

Prince William Sound Subregion

Regional Description and Overarching Priorities

Home to five communities – Chenega, Cordova, Tatitlek, Valdez, and Whittier – Prince William Sound (the Sound) is a large, semi-enclosed “inland sea” of nearly 3,900 square miles. Over 90 percent of the uplands are public owned, primarily by Chugach National Forest. The Sound boasts a wealth of outdoor recreation resources, including marine and terrestrial wildlife, a spectacular collection of glaciers, and a complex, inviting, system of islands, bays, and fjords.

Primary access to the Sound is through Whittier and Valdez, the area’s two gateway communities with road access. Use of Whittier Tunnel increased by 50 percent from 2000 to 2019 (from 88,053 to 131,521 vehicle trips, ADOT¹). Other than roads within the area’s few communities, most use is by motorboat, kayak, or trail.

Map of the Region Here



Photo Credit (left): The Tatitlek Corporation² Caption: Native people have relied for millennia on the Sound’s sea life and upland game for food, clothing, and shelter; they and more recent arrivals continue to take advantage of the region’s bountiful subsistence resources.

Photo Credits: Patrick Endres (center) and courtesy of Discovery Tours (right). Caption: Oil transportation, shipping, commercial fishing, and the cruise industry are large-scale industries operating in the Sound’s marine waters. Popular but lower profile commercial and recreational activities include sea kayaking, hunting, fishing, camping, research, and wildlife and glacier cruises.

The Prince William Sound regional partners identified in this section are committed to enhancing year-round outdoor recreation experiences and opportunities for residents and visitors. They are working to grow their capacity to plan and guide responsible regional growth, with the specific objectives of expanding funding opportunities, invigorating the local economy, and celebrating and stewarding the resources that make the region unique. Key near term project priorities include establishing a Prince William Sound Marine Trail guide and restoring existing outdoor recreation infrastructure and facilities.

Members of the Prince William Sound Region SCORP Team

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Wendy and Steve Ranney, Orca Adventure Lodge

Priorities in the Prince William Sound chapter have been developed by a wide range of stakeholders who participated in the planning process from June, 2021 – August, 2022. Participating stakeholders include municipal staff, federal and state agency staff, non-profit leaders, and guiding, excursion and lodging business owners. Facilitators of the planning effort engaged regional members through a series of virtual meetings and email correspondence. The volunteer Prince William Sound SCORP Team attempted direct outreach to communities where representation was lacking early in the process, but encountered challenges connecting with many smaller communities. At each new level of planning, stakeholders were emailed a review of past discussions and content development to ensure that what was established was indeed what the region communicated during the meetings. Refinement of the content took place over time and careful review of the regional goals was performed. Specific outreach efforts include:

- Outreach to Native Corporation and Tribal Council representatives at five Alaska Native organizations and villages, June 2021 – August 2022.
- Outreach to over 50 organizations, excursion businesses, individuals, and communities within Prince William Sound
- Individual email and phone conversations with five communities and over 15 individuals and organizations representing these communities or the region
- Three regional meetings held via Zoom with discussion and comments on the plan (June 9, 2021, November 1, 2021, and May 16, 2022).

Strengths of Regional Outdoor Recreation

- The Sound offers residents and visitors diverse, world-class outdoor recreational opportunities on uplands and protected marine waters for hiking, camping, boating, hunting and fishing, and recreational infrastructure including cabins, trails, harbors, and boat launches.
- The landscape of the Sound includes rich and largely intact natural ecosystems as well as accessible tidewater glaciers, one of Alaska's biggest visitor draws.
- Wildlife and sea life concentrations can be seen at sea lion haul-outs, bird rookeries, and intertidal zones. There are ample opportunities for tourism-based outdoor recreation and

education including services by companies offering water taxi service, guided fishing and kayaking, and overnight cruise boat tours. Many of these companies have served the Sound for decades and have an extensive knowledge base.

- Prince William Sound is accessible from Alaska's population centers and major visitor markets. Transportation links include scheduled daily air service to Cordova and Valdez, as well AMHS ferry, train, shuttle van service, rental car, and RV.

