. In some cases, reciprocal membership will allow access to tour operator familiarization tours, press trips, research, brochure distribution, convention delegate packets, newsletters, and usage of photos.
- Purchase Marketing Partner membership in the Alaska Travel Industry Association. This membership will provide access to Alaska Travel Industry Association-sponsored travel writers, tour operators on familiarization trips, and inclusion in Alaska Travel Industry Association website (1.2 million monthly page views in 2007) and future brochures (450,000 copies annually).

**Strategy: Increase published information about SEATrails in visitor guides, brochures, and websites.**

- Develop a SEATrails article in several different lengths that can be utilized in marketing partners' promotional materials. Suggested lengths include a paragraph, a half-page, and a full-page.
- Offer editorial assistance to adapt the content to each specific marketing partner.
- In addition to marketing materials produced by Convention & Visitor Bureaus and Chambers, contact editorial staff at privately-produced visitor guides like those published by local newspapers and private guidebooks (*Sitka Through Four Seasons*, for example).
- Offer high-quality images (downloadable, high-resolution).
- Encourage inclusion of SEATrails logo and website address alongside editorial content.

**Strategy: Increase SEATrails information in printed schedules and other materials developed by regional transportation providers.**

- Collaborate with Alaska Marine Highway marketing staff to increase SEATrails editorial content in published schedules, website, and other appropriate marketing materials. Include SEATrails logo, compelling text, and website links. (Note: AMHS is recognized for having the only prominent linkage to SEATrails at the onset of this project.)
- Request usage of SEATrails information in marketing materials produced by other transportation providers like Alaska Airlines, intra-regional air carriers, Inter-Island Ferry Authority, and privately-operated passenger ferries.

**Strategy: Increase SEATrails information in materials published by public land managers and agencies.**

- Where possible, provide SEATrails information and website links from State Parks, National Park Service, US Forest Service, and other public land agencies.
- Place SEATrails editorial and linkages on municipal website pages relevant to prospective travelers such as pages with maps, local trail information, parks and recreation, and harbors.

**Strategy: Increase magazine and newspaper articles about SEATrails and trail-oriented recreational opportunities.**

- Serve as a centralized media contact for marketing partners. Recognize that marketing organizations are compelled to respond to the media's interests. Secondly, they try to provide exposure opportunities to their members and partners.
- Maintain an inventory of high-quality and engaging images for use by travel media. (Because some authors and editors prefer unique images, SEATrails may want to reserve some images for exclusive media usage.)
- Offer sample stories and itineraries that feature SEATrails communities, trails and activities. Information can also be incorporated into a CD-based media kit and/or posted online.
- Pitch stories directly to specifically targeted editors, authors, and photographers that share SEATrails' passion for adventure travel. Consider editorial content and reader demographics when targeting media.
  - Frequently published Alaska writers include Nick Jans, Mark Kelley, Scott Foster, Melissa Devaughn. Regional contacts include Sarah Eppenbach and Stanton Patty. Marketing partners like Convention & Visitor Bureaus can help facilitate communication with these journalists.
  - Recommended publications include Alaska Airlines in-flight magazine, National Geographic Adventurer, Outside Magazine, and publications that feature kayaking, hiking, skiing, scuba diving, and biking.

- Be aware that many publications plan major content far in advance. Calendars showing feature articles are often included with advertising materials.
- Submit information about significant regional festivals and events, along with SEATrails and community contact information.

**Strategy: Increase website appeal and usability.**

- Update website to include Hoonah and Yakutat content.
- Continue to develop and refine sample itineraries as communities and travel experiences change, as they help prospective visitors envision their own trip.
- Include visitor testimonials in key places throughout the website. They add credibility and can help frame itinerary ideas.
- Measure website usage, including page views, “bounce rate” (number of people that visit the home page and leave immediately), and other analytics.

**Strategy: Leverage marketing partner presence at consumer and trade shows.**

- Distribute a rack-sized brochure that attracts prospective visitors to visit the website. Seek distribution of brochures from marketing partners.
  - Alaska Marine Highway System participates in numerous consumer and trade shows each winter. Several trade shows are a particularly good fit for SEATrails, including the Seattle Bicycle Show and the Long Beach Adventure Show.
- Package marketing partner brochures into a single poly-bag with a SEATrails insert. Brand the package (possibly the SEATrails Adventure Travel Kit). The costs of bagging, printing, and shipping materials can be offset by a nominal fee collected from each participant.
- Offer adventure travel and trail images for marketing partners’ use in trade booths and other displays. (Costs associated with enlargement/backing would fall to marketing partner.)
- In advance of trade shows, brief destination marketing, transportation, and tour operator sales staff about SEATrails, the website, and outdoor recreational opportunities in general. To some extent, these individuals can act as an informal extension of SEATrails staff.

**Strategy: Increase SEATrails awareness among community and business leaders.**

- Seek opportunities to present SEATrails at Chamber, Convention & Visitor Bureaus, municipal leaders, and trail organizations.
- Provide regular updates about major accomplishments and activities in a format that can be incorporated into newsletters. (Examples include availability of trail grants, acquisition of major donations and grants, and receipt of awards or recognition.)

