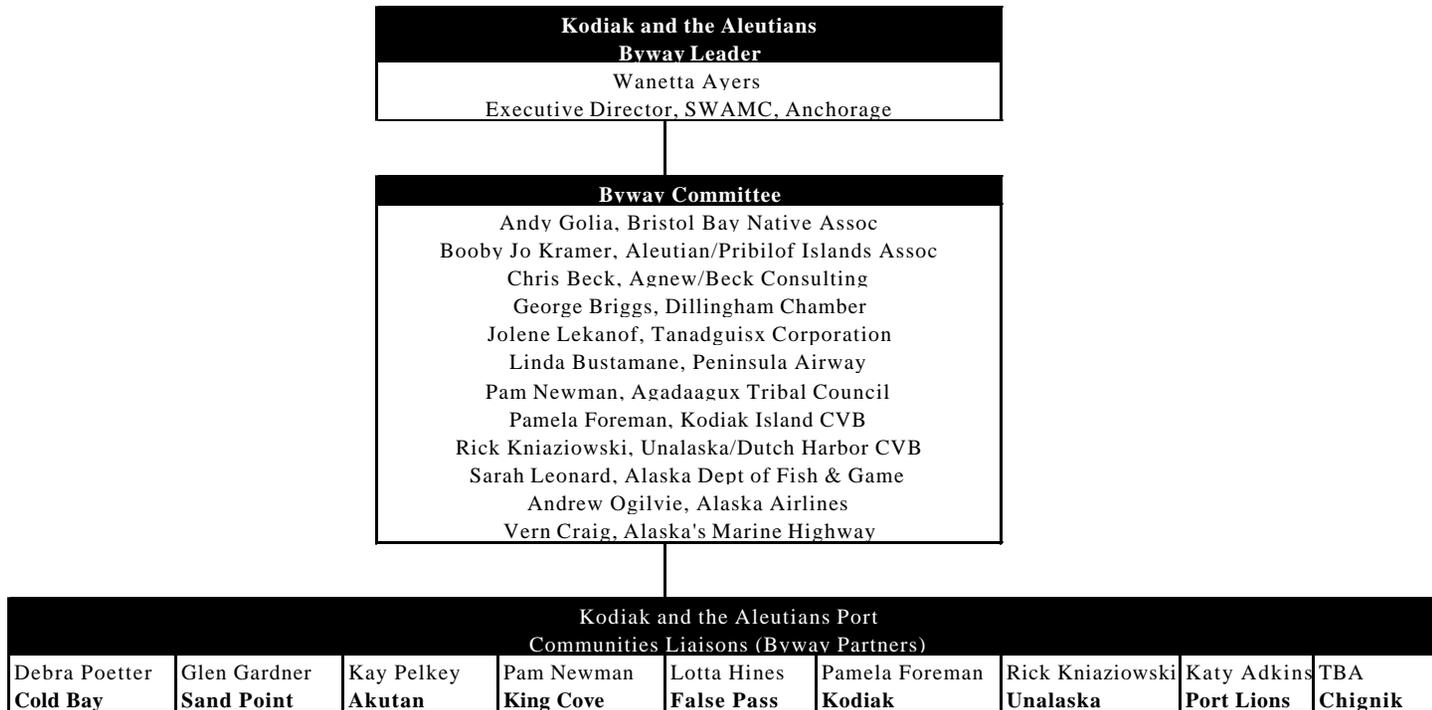


REGION'S CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES



3

KODIAK AND THE ALEUTIANS SEGMENT COMMITTEE



3

REGION'S CHALLENGES & OPPORTUNITIES

Representatives from the various communities along this segment of the byway gathered together for the *Scenic Byway Sail-a-bration* in September 2004 to discuss directions for the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* segment. The following are key ideas generated by the group regarding how their area and the byway as a whole should proceed and function. These ideas form the foundation for many of the recommendations that follow in Section 4, Actions.

When not participating in the on-board US Fish and Wildlife Interpretive Program, passengers can be found on deck photographing the land and oceanscapes as well as abundant wildlife found along this segment.



CHALLENGES: ORGANIZATIONAL ISSUES

A central challenge for this segment — and for the others — is how to organize the byway effort in an efficient way. Most of the individuals who will participate in the byway are already members of many other organizations and have many other commitments. Their work plates are often full to overflowing. How then should the byway — which everyone acknowledges is an important effort — be incorporated into people's schedules? How should it be managed and pushed forward without overburdening participants?

Workshop attendees agree that there needs to be an organization representing the entire byway, as well as an organizational structure for each of the three byway segments. The organizational structure for the individual byway segments should provide opportunities for communities, Native corporations, and other byway partners to participate in policy decisions with the Marine Highway in a manner that allows the organization to operate effectively and make decisions efficiently.

