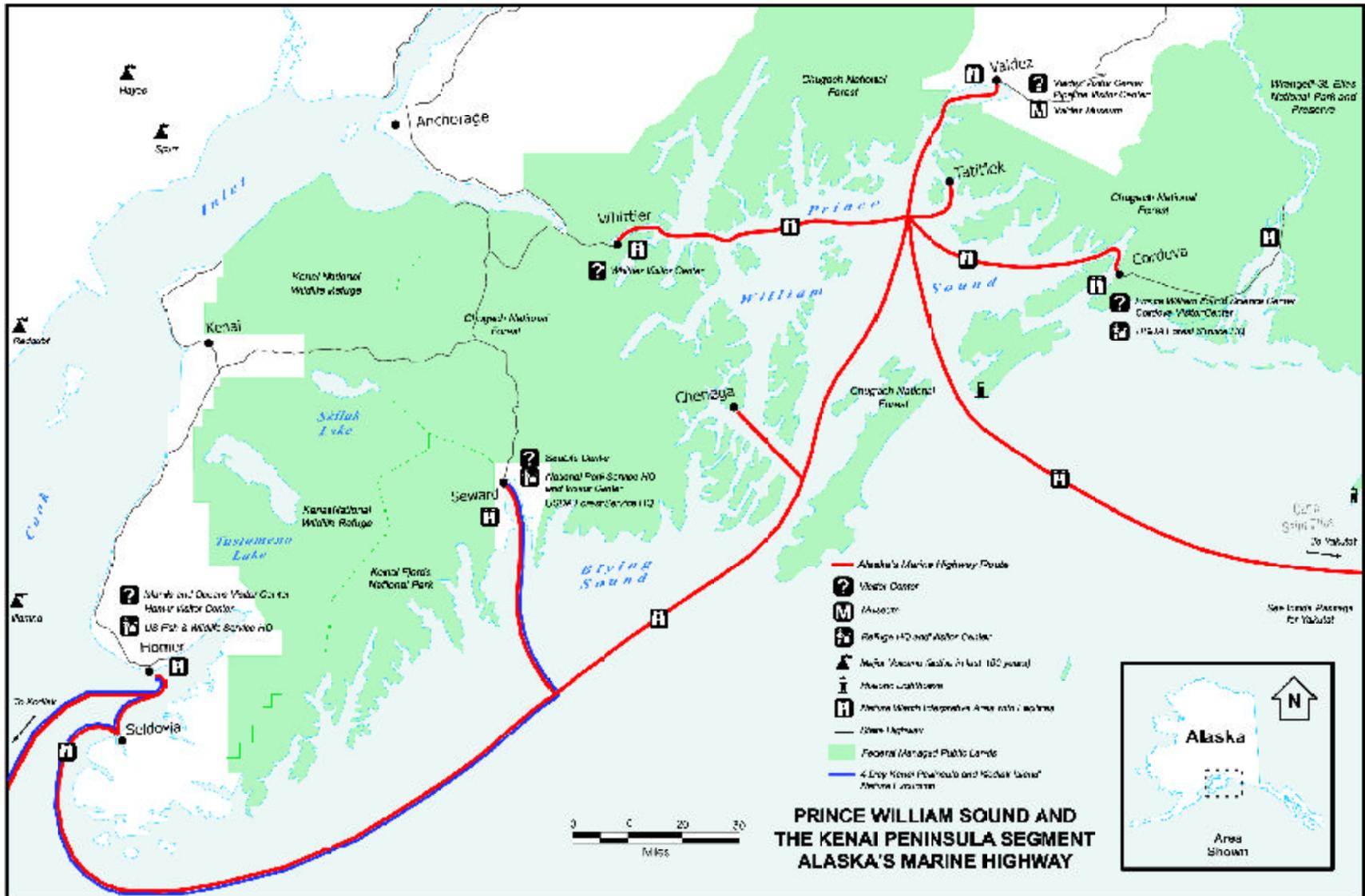


# REGIONAL OVERVIEW

2





## 2

## REGIONAL OVERVIEW

The *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* segment of Alaska's Marine Highway extends from the small community of Yakutat on the Gulf of Alaska, westward along the mountain lined coastline, then into Prince William Sound and along the Kenai Peninsula terminating in Homer. The direct distance is over 825 miles. (Homer falls into both this region and *Kodiak and Aleutians* due to its double role as a terminus for each region. As such it will be discussed here, as well as in the *Kodiak and Aleutian Plan*). This segment serves nine port communities (moving from east to west), Yakutat, Cordova, Tatitlek, Valdez, Whittier, Chenega Bay, Seward, Seldovia and Homer. The *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* segment is linked to both the *Inside Passage* to the east and *Kodiak and Aleutian* to the west and provides important road access to the entire Marine Highway. The following information provides a quick overview of this segment and its communities.

