Mat-Su Sustainable Tourism Master Plan

SUMMARY REPORT

The Mat-Su Convention and Visitors Bureau is pleased to present this ***Sustainable Tourism Master Plan*** for our region. The plan will help guide recovery from the devastating impacts of COVID, address tourism-related pressures that were mounting before the pandemic, and forge a future with minimal negative environmental or social impacts.

This plan was informed by a range of sources and research tasks: previous reports on Mat-Su's tourism industry; four community workshops; an online, public opinion survey; interviews with tourism stakeholders; Leadership Team meetings; and analysis of tourism indicators. This plan was funded by a grant from the Alaska Community Foundation through the American Rescue Plan Act Nonprofit Recovery Fund. The project was administered by the Mat-Su CVB, conducted by McKinley Research Group and Huddle AK, and steered by a Leadership Team designated by the Mat-Su CVB board.

We will begin to implement the Plan, in partnership with the Borough and other organizations, in the coming months. We invite you to join us and contribute to making the Mat-Su an even better place to live, work, and visit!

Sincerely,

Bonnie Quill

BONNIE QUILL
PRESIDENT AND CEO, MAT-SU CVB

MAT-SU VALLEY
Alaska

McKINLEY RESEARCH GROUP, LLC

VISION

Mat-Su is a world-class destination supported by a tourism industry that operates sustainably, contributes meaningfully to the regional economy, and is embraced by residents and community leaders.

GOALS

Four overarching goals serve to organize the objectives and strategies of the plan.

- IMPROVE THE VISITOR AND RESIDENT EXPERIENCE
- MAXIMIZE ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR BOROUGH RESIDENTS
- CULTIVATE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY
- STRENGTHEN RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

Full report is available at ***alaskavisit.com/masterplan***

Goal
IMPROVE THE VISITOR AND RESIDENT EXPERIENCE

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES
Complete the Gateway Visitor Center	• Provide personal engagement and education for visitors and residents about the range of experiences available in the region • Encourage visitors to stay longer and slow the "rush" to Denali Park entrance • Incorporate Alaska Native and other local culture into programming and encourage visitors to explore cultural experiences
Maintain and enhance existing trail and park system	• Increase investment in regional trail system to deliver high-quality and safe experiences for residents, other Alaskans, and visitors • Reduce trash and destructive behavior by providing adequate parking, trash receptacles, maintenance, and security • Support creation of Borough Parks and Recreation department
Create new "destination" trail experiences	• Support the development of the Alaska Long Trail • Support development of hut-to-hut system and additional public use cabins
Maintain and enhance highway rest areas	• Improve maintenance of existing rest areas • Construct new rest areas at stategic and scenic locations
Enhance signage and wayfinding	• Encourage visitors to slow down, learn about the area, and explore less-visited areas • Comunicate ways to protect and preserve local environment • Provide interpretive information on the area's Alaska Native cultures and pioneer heritage
Improve transportation system	• Support highway maintenance and transportation projects that minimize traffic delays and improve efficiency • Comunicate ways to protect and preserve local environment • Include rail, bus, bike, RV, and personal vehicles

Goal
MAXIMIZE ECONOMIC BENEFITS FOR BOROUGH RESIDENTS

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES
Focus on new products and tour patterns	• Showcase destination to current and prospective tour operators, travel media, accommodations, and service providers, especially less visited parts of the region • Encourage travel media to explore areas off the beaten path • Incentivize and support development of new accommodations • Support the development of new product in promising areas of winter tourism, agri-tourism, and cultural tourism
Support a strong tourism workforce	• Promote employment opportunities through job fairs and other forums • Increase visibility of tourism to Borough students through classroom visits by tourism professionals, student site visits to tourism businesses, internships, and mentorships • Create training and dual credit programs that align with full range of professional needs including business management, marketing, finance, IT, HR, and other technical skills • Address seasonal housing needs with zoning, financing, and incentives
Develop new funding sources and mechanisms	• Re-activate the Mat-Su Visitor Foundation • Pursue federal infrastructure development grants • Consider increasing bed tax rate with intention to fund infrastructure, maintenance, and program development • Pursue partnerships with private companies, foundations, and cruise lines • Explore voluntary contribution programs for visitors
Facilitate post-pandemic economic recovery	• Pursue COVID recovery grants for projects and programs • Promote best practices for tourism businesses and visitors as pandemic evolves

Goal
CULITVATE AND PROMOTE SUSTAINABILITY

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES
Address overcrowding and pinch points	• Encourage travel industry to consider new and creative itineraries • Construct transportation corridors appropriate for traffic volume within and between communities • Align infrastructure with visitation patterns including roads, trails, restrooms, parking, accommodations, broadband, and other services
Create and promote a Tourism Best Management Practices program	• Create mechanisms for residents to share suggestions and report concerns about overcrowding, traffic issues, environmental impacts, etc. • Develop a tour operator education program addressing environmentally sustainable practices • Promote businesses engaged in Adventure Green Alaska and Tourism Best Management Practices programs
Support appropriate governance structure for Talkeetna	• Establish mechanism to fund and address issues resulting from high visitation including traffic congestion, public restrooms, trash, and crowding
Support local harvest and manufacturing	• Promote Alaska-grown products to visitors including agriculture, distilleries, breweries, and other products produced in the region

Goal
STRENGTHEN RESIDENT ENGAGEMENT AND SUPPORT

OBJECTIVES	STRATEGIES
Improve data and insights	• Update research on out-of-state visitor volume, origin, destinations, activities, characteristics, and spending • Initiate research program on in-state visitors • Measure economic impact of visitors (both in-state and out-of-state) • Facilitate sharing of data among partners
Educate residents on tourism industry	• Publicize economic benefits, business and employment opportunities, and resident specials • Educate elected officials on tourism's value to the regional economy • Engage local news sources on new tourism businesses, infrastructure improvements, Visitor Center, and newsworthy topics
Monitor resident sentiment	• Conduct periodic public opinion surveys to gauge support, impacts, and concerns • Promote Tourism Best Management Practices program including ways for the public to report suggestions and concerns

QUESTIONS?

Contact the Mat-Su CVB at 907.746.5000 or info@alaskavisit.com

MAT-SU VALLEY Alaska