Challenges Impacting Regional Outdoor Recreation

- Like much of Alaska, the Sound faces the challenge of accommodating and promoting visitor growth without compromising the area's resources and the quality of visitors' experiences, especially in parts of the Sound cherished for their remoteness.
- Traveling into and within the Sound requires detailed knowledge of transportation options and schedules, and can be comparatively expensive.
- AMHS ferry service continues to see reductions in funding and service levels.
- The region has unpredictable and often challenging weather all year long.
- Existing resources for outdoor recreation facilities are limited relative to demand. This is particularly true for all the more accessible public-use cabins which are reserved months in the advance for the whole summer.
- Continuing wear and tear on USFS and State marine parks outside of Whittier and a lack of staff to support these facilities is a concern.
- Dependable, affordable Wi-Fi and phone reception are difficult to access or unavailable, and pose a challenge to conducting business in remote areas.

Outdoor Recreation Vision

Draw on the Sound’s extraordinary outdoor recreation assets, including ready access to some of the world’s richest marine waters, extensive shorelines, and upland trails and cabins, to allow recreation opportunities to grow in ways that ensure a quality experience and safeguard the Sound’s resources. Work with individual communities in the Sound to develop the outdoor recreation resources that match their local goals.

Outdoor Recreation Objectives, Strategies, and Initiatives

The Prince William Sound SCORP Team was organized as part of the 2023 to 2027 SCORP update. The team worked to identify local outdoor recreation priorities that help meet statewide outdoor recreation goals (Chapter IV) and respond to the LWCF criteria (Chapter III). In addition to the introductory material above, their work (presented below) includes:

- Regional objectives, standardized statewide, that emerged through the shared work of the regional working groups
- Strategies and initiatives to reach these objectives; “initiatives” include specific projects and programs as well as broader opportunities

Specific projects and programs identified in this section are examples of priorities that meet LWCF criteria. Other projects meeting those criteria and advancing SCORP goals are equally eligible to receive LWCF funding.

More work is needed throughout Alaska so regional interests can come together, define *their* recreational vision and identify *their* priorities, as has been done in this region. (See *introduction to Chapter Five for more details on this process.*)

Objective 1. Build strong partnerships to identify and deliver quality outdoor recreation opportunities

Strategies:

- Take steps needed to bring together regional partners and tourism businesses currently not collaborating to plan for and improve outdoor recreation opportunities for regional visitors and residents

Identified Initiatives	Potential Partners
1) Assist PWS Stewardship Foundation (PWSSF) and Valdez Adventure Alliance (VAA) in expanding their capacity/raising funds to manage information regarding outdoor recreation resources and infrastructure so they can become information “hubs”, facilitate planning and dialogue regarding high use areas among outfitters and land owners/managers	Build on existing partnerships that PWSSF has with USFS (formal agreement) and State of AK (informal relationship), and that VAA has with State of AK.
2) Support publishing and distribution of guidebook materials for PWS (e.g. <i>Cruising</i>	PWS Books publishing company, VAA and PWSSF

Guide to PWS and Kayaking and Camping in PWS)

3) Support development of tourism “best management practices” for Whittier and PWS tourism growth

Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce, PWSEDD, PWSSF, use Juneau’s Tourism Best Management Practices group as model

Objective 2. Expand funding for outdoor recreation infrastructure and programs

Strategies:

- Prioritize funding requests where regional and local facilities to enhance the existing network of outdoor recreation infrastructure, and where evidence of growing demand is greatest.
- Pursue new sources of in-region funding

Identified Initiatives	Potential Partners
1) Inventory and share information on federal, state, and local funding sources. See Appendix XXX for potential funding sources	PWSEDD, share funding source and notice information with PWSSF, VAA, AK DNR, and other SCORP partners
2) Form partnerships that can combine and leverage funds for a short list of near- term project priorities	PWSEDD facilitate regional prioritization
3) Funding to get projects to shovel ready: Dedicate a fixed amount to do community outreach, design and engineering planning needed to advance high priority projects	
4) Restore funding for the Valdez state park ranger and facility operations	AK DNR
5) Direct more funding to State Marine Parks, which absorb a lot of use in PWS and help to buffer the places around them from overuse	AK DNR
6) Work with regional and local tourism businesses to explore implementing an Outdoor Recreation payment add-on.	
7) Pursue local government contributions to help match and leverage larger state and federal grants for outdoor recreation projects.	

Objective 3. Foster stewardship of cultural and natural resources through education.

