

ALASKA'S WILDLIFE IS WORTH WATCHING
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Alaska Department of Fish and Game
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Executive Summary:

- I. Public interest in viewing wildlife viewing is large and growing.**
- II. Wildlife viewing recreation and tourism can provide significant economic, social and conservation benefits to Alaska.**
- III. Alaska has superb and unique wildlife viewing resources.**
- IV. Significant funding to address issues and maximize benefits may be coming soon (H. R. 701/S. 25 Conservation and Reinvestment Act)**

I. Public interest in viewing wildlife is large and growing

- ◆ **The 1996 24 million Americans took 266 million trips *primarily to see wildlife.***
- ◆ **Recreation researchers predict that participation in wildlife viewing will increase faster than the rate of population increase, and that the Pacific region, which includes Alaska, will experience the highest rate of increase.**
- ◆ **Nationally, birdwatching has increased 155% recently - growing more than any other outdoor recreation**
- ◆ **There is ample opportunity for growth in this aspect of Alaska's visitor industry. Thirty-six percent of Americans take trips primarily to view wildlife but only 3% of Alaska visitors come primarily to view wildlife**
- ◆ **Visitation at the Pack Creek brown bear viewing area has grown from about 100 people in 1981, to 1400 in 1997, despite a large increase in permit cost**
- ◆ **78% of Alaska residents and 74% of visitors surveyed want to know more about how to find and watch wildlife**
- ◆ **The opportunity to view wildlife is a major motivation for travel to Alaska, ranking second in importance to prospective Alaska visitors. (ATMC 1996).**
- ◆ **(see overhead) Visitors to Alaska are particularly interested in seeing:**

STRONGLY ATTRACTIVE FACTORS

for selection of a wildlife viewing day tour by Alaska visitors
(from Miller and McCollum 1997).

	Primary Viewers	Secondary Viewers	Incidental Viewers
Seeing wildlife at close range, assuming it is safe	89%	76%	55%
Good chance of seeing many different kinds of wildlife	86%	88%	62%
Viewing site located in a remote wilderness area	68%	56%	27%
Opportunity to see particularly large individual animals	67%	54%	36%
Good chance for seeing lots of wildlife, even same kind	56%	34%	21%
Information center or naturalist in the area	53%	49%	36%
Access to hiking trails	48%	38%	16%
Access to public campground	29%	29%	18%
Access to public restrooms	24%	34%	41%
Access to commercial hotel/lodge	23%	18%	25%
Access to commercial flight seeing	14%	15%	10%
Access to public air strip	9%	8%	6%
Access to public boat moorings or launch	7%	9%	9%

Primary Viewers were AK visitors whose primary trip motivation was to view wildlife.

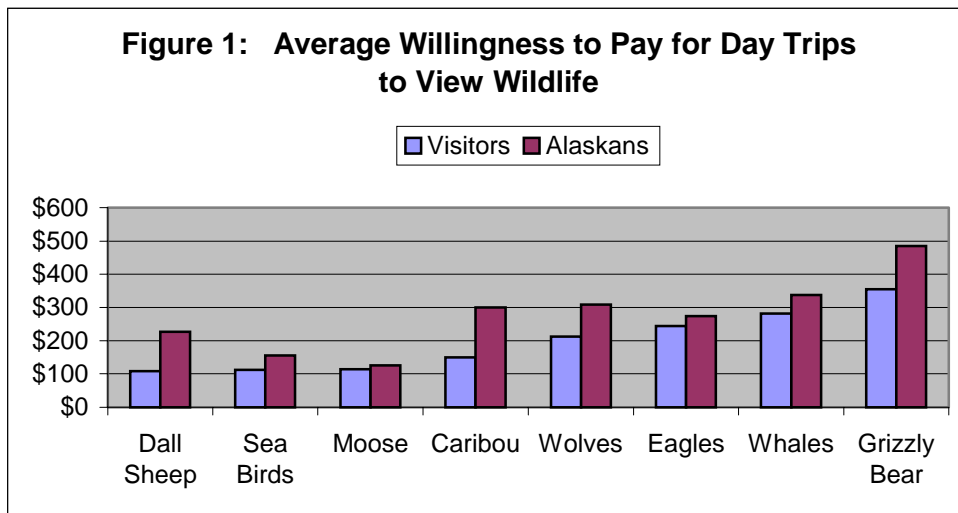
Secondary Viewers were AK visitors with wildlife viewing as a very important (but not primary) motivating factor.