Workshop participants agree that, due to the limited population and large geographical distance between the communities, using an existing organization should be considered. The Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference (SWAMC) is an appropriate organization to lead *the Kodiak and Aleutians* segment of the byway. The SWAMC Tourism Committee will use their local representatives and committee members to be byway representatives. Much of their work, goals and objectives are parallel to the byway program. If needed, an *ad hoc* committee can provide more flexibility on some issues. The communities are already represented by SWAMC, however should additional community members wish to participate, they should be allowed to join the byway committee or provide input to the committee as a stakeholder for *Kodiak and the Aleutians*.

SWAMC is a regional non-profit economic development organization for Southwest Alaska. It serves the five regions of Southwest Alaska: Kodiak Island, Bristol Bay, the Alaska Peninsula, the Aleutian Chain, and the Pribilof Islands. SWAMC is a federally designated Economic Development District (EDD) and a state designated Alaska Regional Development Organization (ARDOR). A regional membership organization, SWAMC advances the collective interests of Southwest Alaska people, businesses, and communities. SWAMC helps promote economic opportunities to improve the quality of life and influences long-term responsible development. SWAMC produces a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy for the region, which includes various tourism development goals.

Many of the communities continue their subsistence lifestyle including collecting eggs. This provides a rare glimpse into traditional ways.



SWAMC's Tourism Committee includes representatives from many byway communities and other stakeholders. Since committee meetings are held on a regular basis, coordination and productivity will be heightened. In addition to the Tourism Committee, SWAMC will seek official representatives from each byway community to serve on a byway subcommittee that will develop and recommend byway development activities.

The very nature of the byway presents significant organizational challenges. Because the Kodiak and Aleutians route only operates monthly from April to October, the byway itself does not provide byway stakeholders with a regular means to travel between communities. Unlike other byway organizations, individuals must incur significant travel costs to participate in meetings. Typical air fares range between \$700 and \$1,000 for communities west of Kodiak. The geography of the region, the operating schedule of the Alaska's Marine Highway, and the cost of travel pose significant organizational hurdles.

Additionally, the Marine Highway is considered as one National Scenic Byway, but three separate organizations are required to organize the byway communities and development effort. Seed grants must be allocated among the three organizations, resulting in a dilution of organizational ability. In comparison to other byway organizations, the three Marine Highway byway segments are challenged to overcome this limitation on organizational funding.

The byway effort needs to focus on activities that link byway communities with the onboard corridor experience. The Marine Highway is a stakeholder in the byway process, but will continue to operate and schedule independently from byway development activities.

It is important to change current marine highway names from *Southcentral*, *Southwest* and *Southeast* to names that mesh with existing tourism promotion. For example, names should shift to *the Prince William Sound and the Kenai Peninsula*, *Kodiak and the Aleutians* and the *Inside Passage*.

The following is the latest version of a proposed organizational structure for the full byway. There are several ways in which this structure appears appropriate for the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* Region. Of most relevance is that this segment will use its existing professional staff to guide the segment's byway efforts and ensure that the segment is well-represented in all full byway initiatives.

The organizational chart identifies the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* byway committee and leadership. The byway committee will be supported by liaisons in each of the ten port communities along this segment. In this manner, our region will be assured of consistent, professional representation in the full byway effort by our existing community and economic development organizations in addition to providing an efficient way for communities and individuals to participate, if they so choose.

The M/V Tustumena tied up at Chignik, a small Alutiiq community of less than 100 residents.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: MARKETING

Workshop participants and local community development entities agree on several marketing opportunities and challenges facing the byway and their segment. One major advantage for the byway is that the Alaska's Marine Highway has a full time Marketing Manager who will work with the byway team to market the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* segment as well as the whole byway. An additional advantage of this structure is that the Marine Highway's marketing department can help to define and organize a consistent design and graphics appearance to marketing materials. Local tourism organizations should take the lead from the Marine Highway in terms of approaching Marine Highway marketing collateral design.

Of particular importance is the need to market the entire byway corridor while also finding ways to emphasize the strengths and qualities of each segment. Due to the byway's extensive length, scheduling and geographical characteristics, it will be necessary for each segment to consider having its own marketing message. This allows the Marine Highway, in the minds of visitors, to be broken into smaller portions that are easier for visitors to comprehend. The byway should be one platform upon which the whole of the coastline is marketed together, with clearly defined sub-regions that encourage the traveler to pick and choose different trip lengths and trip routings.

The other side to this issue is that care must be taken to not overwhelm the potential visitor with too much detail about each community within the region. The activities and resources of the segment should be presented as a package that allows visitors to comprehend the integrated experience that they will find in the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* segment. A balance should be sought between marketing the segment and marketing the communities. The farther away from the decision a consumer lies, the broader should be the information. The closer to the decision and physically to the destination, the more detailed and fine-grained should be the information.

