



ATIA LAND MANAGERS FORUM REPORT

September 29, 2023

Fairbanks, Alaska



ATTENDEES

Colleen Stephens, Stan Stephens Cruises and Tours, ATIA Board Member & TPP Committee Chair

Jillian Simpson, ATIA President & CEO

Jeff Samuels, ATIA Director of Policy & Communications

Adriel Butler, Borealis Basecamp, ATIA Board Member

Lanie Downs, Cruise Lines International Association, ATIA Board Member

Scott McCrea, Explore Fairbanks, ATIA Board Member

Liz Perry, Travel Juneau, ATIA Board Member

Bruce Cain, Ahtna Incorporated

Taylor Marshall, Ahtna Incorporated

Julius Adolfsson, Alaska Dept of Transportation

Andy Hall, Alaska Geographic

Lee Hart, Alaska Outdoor Alliance

Ricky Gease, Alaska State Parks

Haley Johnston, Alaska Trails

Jason Hill, Aramark Joint Venture

Randy Mantler, Aramark Joint Venture

Sam Sukimawa, Aramark Joint Venture

Tim Hammond, BLM Eastern Interior Field Office

Simon Hamm, Camp Denali

Bonnie Westlund, Carnival Corporation

Sharon McConnell, Denakkenaaga Inc.

Vanessa Juszczak, Denali Chamber of Commerce

Molly Redilla, Doyon Limited

Mark Dowdlem NPS Gates of the Arctic National Park

Robert Venables, Southeast Conference

James King, USFS

Sierra Carmello, USFWS Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge

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SUMMARY OF FORUM

Thirty land managers, nonprofit leaders, tourism business representatives, and others spent the day discussing issues relevant to land management related to tourism operations. Individual agency presentations featured projects being funded, projections for future developments, and highlighted ongoing challenges especially regarding access and permitting. The stated objective for the day was to generate policy issues which ATIA could consider advocacy efforts for, and the end result, listed at the bottom of this report, provides ample material for the coming year.

AGENDA & SUMMARIES

8:30 AM Coffee & Networking

9:00 AM Land Acknowledgment delivered by Jillian Simpson to Reverend Doctor Anna Frank

Denakkanaaga Land Acknowledgement

We respectfully acknowledge the Dena People on whose traditional lands we reside on. We honor the Dena who have been the stewards of Interior lands and waters for centuries, the elders who lived here before, the Dena people of today, and future generations to come. We also recognize that Alaskan Native people would traditionally gather here and harvest Native foods.

Welcome and Introductions

9:30 AM Delegation Report

9:45 AM Tongass National Forest's Mendenhall Glacier

- James King provided an overview of visitation numbers and the EIS which dictates limits for visitation at the Mendenhall Visitor Center. Cap is 540,000 annual visitors. He shared an overview of VC improvements, including new parking and bus turnaround area, welcome center, and bear viewing platforms. He also talked about Uber/Lyft being used to transport passengers and not allowed to make drop-offs at VC, but doing so anyway.
- Liz Perry talked about impacts of cap limit to community as visitors used Capitol Transit to gain access to area, displacing locals on public transportation system which has operation limits. Travel Juneau staff spent time sharing updates on Reddit for cruise groups to manage expectations for visitation. She also spoke of the flooding disaster and community efforts to protect dignity of residents and not to be exploitive in promoting "disaster tourism." Focus in 2024 will be visitor education.
- Pinch point seems to be transportation and capacity limit from EIS, but not the facility itself.

- 10:20 AM Bureau of Land Management's expanded approach to recreation and visitor services: Tim Hammond**
- Tim Hammond provided an overview of White Mountains Recreation Area developments in the face of increased visitation across BLM lands in Alaska (this was common for all land managers.) BLM needs more parking capacity and staff to manage increased visitation. Bipartisan Infrastructure Law is funding many new structures and cabins on BLM land., and locally-sourced building materials are being used when available.
- 11:00 AM Discussion: Permitting Access on Public and Private Land What is working well and what needs improvement in terms of operating on public and private lands?**
- Please bring challenges and improvements you want to discuss
 - Ahtna McCarthy Road / Chitina area trespass issues
 - SOA / DOT road maintenance advocacy
 - Bruce Cain and Tayler Marshall shared a summary of Ahtna, Inc. lands. Increased visitation, especially for dipnetting in the Chitina area has been problematic. While Ahtna charges a very modest user fee for its land, most visitors to the area are not paying it, yet are leaving waste and garbage on Ahtna lands. Abandoned dipnets are trapping and wasting the fish resource in the riverbed. Local residents are frustrated and Ahtna is hoping for a message of respectful travel for in-state as well as out-of-state visitors from ATIA and Travel Alaska (and also with military base commanders.)
 - Open questions: Can ADFG include information and stipulations on dipnet permits? Who is responsible for enforcement: ADFG or private landowners? How are others managing trespassing issues- what works in other parts of the state?
- 10:45 AM Alaska Long Trail update: Haley Johnston**
- Haley Johnston provided an update on Long Trail developments. Work has been primarily in the southern portion where existing trail sections have been more easily linked together. Work will continue into Mat-Su and Denali areas next. AKRR and Alaska DoT have right-of-way for some sections. Many federally funded transit improvements come with a required trail component, which AK Trails is capitalizing on. Seward to Eagle River section is ready to be included in statewide marketing.
 - ATIA can consider continuing to support the Long Trail with our delegation and Commissioner Anderson's office. Waysides should be advocated for also, as a resource for visitors and residents.
- 12:15 PM Legislation/ Policy update:**
- The LODGE Act
 - Explore America Act of 2023
 - NPS Cost Recovery
 - NPS Expanding Local Hire Authority
 - Rural Outdoor Investment Act
 - BLM Public Lands Rule
 - BLM Public Lands Rule FAQs