## ACCESS AND SHIP SERVICE

Access to the *Prince William Sound and Kenai Peninsula* segment is either by Marine Highway ship from the *Inside Passage* via the Cross Gulf Route departing Juneau monthly or via land from the main highway access routes at Valdez, Whittier, Seward and Homer. Unlike the other two segments of the Alaska's Marine Highway, nearly half of the communities in this segment have highway links making it the most road accessible region. Additionally, during the summer months, passenger railroad service extends to Whittier and Seward from Anchorage, Denali and Fairbanks on the Alaska Railroad. Air service, at varying levels of frequency, is available at all communities.

The Alaska's Marine Highway ships provide an outstanding way to explore the rugged coast of this segment.



The *M/V Kennicott* provides monthly service from the *Inside Passage* on Cross Gulf sailings to this region calling in at Yakutat, Tatitlek, Valdez and Whittier. The *M/V Tustumena* sails between Chenega Bay, Seward, Seldovia, Homer, and then onto the *Kodiak and Aleutians* segment monthly in the summer. Starting in the summer of 2005 the fast ferry *M/V Chenega* will be brought into service for the Prince William Sound port communities of Whittier, Valdez and Cordova. The *M/V Chenega* is the sister ship to the *M/V Fairweather* and will provide daily service between these communities. This will significantly alter the transportation convenience in this region and open up new ways for residents and visitors to quickly move between these communities. For instance, day trips within the segment will be possible. Once in service, the *M/V Tustumena* will be removed from duty in Prince William Sound and will concentrate on providing sailings to the remaining communities in this segment not served by the *M/V Chenega* as well as the *Kodiak and Aleutians* port communities. This too should improve service to these remaining port communities.

The fast ferry *M/V Chenega* will be the same class of ship as the *M/V Fairweather* (below). It will significantly improve service in this segment.



## STATUS OF COMMUNITIES AND PARTNERS

The communities in this segment, from east to west are: Yakutat, Cordova, Valdez, Tatitlek, Chenega Bay, Whittier, Seward, Seldovia, and Homer. Many of these communities are located within the Chugach National Forest, the second largest National Forest in the country. Each community is briefly reviewed below in order to provide a general summary of the role of the community in the system.

It should be emphasized that as of the writing of this document, Tatitlek and Chenega Bay are in the midst of a community planning exercise to determine the degree they wish to participate in tourism development, byway planning and byway marketing. Given the uncertain nature of their involvement, they are discussed in this plan in a manner emphasizing the options they might pursue if they become involved as byway partners, but with a tone that respects the villages' right and option to remain apart from the byway if they so choose.

**Yakutat** is a 'whistle stop' (i.e., there is no regular service) and the first stop on the Cross Gulf trip to Southcentral by the *M/V Kennicott*. The small community's economy is based on fishing and is known for its expansive black sand beach along **Canon Beach Recreation Area** and thundering surf along the Gulf of Alaska. World class surfing in the autumn draws people from throughout the world to challenge the icy waves along Canon Beach. Remnants of World War II canons still line the beach that protected Alaska from Japanese invasion. The community is known for its subsistence lifestyle with moose, bear and other wildlife being abundant around Yakutat including great fishing opportunities. The **Hubbard Glacier** on Disenchantment Bay is the largest tidewater glacier in North America and is very active year round. Yakutat was home to the Eyak and now the Tlingit people. Daily air service is provided by jet. The community has no upland terminal facilities but does have basic services for visitors.

**Cordova** is a fishing port and historic home to the Alutiiq and Eyaks people. The community is located near the **Copper River Delta** and accessed by the Million Dollar Bridge. The Copper River is home to the famous Copper River Red Salmon and on the migration route for hundreds of species of birds. Each year Cordova hosts the **Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival** in early May where over 5 million birds can be viewed and events include numerous workshops, field trips and special events. In June, the community hosts **Wild Salmon Days** to celebrate the return of all five Pacific salmon species to the area. More can be learned about Cordova's abundant wildlife and the area at the **Prince William Sound Science Center**. The community has numerous recreation opportunities year round including rafting, skiing, heli-skiing, hiking, kayaking, and of course birding and fishing. The terminal in Cordova was renovated in 1998 and is approximately one mile from town. The community provides many visitor services and has daily jet service. The *M/V Chenega* will be home ported in Cordova starting in 2005.