Related to the above topic is that of targeting ridership markets for this segment of the byway. Generally speaking, little is known about the tourism ridership on the *Kodiak to the Aleutians* and this may suggest that research is needed. There are a number of very strong resources and qualities about this segment that merit their own targeted outreach programs, including Aleutian Island culture, world class birding and marine mammals, World War II history, current cultural characteristics (e.g., fishing industry, fish processing industry, hand crafts, Native culture and special events.) The very specific nature of some of these topics underlines the importance of a strong marketing and web presence for this segment and its communities.

Need to complete your birding life-list?
A trip to Kodiak and the Aleutians is a must.
Six species of auklets can be found along this segment
including the rare whiskered auklet below.



Another opportunity is the ability to expand marketing efforts with partners: communities and businesses. Partnerships should also be formed with the corridors that link the byway with major highways, airports and important destinations near the byway. These communities, facilities, corridors and destinations all provide important services to the byway traveler, provide access connections to the byway and will help to keep visitors in the region for a longer time. Marketing materials for the byway should emphasize the travel corridors that visitors could take to reach the byway. For example, Homer offers the only road access to the region and is, therefore, a formal partner in the byway effort. Additional potential partnerships might include working with the cruise lines, charter boats/cruises and local hotels.

Building on the previous point is the challenge of encouraging visitors to explore *Kodiak and the Aleutians* while balancing the limited visitor services in many communities and only monthly summer sailings along this portion of the byway. In other words, marketing faces a challenge of conveying that this is not an 'easy-in-easy-out' destination. There are limited opportunities each month and each season to access the segment via ship. The benefit for visitors is that they will not encounter an over-used, over-visited destination. Visitors who make the expenditure and effort to visit the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* segment will have an increasingly rare travel experience: being one of a relatively small number of people who have seen unique landscapes, communities and cultures.

Related to the above issue is that of ship service frequency and scheduling to the segment. Given that year-round population levels are unlikely to rise significantly, tourism offers one opportunity to grow the ridership necessary to merit additional sailings and service to the segment, at least during the summer months. This will be a ‘chicken and egg’ situation in that marketing must push increased ridership, but increased visitation may grow slowly due to the current limited sailing service. As demand increases, it will be important for Alaska’s Marine Highway to seek opportunities to test the waters of tourism demand and experiment with additional service to the region.

A general marketing opportunity that will flow to the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* region extends from the National Scenic Byway and All-American Road designation. The Federal Highway Administration has a marketing staff person focused on promotion of national byways. They work to gain publicity, establish marketing partnerships, oversees web-driven marketing and will advance a national marketing effort for byways. This type of national and international exposure will draw more visitors to the Marine Highway and subsequently to the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* segment.

Finally, Alaska’s Marine Highway receives many international visitors already and a part of its annual marketing program is to reach these travelers. Therefore, designation of the Marine Highway as an All-American Road will not take the Marine Highway into unfamiliar waters; instead, the designation will help attract even more international visitors by making more non-U.S. citizens aware of Alaska’s Marine Highway as one of America’s premier byway destinations.

Currently, Alaska’s Marine Highway markets to international travelers by attending the major travel and tourism trade shows for both individual and group tourism. Journalists are invited to travel and write about the Marine Highway for foreign publications. Cooperative ads are also taken out in conjunction with the Alaska Travel Industry Association. The Marine Highway website is also an effective marketing and communication means for non-U.S. visitors. Finally, the central reservations staff handles calls and inquiries from all over the world each year and provides some multilingual services.

In the future, Alaska’s Marine Highway hopes to take advantage of any international marketing efforts that the National Scenic Byways Program pursues. If funds are available, it will also be important to produce more materials in other languages for international visitors. Signage, interpretation and other materials would be additional objectives for translation or upgrading using international pictographic symbols.

The community of Kodiak provides access to outstanding recreation and hunting opportunities as well as the Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge and Katmai National Park.



CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES: PHYSICAL IMPROVEMENTS

This section reviews the Marine Highway terminals and ships, as well as landside transportation and port community facility challenges and opportunities. Categories of improvements are suggested for the region in general and then for each terminal and community in Chapter 4, Actions.