**Strategy: Request promotional support and website links from trail networks and clubs.**

- Request that a link to the SEATrails website be added to the websites of major trail networks such as Pacific Crest Trail Association ([www.pcta.org](http://www.pcta.org)) and the Appalachian Trail Conservancy ([www.appalachiantrail.org](http://www.appalachiantrail.org)).
- Pursue website links on nationwide trail and adventure-oriented websites such as [www.trailresource.com](http://www.trailresource.com), [www.trailresources.com](http://www.trailresources.com) (second website is plural), [www.gorp.com](http://www.gorp.com), and [www.backpacker.com](http://www.backpacker.com).
- Pursue website links on local trail and activity websites such as the Juneau Freewheelers Bicycle Club, Juneau Alpine Club, Sitka Trail Works, etc.
- Pursue a website link with the Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association (AWRTA).

**Mid-Term Strategies**

**Strategy: Continue website enhancement and redevelopment.**

- Optimize the website's performance on search engines.
- Introduce interactive features such as trail reviews, blogs and online forums.
- Expand and update the trail search feature.
- Add links to trail-oriented sounds, web-cams, and 360 degree tours.
- Add option to sign up for an electronic newsletter.
- Consider incorporating Geo-Cache program (GPS-based scavenger hunt). Partner with schools, educational foundations, or trail organizations to develop the program.
- Feature links to marketing partners that offer adventure travel packages.
  - For example, the Anchorage Convention & Visitors Bureau prominently features links to specials, packages, and events on every page of their website ([www.Anchorage.net](http://www.Anchorage.net)). Similarly, the official Alaska travel website ([www.travelalaska.com](http://www.travelalaska.com)) has a travel package search featured on the home page.

**Strategy: Develop an electronic newsletter.**

- A quarterly newsletter should be sent to members, marketing partners, and potential travelers.

**Strategy: Reinforce the SEATrails brand wherever possible.**

- Reinforce the regional network concept where possible with trail signage and visitor information.
- Reinforce the SEATrails brand with consistent presentation of information and design.

**Strategy: Capture ongoing feedback from target markets.**

- Collect information from a cross section of users to identify what is working in terms of trip planning and the actual visitor experience.
  - Techniques may include a combination of intercept surveys, online surveys, and informal interviews.
- As needed, modify SEATrails marketing materials and other communication to reflect visitors' information needs.

**Strategy: Solicit partners to develop a biennial SEATrails conference.**

- Brand the conference as a SEATrails event.
- Solicit planning assistance from host communities and land management agencies. Rotate locations to share event planning responsibilities as well as economic and marketing benefits.
- Attract private businesses and marketing organization participation by attracting national publications whose audience includes adventure travelers. (Examples include Outside Magazine, Gorp, and National Geographic Adventurer.)
- Attract public land managers and trail development organizations by incorporating sessions on trail development and maintenance.

**Strategy: Create a photo contest.**

- Secure SEATrails-oriented travel prizes from marketing partners to increase participation.
- Solicit media coverage for SEATrails and the contest by publicizing the contest launch and selection of the winners.
- Incorporate selected photos into SEATrails image collection.

**Long-Term Strategies**

**Strategy: Secure advertising placements in selected print and online publications.**

- Where possible, coordinate advertising placement when feature articles include Alaska or adventure travel.
- Increase exposure of SEATrails website through paid advertising placements
- Commit staff or contractor time to search optimization. This continual refinement of the website can result in significantly better placement during online searches.

**Strategy: Attend targeted trade and consumer shows.**

- Personally represent SEATrails at targeted adventure travel shows.
- Increase exposure (and reduce costs) by sharing trade show booth costs with marketing partner organizations like Alaska Travel Industry Association, Convention and Visitor Bureaus, or transportation providers.

**Strategy: Develop a professional media development strategy.**

- Consider participation in Alaska Travel Industry Association Media Road Show, which provides opportunity for face-to-face meetings with qualified travel media.
- Contract for professional media support with a public relations firm that specializes in Alaska or adventure travel media.
- Consider partnering with Southeast Alaska Tourism Council, which previously had a media program dedicated to increasing independent travel.

## **Website and Index Map Recommendations**

### **Website**

The SEATrails website content and format was updated during development of the SEATrails Business and Marketing Plan, based on input from the project team and supporting research conducted on travel-related websites. Several additional website recommendations are reflected in the Implementation Strategy.

Immediate actions include development of Hoonah and Yakutat content, continued refinement of sample itineraries, placement of visitor testimonials, and measurement of website usage. Mid-term development strategies for the website include development of interactive features such as trail reviews, blogs, and online forums; expansion of the trail search feature; and use of features like sound and web-cams.

### **Index Map**

SEATrails is currently engaged in project to update and produce community maps, which will be subsets of the regional index map. (This project was funded by a National Scenic Byways grant.) Through this project, map content can be developed for the two new communities of Hoonah and Yakutat.

Additionally, the study team recommends periodically reviewing the selected trails with each SEATrails community to ensure that the trail condition, difficulty rating, and description is accurate. Further, this reinforces the concept of local control and support of the SEATrails nomination process.

SEATrails should formalize the usage rights for the regional and community maps. As SEATrails expands the visibility of the regional trail program and information, there will likely be requests from communities, tour operators, and other businesses to reproduce the maps in other marketing materials.

# Contact Information

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