1:45 PM

AMHS Update: Robert Venables, Southeast Conference

- Robert Venables holds optimism for future of AMHS as infrastructure funding will build new mainline vessels in coming years. There is an opportunity to modernize the fleet coupled with increased resources. Legislative support is high as everyone recognizes flawed system. Tap into existing technology in other countries which is modernizing fleets with low emissions vessels.
- ATIA has an opportunity to thank legislators for supporting AMHS and continue to advocate for its growth.
- Consider writing ATIA letter of support for the Explore America Act of 2023

2:15 PM

Agency Briefings: What's new with NPS, USFS, USFWS, BLM, ASP (10 minutes each)

- Ricky Gease provided an update on the Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), which is being reviewed by the National Park Service.
- James King shared the Alaska Region of the USFS has 25 new public use cabins slated for the Tongass and Chugach National Forests. Cabins are a significant attraction for residents.
- Mark Dowdle shares upcoming Fat Bear Week kickoff at Katmai National Park. What started as a novelty online event has become a public relations sensation.

3:10 PM

Overview of tourism joint ventures and new tourism projects (Open to all attendees to share)

- Jason Hill shares season update from Aramark/ Doyon joint venture at Denali NP. States JV celebrated 20 years of operation in 2023. JV has a Doyon shareholder hire preference. Guest satisfaction on shorter bus tours has been high though guest behavior has been poor following the pandemic.
- Molly Redilla from Doyon says increasing shareholder hires has been difficult.
- Randy Mantler from JV says the workforce expectations have changed with shorter bus tours but that overall, the shorter tours have been well received by staff and guests.
- Simon Hamm from Camp Denali shared the NPS and lodge operators were able to move some equipment across Pretty Rocks slide area in September as the contractor created a rough road bed for transferring construction equipment to west end of area. NPS should now have the ability to do basic maintenance of west end of road to include Eielson VC and Kantishna Airstrip areas. He states energy independence and regenerative tourism efforts at Camp Denali has been an attractive feature for fully independent travelers (FIT) there, and they are receptive to carbon offset fees and higher costs to accomplish energy initiatives. Suggests ATIA could share Denali Road conditions and updates, and expectations with visitors. Lodging capacity and rental car capacity for FITs has been slow to return to pre-pandemic levels. Has received good feedback from visitors who want to return once the road is re-opened at Pretty Rocks. Suggests it will be difficult to re-open road mid-summer as NPS is proposing,

with different access and costs for guests in first half and second half of summer, and a transition overnight. It would be better to open road at beginning of a season for ease of costs, bookings, and operations for businesses.