KODIAK AND THE ALEUTIANS TERMINAL IMPROVEMENTS

The Marine Highway provides an important alternative to expensive air transportation and is utilized by both residents and visitors alike. Communities are not linked by road to the mainland (with the exception of Homer) and the only access is by air or water. For passengers, the terminal is their first destination and opportunity to get local orientation about the community they are visiting. As a result, some terminals have evolved beyond waiting rooms and a place to purchase tickets into welcome centers, interpretive centers, event spaces, shelters from inclement weather and community centers. On the other hand, many communities along this segment are so small they do not have any terminal facilities, shelters or information services at all. To further add to the complexity, those communities with terminals can be controlled by a variety of owners including the Alaska's Marine Highway, local government, or commercial operations. For many coastal communities, the Alaska's Marine Highway terminal/facility where the ship docks is the primary gateway to their community and thus the following section on terminal improvements is critical.

Residents often come to greet the ship and sell local crafts, food and clothing. In the community of False Pass passengers can buy glass balls that have floated to Alaska from Japanese fishing boats, as well as purchase smoked salmon.



The Alaska's Marine Highway terminal facilities vary greatly from community to community from no terminal building with only a marine ramp to access the ships, to large terminals with visitor centers, internet kiosks and surrounded by a pleasant park setting. Typically, the larger the port community, the larger the terminal and the amount of visitor services provided at the terminal. Each terminal has its own manager and is independently responsible for providing visitor services for the terminal. As a result, each terminal is unique and throughout the system there is a lack of visitor service consistency between terminals. This creates local flare and color but results in some information services not being provided, others duplicated and some of the potential 'corridor stories' not being told.

Most visitor services at the terminals are the result of partnerships with local visitor and convention bureaus, state and federal agencies and local organizations. Typically, larger communities with more partnership opportunities have more interpretation and visitor information in the terminals. Visitor services in smaller terminals may be as simple as paper maps taped to the walls while larger terminals may have interactive touch screen information kiosks and visitor information staff to meet the ships while in port. In all terminals, the Marine Highway staff fills the role of providing outstanding visitor information to its passengers, when time is available outside of selling tickets or loading the ships.

This section describes potential terminal recommendations for enhancing the visitor services along this portion of the Alaska's Marine Highway. As indicated, a majority of the ten port communities have minimal or no terminal building or visitor services due to their small population and infrequent service.

General Issues for Terminals and Port Communities

Homer and Kodiak are the only port communities with full service terminals along this segment. It is likely that Unalaska will pursue a terminal facility in the near future. The following discussion must be gauged against the size of the community, facilities available and the amount of time the ship is port. The larger the community, the more visitor information services should be provided.

The Homer Ferry Terminal is located at the end of the Homer Spit and the Sterling State Scenic Byway.



- Many communities have no terminal or even a sheltered waiting area. The Marine Highway should place basic shore side shelter in each community and these can be successful as either independent improvements or through partnerships with local government, Native Corporations or businesses. Although used only a small portion of the time by the Marine Highway, these can be used by the rest of the community for other purposes including waiting areas for seaplanes, other ships, charter boats and crew for fishing boats.
- Due to the limited size of many communities, and the time in port, the ships must become floating interpretation and visitor information centers for the Marine Highway, the segment and the communities they serve. For communities that are not able to provide these services they must be accommodated on the ships.
- Some terminals/dock facilities are located out of the town center and are isolated. Consideration should be given to allowing, permitting or encouraging permanent or temporary visitor services to be located at or within close proximity of terminals for larger communities. Services might include food, the opportunity to purchase provisions, lodging, camping, arts and crafts, and access to dependable transportation to the community center. Smaller communities should be encouraged to meet the ships to sell local food, and arts and crafts where visitor services do not exist. For communities considering new facilities, location is essential for providing services to meet the needs of passengers.

The US Fish and Wildlife Service's Islands and Oceans Visitor Center is a state-of-the-art interpretive center for the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge. It discusses the importance of this ecosystem and its traditional cultural use.



- A majority of travelers who use the Marine Highway travel by foot, while some bring kayaks, or bicycles on the ships. The ships accommodate these alternative modes of travel, however many port communities do not provide services for them at the terminal. Some terminals are located several miles from the community's attractions and center. Work with local private transportation carriers to provide dependable and consistent service from the terminal. Provide safe and efficient transportation routes for non-motorized travelers for pedestrians and cyclists to nearby points of interest, visitor service areas and community centers.
- For larger communities and those where property size and characteristics allow, provide covered outdoor waiting areas with picnic facilities, and grass areas at the larger terminals. Terminals should be located in a pleasant setting to create a positive gateway rather than an industrial waterfront setting. The gateway should be welcoming and provide visual clues to the character of the port community while maintaining the functional needs and image for the Marine Highway. For smaller communities it is exciting and appropriate to dock alongside fishing boats, stacks of crab pots and coils of fishing gear. These are working communities and an appropriate gateway however provide safe and obvious access from the ships to the community.

Acting on the above issues will do much to move the Marine Highway system toward being more unified and visitor-oriented.