*Hundreds of species of shorebirds can be seen at the Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival that draws 'birders' from throughout the United States and beyond.*



Native culture is found in many communities. The Alutiiq inhabited much of the Kenai Peninsula and Prince William Sound.



**Valdez** is a main access point for travelers into this region as it is connected to the state highway system via the Richardson State Scenic Byway. The area was originally settled for mining and later fish processing and is now the southern terminal for the 800 mile **Trans-Alaska Pipeline** that includes a **Pipeline Visitor Center**. Today the economy is based on oil, shipping, fishing and recreation. Valdez is surrounded by five glaciers, the Chugach Mountains and the **Wrangell St. Elias National Park** providing endless recreation opportunities including wildlife viewing, kayaking, hiking, camping and rafting. Valdez hosts thousands of people each winter who come to backcountry ski and heli-ski the 900 inches of powder snow that falls each year in the surrounding mountains as well as participate or watch the **World Extreme Skiing Championships**. Other winter activities include ample ice climbing and snowmobiling. Valdez is the home to the state's oldest fishing derbies and offers thousands of dollars each year to the winners for both salmon and halibut. Much can be learned about the area and the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake at the **Valdez Museum**. The community is full service and has a new terminal facility including a staging area and terminal building that opened in January 2005.

**Chenega Bay** is a small Alutiiq village of less than 100 residents located on Evans Island in Crab Bay approximately 100 miles from Anchorage. The community was destroyed by the 1964 Good Friday Earthquake and Tsunami in which over half of its residents perished. The community was relocated to its current location and remains a Native community with a subsistence lifestyle and commercial fishing economy. The community provides access to recreation opportunities including hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and spectacular scenery of mountains and glaciers. Chenega Bay is a 'whistle stop' for the Marine Highway with very limited visitor services and docking facilities. Air service is available from this community. This community receives only monthly port calls in the winter.

**Tatitlek** is another small Alutiiq village located between Valdez and Whittier that is a 'whistle stop' for the Marine Highway. Originally called 'Tatikhlel' meaning 'windy place' is a community with a strong subsistence lifestyle and dependence on commercial fishing. The community also has a Russian Orthodox history with its blue onion dome church located in the community. With a population of just over 100 people the community grew after the 1964 earthquake with survivors from Chenega Bay relocating to Tatitlek. The community provides access to many recreation opportunities including hunting, fishing, wildlife viewing and spectacular scenery of mountains and glaciers. New docks and ramps were installed in Tatitlek in 1995 however there is no terminal facility. The community provides very few visitor services but does have air service and a new general store. This community receives only monthly port calls in the winter.

**Whittier**, like Valdez, is also served by state highway via the Portage Glacier Highway and the **Anton Anderson Tunnel**. The tunnel is the longest vehicle tunnel in North America at 2.5 miles and is used by both vehicles and the Alaska Railroad. It provides access to the community from Anchorage. The community was original established as a strategic military facility during World War II at the head of Passage Canal, a deep ice-free fjord surrounded by the Chugach Mountains and the **Leonard and Shakespeare Glaciers**. Numerous recreational opportunities can be found in the surrounding **Chugach National Forest** including hiking, snowmobiling, skiing and camping. Several charter operations provide access to wildlife viewing and fishing. Whittier is actively seeking more interpretation of its resources and of Prince William Sound and is in the planning stages for a new museum to include interpretation of the area's involvement in World War II. Whittier provides many visitor services and will receive a new terminal and dock in 2005/2006. Marine Highway ships do not call in at Whittier from October to April and the terminal is therefore closed in the winter.

**Seward** lies at the end of the Seward Highway, an All-American Road, on the Kenai Peninsula. Seward is a very picturesque community at the head of Resurrection Bay and is a major cruiseship port. It is home to the **Alaska SeaLife Center** an outstanding visitor center that explains Alaska's marine environment. Seward is also the gateway to the **Kenai Fjords National Park**. The Park contains the **Harding Icefield** the largest Icefield entirely in the United States and wonderful opportunities to learn about glaciers, geology and marine ecology. **Resurrection Bay** and the Park are rich with wildlife and outstanding scenery and provide endless recreation opportunities including glacier viewing, fishing, hiking, kayaking and camping. Due to being a major port of call for the cruiseship industry, the community has many visitor services and points of interest for visitors including many galleries and shops. The Marine Highway's Seward terminal is in the Alaska Railroad terminal building in the industrial port and has recently undergone major renovations. The terminal is located two miles from town however a small visitor related center has opened around the community's harbor less than one mile from the terminal and contains many visitor services including tours.

