Alaska gets nearly 1.7 m tourists each year, who spend $1.5 billion, mostly on the coast. 65% are cruise ship passengers. This is a prosperous, well-run, outsider-owned industry that supplies clientele to some local businesses.
Another 30% come by air, 4% come by highway and 1% by ferry, The majority of these visitors confine their travels to the road system, including ferry-accessible ports.
Most of the state, including dozens of coastal communities and tens of thousands of miles of coastline, get virtually no visitors.
Rural coastal Alaska has enormous tourism potential. It has:

- Extraordinary scenery (weather permitting)
Charismatic wildlife
• Birding
• Geology and other unique natural features
• Communities unlike those found anywhere else in the nation
• And a people and lifestyle totally different from what most people have experienced.
Logistical Impediments to Rural Alaska tourism:
• Great distances and difficult access
• High cost of transportation and other services
• Often awful weather
• Perception of rugged, “frontier” conditions
Structural impediments:

• Lack of knowledge of region by tourism “brokers”
• Lack of access to capital by region’s residents
• Inadequate resources for marketing
• Limited pool of business expertise and management skill
• Shortage of a tourism trained and experienced workforce
• Disagreement in many communities about tourism
What are Alaska Sea Grant’s objectives?
- promote safe and dispersed use of marine recreation resources
- encourage responsible marine wildlife viewing
- provide factual updates on management, technology, efficiency, etc.
- assist tourism industry start-ups and product development
Methods:
- Instructional publications
- Coastal boating guides
- Tourism development workshop presentations
- Web-based outreach
- Charter Log newsletter
- Participation in statewide tourism development task force
- Consulting with individual tourism entrepreneurs
Some recent consultations:
- Yukon delta birding project
- Kuskokwim archeology tourism
- Ketchikan and Juneau citizen science boat tours
- Nome water taxi project development