TERMINAL SPECIFIC OPPORTUNITIES AND CHALLENGES

The following information describes the facilities at each terminal. It is assumed that communities with terminal buildings provide or should provide restrooms, public telephone, seating, pamphlet racks for local tours and attractions and a map of the community, unless otherwise noted. A majority of these ten port communities have minimal or no terminal building or visitor services due to their small population and infrequent service. With the exception of Homer, all communities need some level of visitor information and shelter appropriate to the size of the community and the amount of time the ship is in port. Recommendations can be found in Chapter 4, Actions.

Homer

The new terminal located at the end of Sterling Highway and serves as the gateway to the *Kodiak and the Aleutians* portion of the Marine Highway. The terminal has all the necessary facilities including a small visitor center, brochures and maps, waiting area and restrooms. The terminal is located 5 miles from town on the Homer Spit with many services located within 1 mile of the terminal. All visitor services are located in Homer. Camping, accommodations, shopping (except groceries), food, recreation and charter services (fishing, sight seeing, flying) are available on the Homer Spit within 1 mile of the terminal. A non-motorized transportation route links the community to majority of the Homer Spit but ends ½ mile from the terminal.

Kodiak

All visitor services are provided in Kodiak which is the largest community in this segment. Docking facilities and a new terminal are in the process of site selection and terminal design. A new location has not been determined. Some potential sites are very convenient to downtown while others are more remote from existing visitor services which are located in the downtown area. Maintaining the terminal in the downtown should be a priority. The exiting terminal is small and includes ticket sales and restrooms only with very limited waiting and baggage storage areas. The current facility is conveniently located adjacent to the Kodiak Visitor and Convention office. Vehicle staging is undersized and unorganized. The new design should create a full service gateway facility.

Port Lions

Arriving ships call in at the Port Wakefield Dock (located within the City) this facility is in need of repair. There are several lodges and B&B's located in the community as well as charter operators, a restaurant, grocery store, post office, and paved airfield. The terminal is a very small building used for both ticketing and waiting. Given the frequent level of service to this community some basic terminal services should be provided.

Chignik

The current terminal is the Norquest dock at the center of community. A new City dock may provide new facilities but this will be ¾ mile from town along a gravel road. There is a small multi-use covered area at the dock but this is often used for storage of fishing equipment, can be slippery and cluttered, and is thus not accessible to Marine Highway travelers. Nonetheless, this intermingling of ferry and fishing activities makes for an interesting live interpretive lesson on an active Alaskan fishing village. This terminal area needs signage as three communities are served by the port and are in close proximity. Chignik and the surrounding area are not intuitively laid out for visitors and locating attractions is difficult. There are limited services in the area including a post office, seasonal store with limited provisions and a bakery, medical clinic, gravel airport, B&B, boat harbor, and the Village Public Service Officer. There is a need for a covered shelter for waiting which could also be used by the community since it is often raining and windy. Bears can be found in town and visitors need to be forewarned and cautious.

Sand Point

The City dock, which serves the Marine Highway, is approximately one mile from town. The dock is dark and travelers must bring lighting if they want to venture into town. There are no terminal facilities but an existing storage building can be used for shelter. There is a need for seating and a covered waiting area. The access road is poorly lit road and needs signage. Moderate services are available in Sand Point including a B&B, a restaurant, a store, a clinic, a post office, and a police station. Sand Point has a paved airport. Overall the community is very spread out and it is difficult to locate attractions. Efforts should be made to capitalize on the opportunity for fish processing tours.

A fishing boat heads out to sea as the steep cliffs outside Chignik rise in the background.



King Cove

The City dock is located ½ mile from town along paved roads. Often the ship arrives at night and lighting could be improved for those who are unfamiliar with the community. There are moderate services available in King Cove including restaurants, bars, several stores, B&B, lodges, clinic, police, post office and a paved airport. The Harbor Master's office is located at end of dock and provides washrooms, public phones and information. There is a need for a formal waiting room. The arriving ship is often met by local residents providing free coffee and donuts and native art for sale. The community is linear in nature and provides easy access to attractions however the nature of the attractions is not apparent to visitors due to a lack of visitor information. A road is under construction to connect King Cove to Cold Bay and should be complete in 2005. There is an opportunity to provide vehicle tours of the area and meet the ship at its next port of call in Cold Bay or opposite. As in many communities along this route, bears can be in town and some caution required.

Local charter boat and aircraft operators will be happy to drop you off in the middle of 'no-where.' You'll be surrounded by the most breathtaking landscapes and peaceful isolation.