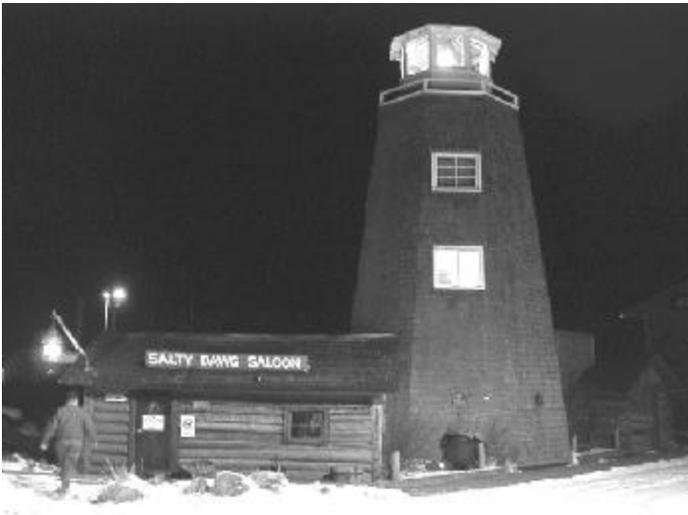
*The SeaLife Center allows visitors to learn about the marine environment of Alaska and take a look at the diverse life in the sea.*



**Seldovia** is a small, historic fishing community east of Homer on the Kenai Peninsula at the mouth of Kachemak Bay. The community of just over 300 residents enjoys a quite lifestyle and was once a boardwalk community until the 1964 earthquake caused the land to settle and much of the low lying portion of the town was flooded. The community maintains its charm including the historic **St. Nicholas Russian Orthodox Church**, boat harbor, several galleries and small shops. The community provides many recreation opportunities including beachcombing, clamming, mountain biking, fishing, kayaking and hiking. Seldovia claims to have the best sunsets in Alaska with brilliant colors of the sun setting over Cook Inlet and the volcano of **Augustine Island**. Alaska's Marine Highway uses the city dock and the City Offices act as a terminal. The community has basic visitor services.

The final community along the *Prince William Sound & Kenai Peninsula* segment of the byway is **Homer**. Homer is the most westerly port of call and lies at the end of the Sterling Highway, a state scenic byway. It has direct road access to Anchorage. It is a quaint fishing and tourist community and popular recreation destination on **Kachemak Bay**. It is well known for world record halibut weighing over 300 pounds. The community is home to the newly opened US Fish and Wildlife Service's **Oceans and Islands Visitors Center**, a state-of-the-art interpretive, educational, & research facility highlighting the **Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge** and the **Kachemak Bay Research Reserve**. The community has a thriving artist community with many galleries and shops. Given the community's location on the popular recreation destination of the Kenai Peninsula and easy highway access to Anchorage, Homer is a staging area for many visitors sailing to *Kodiak and the Aleutians region*. A new terminal was built in 1999, and ships currently dock at the adjacent City dock. Homer has full visitor services.

Once a historic lighthouse on the Homer Spit, the Salty Dawg is now one of Alaska's most famous saloons.



**Other Byway Partners** In addition to the byway communities, there are other key players along this segment of the byway. First are several nearby communities with already-existing strong linkages to this segment of the AMHS route. These places include Anchorage, Soldotna, Kenai, Glennallen, Girdwood and numerous small communities along the Sterling, Seward and Richardson Highways. These places provide services for byway visitors and their attractions can significantly augment the pure ‘water-and-port’ experience that some visitors might have. All visitors should be encouraged to explore these nearby communities in order to lengthen stays and increase in-state expenditures.

Various public land management agencies are critical players in this effort as well. They include the National Park Service (Kenai Fjords National Park, Wrangell St Elias National Park), the U.S. Forest Service (Chugach National Forest), the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (Kenai National Wildlife Refuge, Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge), Alaska Division of State Parks (Kachemak Bay State Park and Chugach State Park) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. These agencies manage many of the resources that visitors are coming to see and experience.

In addition to these entities, the many regional tourism, cultural, economic development and community development agencies across Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula will be significant players and partners in this effort. These organizations include the Prince William Sound Economic Development Council and the Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District. Native and village corporations also play a key role in this region and can strengthen the corridor by becoming byway partners. In addition, there are numerous not-for-profit entities such as museums and educational institutions that are likely to be involved in this byway. Successful implementation of this plan will require actions that are coordinated with these organizations.

*Much of the coastline is comprised of the Coastal Mountain Range with over a hundred glaciers flowing from its valleys.*



