Tourism and Recreation Economic Impact

(Tongass Land and Resource Management Plan, FEIS, Plan Amendment, June 2016)

The Tongass National Forest is home to a vibrant and growing tourism industry. Tourism from large and small cruise ships and independent tour operators plays an important role in the economies of communities throughout Southeast Alaska. The vast majority of visitors to Southeast Alaska are cruise ship passengers. The Summer 2011 statewide Alaska Visitor Statistics Program (AVSP)2 found that cruise ship passengers accounted for 85 percent of visitors to Southeast Alaska compared to 57 percent of visitors statewide (McDowell Group 2012). Cruise ship passengers as a share of total visitors in Southeast Alaska varied by community, ranging from 12 percent of summer visitors to Prince of Wales Island to 98 percent of visitors to Hoonah.

- Independent visitors, who constitute a much smaller group, tend to arrive by air, ferry, and highway and engage in a variety of activities. Independent visitors spend more time in the communities and on the Forest, and may secure the services of outfitters and guides, restaurants, motels, and transportation services such as floatplanes, boats, and gas stations. Lodges have grown in popularity in recent years, with fishing lodges in particular playing an important role in the tourism industry in some local areas.
- The marketing of recreation opportunities by commercial suppliers has important similarities to resident recreation concerns. For example, many businesses that provide boat or aircraft access for wildlife viewing and other activities have a low tolerance for the presence of other groups in the same area. The presence of more than two or three other parties in a bay or area may cause such operators to seek substitute locations.
- The ability to market Alaska tourism is dependent on meeting customer expectations of seeing and experiencing vast, untamed land and its wildlife. Resident recreationists who traditionally use an area may, however, be discouraged by commercial businesses operating in the same area.

Market Sector Highlights

Guided Hunting (Source: Alaska Professional Hunters Association, 2012 Economic Impact Study)

- Statewide, hunters spent $51 million on guided hunts. Of the total, nonresident hunters spent an estimated $48 million. In addition to hunting packages, non-resident hunters and their companions spent another $3.5 million on lodging, food and beverage, clothing, souvenirs, and outdoor equipment, among other purchases while in Alaska.
- Nearly nine out of ten guides are Alaska residents. They live in communities throughout the state, with about half living outside urban communities. A significant portion of the assistant guides, packers, camp staff, pilots and boat captains also reside in the state, many in small communities. Guides spent $12 million for goods and services and accounted for $13 million in wages and income in outlying areas of the state.
- In Southeast Alaska, there were 505 guided hunters in 2012.

Small Cruise Ship Vessels (Source: AK DCCED, Draft report 2015)

- The small cruise vessel market has shown growth since its low in 2011, and Alaska is positioned to benefit from global interest in small ship experiences. The small cruise vessel market is an attractive market for many Alaska port communities, but difficulties obtaining consistent market data or predicting operator intent make it difficult to strategically address opportunity through infrastructure, attraction and service development.
- The number one challenge that operators indicated was lack of sufficient access to public land. These operators require increased and more flexible access to landing sites, including new and maintained trails to provide sufficient space between clients traveling on different vessels.

Sport Fishing

(Source: Economic Contributions and Impacts of Salmonid, Trout Unlimited, 2010)

- Sport fishing in Alaska attracts large numbers of both resident and non-resident anglers. Statewide, anglers participated in 2.5 million days of fishing in 2007, with about 1.5 million days occurring in freshwaters and 1.0 million days occurring in marine waters. Similar to other areas of Alaska, sport fishing opportunities in southeast Alaska are abundant. In most management areas of the region, anglers can fish for all five salmon species, as well as for Dolly Varden, brook trout, rainbow/steelhead trout, cutthroat trout, grayling, halibut and lingcod. Most angling in southeast Alaska occurs in marine waters, and nonresidents of Alaska account for a larger share of the sport fishing activity.

- Between 2003 and 2007, the annual sport catch of salmon in southeast Alaska ranged from 748,480 fish to 1.26 million fish. Coho accounted for about 41 percent and pink salmon accounted for about 31 percent of all salmon caught in southeast Alaska sport fisheries. Across all salmon species, the sport harvest of salmon in southeast Alaska in 2007 comprised about 28 percent of all recreationally-caught salmon statewide.

- In terms of angler expenditures, recreational fishing for salmonids in southeast Alaska generated an estimated $174 million in angler expenditures in 2007, including trip-related expenditures, fishing equipment, and fishing-related real estate expenditures. Net economic values (or net willingness to pay) for sport fishing in southeast Alaska during 2007 were an estimated $8.2 million for resident anglers and $21.8 million for nonresident anglers.

- Similar to commercial fisheries, sport fisheries in southeast Alaska are an important contributor to the regional economy. Purchases of goods and services by resident and nonresident anglers fishing for salmonids support a large number of businesses in southeast Alaska. The value of total output (including direct, indirect, and induced effects) related to purchases by salmonid anglers in southeast Alaska was an estimated $358.7 million in 2007, and supported an estimated 2,334 jobs and generated $84.7 million in personal income.

For more information contact: Laurie Cooper, Tongass Partnership Coordinator, lauriedcooper@fs.fed.us