Cold Bay

The *M/V Tustumena* docks on the ¼ mile long dock for Cold Bay. No shelter or terminal buildings are available in Cold Bay and it can be very windy. The long walk along the narrow dock with vehicles driving on it can be daunting. Shelter is needed at the dock. There are limited services in Cold Bay and consist of a store, a restaurant, a bar, a clinic, a major airport, and a post office. There is a need to provide an US Fish & Wildlife Service Visitor Center for the Izembek National Refuge near the dock and/or the airport. The USF&WS Headquarters provides minimal visitor services and is located ¾ mile from dock but is not signed. The USF&WS provides a free shuttle service to the Bering Sea side of the National Refuge that has a small refuge interpretive and viewing area. There is limited seating available on the shuttle and ship's passengers enter a raffle to go on the tour. This is very popular but could be expanded to provide shuttle for all interested passengers. The pavilion at the Refuge could be expanded to provide more interpretation. This community is very spread out and it is difficult to identify buildings. There is a walking map available of Cold Bay but it should be handed out on the ship rather than in community. There is a great opportunity to expand on the World War II role of community.

False Pass

False Pass is the shortest port of call along the *Kodiak and Aleutians* strip. There are no terminal facilities and the ship calls in at the City dock located ½ mile from town. This is a very rural community and there are very limited services available. Typically, community members meet the ship and sell native crafts (dolls, fur hats and other clothing) and Japanese glass floats from fishing nets that break free and float across to Alaska. False Pass is the most westerly community on the Alaska Peninsula.

Akutan

The ship docks at the City dock which has no terminal. The dock is located at the edge of town with a general store and bar located dockside. This community has B&B facilities, a clinic, and basic amenities. Akutan is a boardwalk community with no vehicle access in town.

Unalaska

The terminal facilities are located in the industrial docking portion of town located $\frac{3}{4}$ mile from town. Ships tie up at the City dock with no formal terminal building. Basic facilities can be found at neighboring commercial business (phone and restroom). Upland facilities are not organized and have no sheltered waiting areas. Planning is being initiated to design a terminal in this area to be used in conjunction with cruise ships which also tie up in this area. The terminal could include a visitor center as well as terminal amenities. Taxis meet the ship but not in a predictable manner. Tour buses meet cruise ships and could also meet Marine Highway ships during port of call. The ship calls in at the morning for several hours during the day allowing tour opportunities of the community (this appears to be a tourism opportunity with much potential.) All visitor services are located in the community of Unalaska.

GENERAL COMMUNITY CHALLENGES

Scenic byway workshop discussions and field observation indicate several challenges that are common to most byway communities along this segment:

- Many port communities along this segment have no — at the least just limited — uplands facilities or terminals. Where possible, the byway effort should seek to provide minimal shore side services that might include covered seating/waiting, defined parking and loading zones, site lighting and basic interpretation or directions on where to get more information.
- Many communities are not intuitively laid out for visitors, can be dark and therefore create hesitation to explore these communities if the ship calls to port at night. Safe and obvious access is required between the ship and communities.
- There is a need to better educate travelers about the port communities and landscape the ships travel through.
- There is a need for alternative transportation services and routes in larger ports, such as bike lanes and safe walking trails/paths, to better access communities from terminals. Bicycles could be provided on board the ships and rented out to allow passengers a faster and more efficient way to see the communities that have a limited time in port.
- Signs are needed in most communities to guide visitors from the terminals or docking facilities to local attractions.

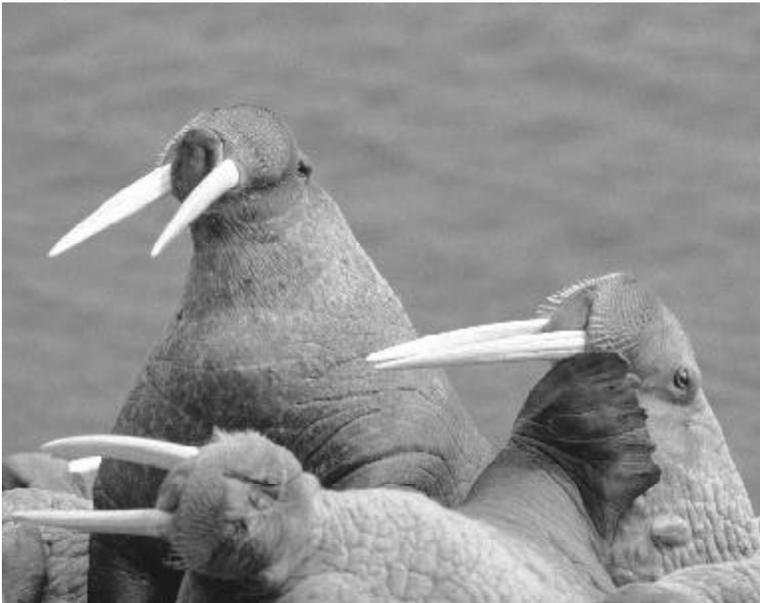
The M/V Tustumena tied up at Cold Bay.



