

SUBJECT: WILDLIFE VIEWING

Introduction

Thank you so much for the opportunity to join you today at your annual conference. I am delighted to be able to spend a few minutes of your busy schedules to talk about the value of wildlife viewing to tourism in Alaska. A substantial part of the tourism industry within Alaska depends upon the wildlife resource in the state. As most of you know, Alaska's wildlife resources are the best the nation has to offer. Unfortunately, Alaska lags far behind many other states in marketing and capitalizing on its wildlife resources.

According to the USFS, over 400 species of birds and 100 species of mammals are known to occur in the state. Alaska also hosts over 1 million visitors annually. Many of the visitors to the state are drawn by the variety of recreational opportunities and activities that depend upon our wildlife resource. Wildlife viewing provides opportunities for tourism in all parts of the state:

Southcentral and Southeast: deer, bears, bald eagles, owls, woodpeckers, flying squirrels, whales, seals, sea lions, sea otters, puffins, murrelets, etc.

Interior: moose, wolves, bears, dall sheep, caribou, ptarmigan golden eagles, woodpeckers, hawks and owls, swans, ducks, beaver, swallows, etc.

West and Far North (Tundra Zone): caribou, musk ox, brown bears, foxes, swans, loons, jaegers, snowy owls, wolves, plovers, etc.

Benefits

The social and economic benefits of our wildlife resource are shared by residents as well as visitors.

Social Benefits: Wildlife and wilderness areas are central to the quality of life and social identity of our residents.

Economic Benefits: Tourism is a sustainable economic use of our wildlife viewing resources and provides economic opportunities for residents in urban and rural areas.

According to a study conducted by Suzanne Miller and Daniel McCollum in 1997, visitors who come to Alaska primarily to view wildlife spend more money in *more areas* of the state and tend to stay longer. The study also found that visitors and residents are willing to pay for high quality wildlife viewing opportunities and that there is a “consumer surplus” estimated at \$402/visitor that could be captured through the expansion and enhancement of our wildlife viewing opportunities.

Role of the Division of Tourism

The Division understands that conservation of our wildlife resource makes good business sense and can provide economic opportunities in the rural, as well as urban, areas of our state. We also recognize that there are lots of different use groups and levels of interest in wildlife viewing. To optimize the opportunities and visitor experiences of our wildlife resources, the Division is involved in a wide variety of research, coordination and planning efforts.

Improved data collection: The AVSP is currently being revised to address a wider range of interests and perspectives in the development and implementation of the state’s tourism program. The division anticipates the information collected in 2000 will enhance businesses ability to understand the motivation and needs of visitors who come to view wildlife and more effectively market to them. The improved data will also help land managers maximize the benefits of wildlife viewing and minimize the impacts to the resource.

Support private wildlife management efforts: According to information released by AVI, Alaska has more than 44 million acres of land in private ownership, of which more than 95% is prime wildlife habitat. A Private Land Management Program is being successfully implemented in the states of Colorado and California, where incentives are provided to landowners to manage their wildland for the benefit of wildlife. As a result of the program, those states have enjoyed a significant increase in wildlife habitat and populations, reducing pressure for activities such as hunting on public lands.

Improved Government Coordination:

- 1) Our division will be participating more actively in other agency planning processes to assure the sustainability of the wildlife and other resources that tourism relies upon and to assure a visitor experience that is second to none. Through our participation in these planning processes we hope to improve coordination between state and federal land managers, and neighboring communities who are able to expand commercial opportunities and create jobs by serving as "Gateway Communities" to these resources.
- 2) Continue to educate local, state and federal agencies of the implications their permitting processes have on tourism opportunities and businesses, and support the development of streamlined permitting processes.
- 3) Provide local governments with the knowledge and tools needed to effectively manage tourism or promote development of tourism in their communities.

Improved planning:

There's no doubt that the growth of tourism has benefited Alaska economically. Unfortunately, there is also little doubt that in a few areas conflicts with residents or adverse impacts to the resource have resulted from the rapid increase in tourism. To assure that there is a long-term, abundant supply of opportunities for visitors, our Division will undertake an aggressive planning program that will seek to "optimize", rather than "maximize," the visitor opportunities and experiences available.

- 1) Regional Planning: Over the next year, we hope to initiate a collaborative planning process that will review existing conditions and opportunities, make realistic development projections and define statewide and regional tourism goals, objectives and implementation strategies. A strong emphasis will be placed upon local and regional needs and priorities. A strong need for a regional plan in southeast has already been expressed is currently in the preliminary stages of discussion.

2) Support the Alaska Wildlife Viewing Initiative: We are working with ADF&G and other federal and state agencies, conservation groups and the visitor industry to develop a plan to expand wildlife viewing access and opportunities throughout the state. Through coordinated planning and development, opportunities exist to develop viewing opportunities that range from remote sites that provide more specialized opportunities for smaller groups, to the more accessible sites that will be visited by larger groups.

4) Another goal of ours will be to identify opportunities and obtain funding for pilot planning projects within the various regions of the state that may serve as models for planning efforts elsewhere. Funding for some of these projects may be available from CARA or through T-21 Enhancement Funds.

Conclusion

The Division understands that proper management and conservation of our wildlife resources makes good business sense. We also recognize that the demand to view our wildlife greatly exceeds the opportunities that are available. Through improved research, coordination and planning we hope to ensure development of a wide range of viewing opportunities that will assure an Alaska visitor experience that is second to none.

I hope that you will not hesitate to contact us with any questions or information or research needs. Thank you again for the opportunity to be here with you today.

IDEAS FOR SLIDES: WILDLIFE VIEWING

Slide 1: The Resource

- Alaska hosts over 1 million visitors annually
- Many visitors are specifically interested in viewing wildlife
- Over 400 species of birds and 100 species of mammals are known to occur throughout the state.

Slide 2: The Benefits (or just do pictures)

- Social
- Economic

Slide 4: Role of the Division

- Research
- Coordination
- Planning
- Marketing

Slide 5: Division Mission

- Create jobs and business opportunities for Alaskans
- Disperse the economic benefit of tourism throughout Alaska and throughout the year
- Assure an Alaska visitor experience that is second to none.