Incidental Viewers were somewhat motivated to visit AK in order to view wildlife.

II. Wildlife viewing recreation and tourism can provide significant economic, social and conservation benefits to Alaska.

First – a look at Economic Benefits:

- ◆ Residents and visiting viewers spent \$652 million in AK in 1996
- ◆ Viewing can be a sustainable economic use of Alaska’s natural resources.
- ◆ Can contribute significantly to fall-winter-spring tourism development.
- ◆ Can provide increased economic opportunities for Alaska residents in urban and rural areas.
- ◆ Visiting viewers spend more money in-state and in more regions of the state than other visitors.
- ◆ Visitors and residents are willing to pay well for high quality viewing experiences – even for species like salmon, sea birds and eagles -- residents MORE than visitors!



	Visitors	Alaskans
Salmon	\$182	N/A

- ◆ Visitors are willing to pay even more for wildlife viewing - there is an uncaptured “consumer surplus” estimated at \$402/visitor that could be captured through developing wildlife viewing opportunities

Social Benefits

- ◆ Wildlife is important to the quality of life and social identity of Alaska’s residents – more than half of Alaskans watch wildlife as a recreation.
- ◆ Viewing provides educational opportunities for residents and visitors (74 % of visitors and 78% of residents want to know more about how to find and watch wildlife).
- ◆ Can be compatible and help preserve Bush culture.
- ◆ Provides aesthetic experiences.

Conservation Benefits

- ◆ Economic and social benefits increase support for conservation of habitat:

◇ *East Africa*: “If wildlife pays, wildlife stays” strategy

For Example: The Kachemak Bay Shorebird Festival sponsored by the Homer Chamber of Commerce among others, led to the conservation of Mud Bay, an important shorebird migration habitat area.

- ◆ Recognition of the economic and social values of wildlife habitat can help deter alternatives that degrade wildlife habitat.

III. Alaska has superb and unique wildlife viewing resources....

- Alaska has abundant populations of wildlife that have become rare or have disappeared in other parts of North America, such as the wolf, lynx, brown bear, wolverine, bald eagle, trumpeter swan, peregrine falcon, and common loon.

- **Populations of species that are unique in the U.S., such as**

- caribou**
 - Dall sheep**
 - Horned puffins,**
 - Yellow-billed loons**
 - Walrus,**
 - polar bears**
 - belugas**

- **Other species breed nowhere else in North America, including the**
 - northern fur seal,**
 - western sandpiper and the**
 - bristle-thighed curlew.**

- **Even our more common species can provide a fascinating learning experience:**

- Phalaropes – gender role-switching**
 - Arctic Terns - daylight**
 - Wood frogs - antifreeze**

- **In addition to unique and interesting species, Alaska offers some unique sites, where habitat, habituation, management and/or access have contributed to spectacular viewing:**

- Round Island State Game Sanctuary (walrus, foxes)**
 - Copper River Delta (access)**
 - Kenai River eagles (winter)**

- **There are also seasonal concentrations in many areas of the state that offer spectacular viewing:**

- Migratory bird flock**
 - Caribou herd**
 - Salmon spawning**
 - Seabird nesting colony**

**Sea lions
Humpback whales
Dall sheep – mineral lick
Ptarmigan – winter flock
Bohemian waxwings – winter flock**

**And lastly, we have spectacular expanses of natural habitat –
more than 130 million acres of parks and wildlife refuges
(1-1/2X the size of CA)**

So, with all of these resources, why are the majority of Alaska visitors disappointed with their wildlife viewing experiences? 53% of visitors saw less wildlife than they expected – Miller & McCollum 1997

Why?

Could be one or more reasons:

**Biological reasons?
false expectations of visitors?
shortfall in desired services or opportunities?
wildlife management?
or just plain bad luck on visitor's part – (no guarantees on weather or wildlife)**

**Biological reasons
Number of different species (biodiversity)
Abundance of populations (density)**

In general, AK has LOW diversity and density –(especially in terrestrial ecosystems and wintertime). For comparison: (AK is 30 times larger than Costa Rica -- but has 100 times fewer species per square mile!)

Exception: Relatively high (marine - summer) - More seabirds occur in AK's coastal waters - 75-125 million - than are known to occur in any comparably-sized region in the northern hemisphere.

2. (perhaps) Unrealistic expectations – perhaps due to TV, magazines, advertisements...