ALASKA'S MARINE HIGHWAY SHIP OPPORTUNITIES

This section reviews the status and challenges for the one ship that serves this region, the *M/V Tustumena* (fondly called the *Tusty*). It is the smallest mainline ship in the system and has a 196 passenger capacity. It sails once a month during the season running from April to October. Its 26 staterooms are sold out on every sailing; its passenger profile is typically 60% visitors and 40% residents. During July and August, the ship sails at 100% capacity on every run. The lack of cabin space on the ship limits the number of visitors willing to travel this segment due to having to 'rough it' without cabins and privacy. The car deck holds 25 vehicles and is adequate in size given that there are no 'sail-drive-back' options along this route due to the island nature of this part of Alaska. Some passengers choose to sail in one direction and fly in the other.

A side trip to Round Island would be worthwhile to see walrus.



Perhaps the greatest challenge is the 'chicken-and-egg' issue of the *M/V Tustumena's* smaller size relative to other ships in the system. Historically, given the smaller populations and lower service demands of the resident population along the *Kodiak and Aleutians* route, there has been no demand for a larger vessel. But, unless a larger ship is provided or more runs are scheduled, then it will be impossible to increase the economic benefits of tourism to the communities along the route. Relative to size, the *M/V Tustumena* is too small in many respects for a majority of its sailings. These issues include the following:

- Seating areas with good opportunities for watching the scenery or that allow group seating is limited and are typically very crowded during a sail and this decreases rider satisfaction. An example of a simple accommodation would be to allow seating in the dining area during non-dining hours to increase the amount of comfortable table seating for all passengers.
- The 26 cabins on the ship are far too few for all sailings. Much of the floor space on the ship is taken up by sleeping bags and tents on the decks thus making the deck space less usable for all passengers.
- The theatre/TV lounge is too small for the number of passengers and is also where interpretive talks and videos are presented. The area has a capacity for 25 people, but it should be expanded to a minimum of 40 persons. This area is always overflowing due to interest in interpretive programs and watching movies to help pass the time.

- Booths are very popular seating areas for groups in the reclining area, but there are too few to accommodate the typical number of groups on board.
- The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service's interpreter has too little space to perform his/her duty and this limits interpretive opportunities. For example, interpretive materials are kept in a broom closet with cleaning supplies.

Obviously, adding cabin space, a larger dining area and more deck space to the *Tusty* will be extremely difficult and cost prohibitive. The Marine Highway system could however do test runs with other ships including the *M/V Kennicott* which has a larger capacity and could meet the needs for passengers sailing this segment. This ship makes a cross gulf sailing monthly in the summer and could possibly continue onto Unalaska once a summer and provide additional capacity and on board services required. This would be an internal scheduling issue but could operate as a test run to gauge its success. This could be a marketing success for the Marine Highway, the communities and the region. Additionally the *Tusty* could make additional runs during peak months along this segment and help alleviate the overcrowding. This may be possible as the new fast ferry the *M/V Chenega* will come on line in the summer of 2005 to service Prince William Sound. The *Chenega* will take over a portion of the *Tusty's* old route and reduce the sailing distance for the *Tustumena*. Again, this is an internal scheduling issue but the *Tustumena* might be available for additional sailings to the *Kodiak* and the *Aleutians* segment and relieve overcrowding and provide economic benefits to the region.

CHALLENGES: INTERPRETATION AND INFORMATION

Since a major goal of this byway is to make travelers more aware of the special qualities that this segment of the byway offers, interpretation will play an important role and is needed. For this segment of the byway, interpretation is needed for almost all communities. The US Fish & Wildlife Service offers an excellent on-board interpretive program that is similar to the USDA Forest Service program in the other two regions. On-board interpretive specialists sail with the ships and provide numerous interpretive programs throughout the sailing in the forward lounge of the ships. This is a great program not found on any other byway and has the potential to be a world class interpretive program. This program is limited only by the poorly planned interpretive spaces on board the ship. There is some desire to expand this program to include other federal partners, Native Corporations and the communities to make this program even more successful. This segment of the Marine Highway has world class birding and wildlife viewing as well as a rich cultural, historic and natural qualities that make it the trip of a lifetime. Better planned interpretive spaces could go a long way to improve on board interpretive services and make them equal to the landscape/seascape that the passengers came to see.