Strategies:

- Look for educational opportunities to promote stewardship with students, residents, visitors, outfitters, guides, and nonprofits
- Foster and expand volunteer opportunities for becoming stewards of cultural and natural resources
- Coordinate with partners including on land conservation and stewardship
- Create opportunities for cultural heritage education through outdoor recreation

Identified Initiatives	Potential Partners
1) Organize events to give volunteers a chance to get involved, help people become familiar with PWS trails, shoreline. Activities include beach/marine debris clean ups, invasive species removal, trail and recreation site restoration	PWS Stewardship Foundation, VAA, Alaska Geographic, USFS (Glacier and Cordova Ranger Districts), AK DNR, community Parks and Recreation/Trails Committees, PWS College Outdoor Leadership Program, Valdez Parks and Recreation VESP Program, PWS Regional Citizens Advisory Council
2) Outreach on values and goals of Nellie Juan-College Fjord Wilderness Study Area (western PWS) Maintain and enhance wilderness character by assisting with developing materials on values and goals of WSA and distributing to guides and independent travelers through PWSSF and VAA	PWS Stewardship Foundation, VAA, USFS
3) Develop stewardship through partnerships with youth organizations Facilitate outdoor exploration and safety skills for youth as well as best stewardship practices	Support and build on USFS work with PWSSF, Alaska Geographic, PWSSC, Student Conservation Association (SC), Crooked Creek Information Center, Valdez; VAA, Chugach, Valdez, and Cordova School Districts, PWS College Outdoor Leadership Program
4) Citizen science initiatives Support public lands visitor use monitoring, what areas receive frequent visitors and to what extent, assist AOOS with monitoring for paralytic shellfish poisoning	PWS Stewardship Foundation, VAA, PWSSC, USFS, AK DNR
5) Support the annual PWS Natural History Symposium An education resource for guides, outfitters, and outdoor enthusiasts featuring science, history, culture and land management presentations from all over the Sound	PWSSF and partners

Objective 4. Provide equitable access to outdoor experiences including youth and the underrepresented

Strategies:

- Engage regional partners to enhance and promote diverse outdoor recreation opportunities
- Guide planning and development of more ADA accessible facilities

Identified Initiatives	Potential Partners
1) Reach out to regional school districts to connect with underrepresented youth	Alaska Geographic, Chugach School District, Valdez School District, Cordova School District, PWS Native villages, VAA
2) Include marketing for Native tourism ventures (as directed by Native corporations based on their evolving development plans)	Chenega Corporation and Tatitlek Corporation
3) Support current programs and development of additional programs focused on serving and	VAA

increasing access and involvement of underrepresented populations

- 4) Upgrade facilities and access points to meet ADA standards and opportunities at parks, cabins, and trail systems USFS, ADNR

Objective 5. Guide growth to increase the benefits of outdoor recreation and provide a spectrum of high-quality outdoor recreation experiences

Strategies:

- Develop community outdoor recreational facilities building from priorities established in community comprehensive plans including but not limited to: 2020 Chugach National Forest Land Management Plan, 1995 State Marine Park Management Plan, Exxon Valdez Oil Spill Restoration Plan (1994), Cordova Comprehensive Plan (2019), Valdez Meals Hill Park Master Plan (2020), Valdez Parks and Recreation Master Plan, Whittier Comprehensive Plan (2019), and Whittier Park Plan (2018)
- Evaluate existing facilities regularly for use levels to determine appropriate allocation of funding

Identified Initiatives	Potential Partners
1) Implement priority projects in Cordova Trails Master Plan	Cordova Trails Advisory Committee, PWSEDD
2) Create Whittier Recreation Plan including integration of Whittier link between Alaska Long Trail, Iditarod National Historic Trail, and PWS Marine Trail	City of Whittier, Whittier Parks and Recreation Committee, Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce, PWSSF, AK DNR
3) Develop Valdez Meals Hill Master Plan trails	City of Valdez, VAA
4) Implement Valdez Parks and Recreation Master Plan	City of Valdez, VAA, AK DNR
5) Update 1995 State Marine Park Management Plan recommendations	State of AK DNR, Division of Parks and Outdoor Recreation, PWS SCORP team
6) Revitalize 2008 Prince William Sound Marine Trail MOU Define partner and trail manager roles, responsibilities	AK DNR, PWSSF, VAA, PWSEDD, USFS
7) Develop trails plan to address areas outside of the city of Valdez and/or not in the Valdez Parks and Recreation Master Plan	VAA, City of Valdez, AK DNR

Objective 6. Improve information on the availability of outdoor recreation resources

Strategies:

- Coordinate marketing efforts among land management agencies, Cordova and Whittier chambers of commerce, Valdez Convention and Visitor Bureau, Valdez Adventure Alliance, and Native villages and corporations
- Coordinate marketing to small-scale cruise vessel operators that could make port calls in Cordova, Valdez and Whittier

- Identify a centralized information source for PWS outdoor recreation outfitters, facilities, and services

Identified Initiatives	Potential Partners
1) Establish and publish a Prince William Sound Marine Trail and guide including in smart phone apps (All Trails, Gaia)	
2) Identify a mechanism for a shared host of PWS outdoor recreation information , or a way for all businesses to provide consistent information to support visitors in trip planning	PWSEDD, chambers of commerce, VAA, PWSSF
3) Establish network of marketing materials and messages among tourism marketing organizations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Develop graphic design elements for use by all PWS tourism marketing organizations to create consistent PWS marketing “look and feel” 	Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce, Cordova Chamber of Commerce, Valdez Adventure Alliance, PWS Stewardship Foundation, PWS Economic Development District
4) Coordinate marketing to small-scale, overnight cruise vessel operators that could make port calls in Cordova, Valdez and Whittier	Cordova Chamber of Commerce, VCVB, Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce

Objective 7. Expand and improve the overall supply of quality outdoor recreation opportunities

Strategies:

- Develop new recreational opportunities and infrastructure with strategic, region-wide prioritization
- Develop sustainable facilities for boaters and kayakers (e.g. through hardening established sites for small campsites, huts)
- Investigate new locations to meet growing demand for additional onshore landings by small cruise vessels and boaters
- Maintain or refurbish existing outdoor recreation infrastructure using sustainable practices and materials
- Create a spectrum of outdoor recreation opportunities ranging from high-intensity use to more remote, undisturbed sites
- Direct use away from culturally and environmentally sensitive sites to areas that can sustain more use
- Support sustainable trail design

Identified Initiatives	Potential Partners
Infrastructure Projects:	
1) Support re-establishment and maintenance of mooring buoys at state marine parks	AK DNR, VAA, USFS Chugach National Forest,
2) Whittier Airstrip and Head of the Bay recreation facilities (camping, interpretive walk)	

- 3) Portage Pass trailhead facilities (Whittier)
- 4) State Marine Park public use cabins in Granite Bay, Sawmill Bay (Valdez Arm), Boswell Bay, Canoe Passage
- 5) Construct State public use cabins near communities/areas to which people can drive (Thompson Pass, Blueberry Lake, Worthington Glacier)
- 6) Construct a public use cabin at Gold Creek (Valdez)
- 7) Create tent camping sites near Cordova town center
- 8) Relocate Eyak Lake boat launch
- 9) Shotgun Cove Road extension, and kayak launch (Whittier)

See Appendix XXX for information on potential funding sources for these identified infrastructure projects

Trail projects:

- 10) Establish Prince William Sound Marine Trail and publish trail guide, including in smart phone apps (All Trails, Gaia)
- 11) Restore Shoup Bay Trail (Valdez)
- 12) Extend bike path from Valdez town center to Richardson Highway milepost 33
- 13) Explore hut route between Valdez and Cordova
- 14) Shotgun Cove to Blackstone Bay trail (Whittier)
- 15) Extend disc golf course (Cordova)

PWSEDD, PWSSF, VAA, AK DNR, USFS
See Appendix XXX for information on potential funding sources for these identified trail projects

Objective 8. Increase workforce and organizational capacity to build and maintain trails, parks, and other outdoor recreation infrastructure

Strategies:

- Expand the capacity of the outdoor recreation workforce to meet growing demand
- Increase capacity of the outdoor recreation industry to create better paying, and potentially year-round, jobs
- Use outdoor recreation to attract and retain a skilled workforce

Identified Initiatives	Potential Partners
<p>1) Conduct outreach to present trail crew and recreation management workforce opportunities with SCA, USFS, ADNR, and regional non-profits</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● Conduct fall and spring outreach to regional high school students ● Conduct regional year-round outreach regarding resource management and planning jobs 	<p>SCA, USFS, Chugach School District, Chenega IRA Council, Tatitlek IRA Council, Valdez School District, Valdez Native Tribe, Cordova School District, Native Village of Eyak, VAA</p>

Resources

- 1) Burton, Gordon. ADOT Whittier Tunnel Traffic Opening. 2000 -2019.
- 2) The Tatitlek Corporation. Cultural Preservation. Accessed August 11, 2022.
<https://www.tatitlek.com/cultural-preservation/>.