3. Perhaps we're not meeting demand for opportunities or services desired:

a. Overcrowded: McNeil, Denali - At present, the demand for wildlife viewing opportunities far outstrips the supply. Only 10% of applicants obtain a permit to visit the McNeil River State Game Sanctuary. Denali National Park summer visitors commonly encounter a delay of one or more days to obtain camping, backpacking or bus permits.

b. Not addressing the opportunities sought, such as wildlife at close range

- **Seeing a diversity of wildlife**
- **Viewing in remote wilderness setting: seeing large individual animals, birdwatching**

c. Not meeting the interest in education: large majority of visitors and residents want to know more about how to find and watch wildlife

Wildlife management – we may be failing to adequately address the interest in watching wildlife in our wildlife management practices.

So – what can we do about this situation?

Can't do much about the biological facts, but with adequate funding, we can improve wildlife viewing management and education to improve satisfaction AND maximize the social, economic and conservation benefits to Alaska.

IV. Significant funding may be coming soon (CARA).

H.R. 701 and S. 25: Conservation and Reinvestment Act, now pending in Congress.

How could we use funding from the Conservation and Reinvestment Act to improve viewing in AK?

- 1. Look at demand and interest from residents and visitors.**
- 2. Look at other new and unique opportunities AK can offer**
- 3. Implement actions that maximize economic, social and conservation benefits to AK:**

a. To maximize economic benefits:

- Make sure our actions are sustainable. One tourism expert has said “If tourism is to contribute to sustainable development, then it must be economically viable, ecologically sensitive and culturally appropriate.”**
- The government of Botswana targets tourist marketing and development to high paying wildlife viewers. AK statistics verify that wildlife viewers spend more than other visitors. We could target tourist marketing to 36% of Americans and other foreigners who take trips primarily to see wildlife.**
- Meet consumer interest for the types of experiences desired (including birdwatching and education).**
- Interpretation/stories from local guides – added value.**
- Capture the \$402 per visitor “consumer surplus” with appropriate opportunities.**
- Look for new opportunities for fall-winter-spring recreation and tourism.**

b. To maximize social benefits:

- **Work with communities to make sure our actions are desired and compatible with their lifestyle and culture.**
- **Provide opportunities to serve residents' needs, as well as visitors.**
- **Alleviate overcrowding for experiences like McNeil and Denali. Set limits or market and develop alternatives.**
- **Meet need for education – address false expectations, give people more info on when, where and how to watch wildlife, and engage them to understand and appreciate the “real Alaska”.**
- **Manage wildlife not only for hunting, but also to accommodate the growing interest in viewing.**

C. To maximize conservation benefits:

- **Implement a strong set of “best practices” in wildlife management and facility development.**
- **Implement a strong program of education, so that all viewers are responsible viewers, who minimize their impacts on wildlife and habitat.**
- **Elevate the awareness of the economic and social benefits of preserving habitat for wildlife watching.**

In summary, Alaska’s Wildlife is Worth Watching, - we have superb and unique wildlife resources, millions of acres of unspoiled natural areas, and both residents and visitors who are willing to pay to benefit. But we need appropriate management and education to make sure this opportunity is sustainable. I hope you can help make that happen.

References on wildlife viewing tourism and recreation interest/demand:

Visitor Info:

1. Alaska Visitor Statistics Program
2. AK Tourism Marketing Council
3. Miller & McCollum (ADF&G) reports on visitors
4. National Surveys of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Related Recreation
5. National Outdoor Recreation Surveys
6. 1995 Flather & Cordell - Wildlife & Recreationists
7. Nature-based tourism statistics, e.g.:
 - a. In early 1990's, 40% of U.S. travelers wanted "life-enhancing" travel, compared with 20% who were "seeking the sun." Brandon, *Ecotourism and Conservation*, p. 4
 - b. <<http://www.ecotourism.org/res.html>>
8. Manfredo et. al (in press). Wildlife Viewing in North America: A Management Planning Handbook.

Resident Info:

1. Miller & McCollum (ADF&G) reports on residents
2. SCORP for Alaska (Alaska State Parks)
3. Manfredo et. al (in press). Wildlife Viewing in North America: A Management Planning Handbook.
4. National Surveys of Fishing, Hunting and Wildlife-Related Recreation (1996, etc.)

Resource Statistics:

Quinlan, S. , N. Tankersley and P. Arneson 1983. Guide to Wildlife Viewing in Alaska. Alaska Dept. Fish and Game.

The Alaska Almanac.

Field Guide to the Birds of North America. National Geographic Society.