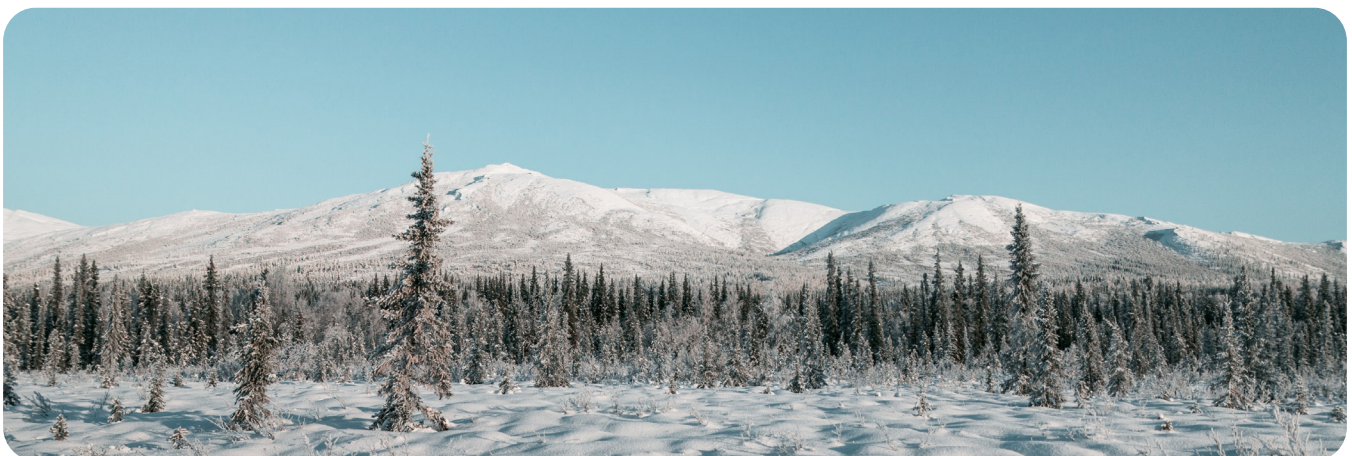
- Vanessa Juszczak shares a need to be consistent in Denali Road messaging: it's not closed, it has modified access. Encourages us to find a "New Normal" of operations after pandemic and road repair era to include: more opportunities with Canyon businesses, different bus tours to provide shorter options. Also states RV camping has been challenging this summer, with more campers parking in pullouts outside of fee campgrounds. This is causing a waste issue and shorting the community of revenue to pay for services.
- Molly Redilla states shareholder hiring at Doyon for tourism operations has been difficult due to a lack of willingness for young workers to relocate away from home for several months. Doyon has other resource-related projects in the works regarding forest inventory and fuels mitigation. They have a trespass management effort underway, mostly communicating with outfitters. Feedback has been positive so far. They are looking to open access to Doyon land through a permit process.
- Bonnie Westlund provides news from Holland America Princess. They have 500 year-round employees and 3200 seasonal employees. They have made investments to reduce waste, reduce energy consumption including installation of solar panels and purchasing 2 electric vehicle cargo vans, and some recycling equipment.
- Lanie Downs shares preliminary cruise numbers of 1.6 million, up from 1.33 million in 2019 and 1.15 million in 2022. She anticipates a plateau in coming years. Alaska remains a key destination for cruise companies. Need to work on dispersing cruise passengers and to share positive messaging to communities highlighting positive initiatives the industry is undertaking.

4:15 PM

Final summary and action items for ATIA to follow up on

4:30 PM

Adjourn



THEMES FROM THE DAY

- Increased visitation on all lands, public and private
 - Address capacity for trails, parking areas, campgrounds, lodging, services
- Need for messaging to public, both in-state and out-of-state, as well as military facilities
 - Respectful visitation – “this is our home”
- Land management plans, actions and suggestions should be more inclusive of traditional land users, bordering landowners and tribal organizations from the start. A statement of inclusion.
- Road rest areas: visitor amenities are sorely needed and need a maintenance budget
- Housing and workforce both remain pinch points to hiring workers
- Dispersal to address over-crowding: support tourism growth outside cruise corridor and railbelt
- Source labor and materials locally to multiply economic impacts of growth
- Collaboration in partnering: public land agencies with businesses and private landowners- what new relationships can be considered? Think outside the box.
- The “WHY” is important
 - What data or story is compelling to tell?
- Lack of funding – all competing against each other and not cooperating; reporting for grants is onerous for small staff teams
- Planning, policy, maintenance, makeover
- Inclusivity from the start – fair trade model for tourism, including sustainability, equity, cultural justice, and respect for Indigenous lands
 - A certification or criteria for measuring these

ACTION ITEMS FOR CONSIDERATION BY ATIA

- Support Long Trail with Murkowski’s office
- Support wayside improvements with Commissioner Anderson
- Statewide stewardship/ “respect the land” campaign via Travel Alaska
 - To include statements of inclusion for land users to be aware of and respectful towards privately held land, including tribally and ANC-owned land adjacent to public land
- Educate decision makers that we need infrastructure
 - Transportation: we cannot save our way to prosperity. Transportation infrastructure investment is needed .
 - Public land access capacity – public lands are an economic driver
 - Maintenance
 - Increase supply to meet demand
 - We need housing, infrastructure to fill job pool and house workers and customers
- Coalesce around statewide tourism plus economic vision and plan with an overarching economic impact report of tourism and all ancillary businesses

- Professional economic forecasting done as part of a statewide strategic tourism plan
- Grassroots, collective messaging (keep message broad and attract a coalition) refine and gain buy-in: what single message can the small operator and large business owner say when they have the chance with our governor and legislators?
 - Clarify vision
 - WHAT do we want to achieve?
 - WHY is it important?
 - HOW do we measurably achieve it?
 - Potentially “Maintain and grow recreation and tourism infrastructure, housing, workforce as a community economic development driver.”

Thank you again for joining us for the 2023 ATIA Land Managers Forum!



Photo Credit: Lexi Qass'uq Trainer (Cup'ik/Yup'ik)