The Alaska Department of Fish and Game also plays an important interpretive role with the Marine Highway. Alaska Fish and Game manages the *Watchable Wildlife Program* throughout the state and the goal of this program is to create opportunities for viewing wildlife. Although wildlife can be found throughout the state, this program identifies accessible sites with outstanding wildlife viewing opportunities

The US Fish and Wildlife Service provides an on-board interpreter on all sailings to this segment. They offer numerous daily programs, wildlife spotting notifications and are always on hand to answer questions. This is an outstanding interpretive service.



and establishes the facilities such as viewing blinds, shelters and interpretive stations to safely watch Alaska's wildlife. In many cases local interpreters are on site during the peak season. *Watchable Wildlife* sites can be found in many of the port communities and also includes the Alaska's Marine Highway ships and the routes sailed by them due to the abundant wildlife viewed from the ships and availability of on-board interpreters. The success of this program is from the partnership with other government agencies such as the USDA Forest Service, US Fish and Wildlife Service and the Marine Highway. This program is in the process of updating its older interpretive material on the Marine Highway ships and is looking for new opportunities to expand interpretation aboard them and in the communities served by the Marine Highway.

The vast majority of the lands viewed from the Marine Highway routes are public lands managed by the US Fish and Wildlife Service, Park Service and other federal and state agencies. Many of the port communities are surrounded by these lands and contain recreation opportunities, visitor centers and interpretive facilities that are attractive to Marine Highway passengers visiting these communities.

Given the size of the byway, variety of government agencies managing these lands and facilities, and the numerous opportunities along the coast, more information is needed to clarify for the traveler what is available and how to access these opportunities. Travelers should have easy access to information; this will make their trip planning more efficient and encourage lengthier stays. Generally speaking, there is a great need for an interpretive plan that looks at the entire region, its communities and the ship servicing the area and pulls all of this together into an effective, integrated strategy.

Horned Puffins and other unique birds can be found throughout this segment. Whether you are a birding veteran or beginner, the on-board interpreter provides birding tips and maps to make your trip a success.



Other interpretive challenges and opportunities include the need for a consistent look to all materials along the byway, the need for information and materials to be updated and consolidated into efficient packages, and the need to work cooperatively with all existing museums and other attractions so that resulting interpretation builds upon, rather than repeats, existing exhibits and information.

Much of the interpretation for this region occurs on-board the *M/V Tustumena*. Relative to that experience, the following issues are challenges aboard the ship

- There is a need for improved lighting on the ship in areas with maps, charts and other interpretive material. Currently, it is often difficult for passengers to appreciate and learn from the existing materials due to the poor lighting.
- The interpretive area for the US Fish & Wildlife Service is shared space throughout the ship and has not been planned. Interpretive space used is overcrowded and the demand greatly exceeds the space available. This is very limiting for what could be an outstanding program.
- The artwork throughout the ship has no interpretation, yet many of these pieces are of high caliber and could be effective in telling a story of the area and its people.

- There are many historic images and images of the port communities with no or little interpretation. These need to be consolidated and updated to become effective.
- The numerous marine mammal and bird identification charts are very helpful but could be updated and made more user friendly. Many passengers take this trip to complete their life list and these interpretive opportunities need to be expanded to meet their needs and expectations. Expand upon the existing marine mammal and bird location maps to be more detailed and informative.
- The public address system and video opportunities needs to be updated and modernized.
- The pamphlet racks have an unorganized and unprofessional look.
- The interpretive information on board the *Tusty* has been added to over a long period of time. A thorough analysis is required to review the material on board and make recommendations to remove, consolidate or update the material. Space is at a premium and must be utilized in an effective manner to benefit the passengers.

In Cold Bay, passengers are treated to a free shuttle trip to Izembek National Wildlife Refuge while the ship is in port. The Refuge is home to numerous waterfowl species as well as caribou, bears, and wolves under the backdrop of several volcanoes.



SUMMARY

The above challenges and opportunities form the basis for *Section 4*. The central themes emerging from this section are the following:

- Segment participation in the full byway effort must be efficient and not overburden existing staffing resources.
- Marketing efforts must strike a balance between the full byway marketing programs which are funded and controlled by the Alaska Marine Highway staff and the cooperative efforts between the Marine Highway staff and local tourism organizations. Together, these professionals must seek cooperative programs that promote both the full byway and the distinct experiences of each segment.
- The Marine Highway's less frequent service schedule (relative to other more populated port communities in the system) and the limited visitor services (i.e., lodging, restaurants and tours) available on some *Kodiak and the Aleutians* destinations mean that marketing must accurately but appealingly convey the unusual nature of traveling along this segment. Over time, it can be hoped that a growing tourism sector will create sufficient demand to encourage more frequent sailings to the region.
- The current service schedule and the facility limitations of the *M/V Tustumena* do lessen the quality and convenience of the travel experience for visitors.
- Existing interpretation is good, given the circumstances, but it could be significantly improved to equal the opportunities present along this segment and be world class.



Camping aboard the ship is popular.

