



# The Bureau Bulletin

A publication of the Mat-Su Convention & Visitors Bureau

Spring Edition

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## Mat-Su CVB developing sustainable tourism master plan

The Mat-Su CVB is the recipient of a \$100,000 American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Nonprofit Recovery Fund Grant. The ARPA provides funding for individual states to distribute to organizations in response to the coronavirus public health emergency or its negative economic impacts. Grant funding was distributed by the State of Alaska Department of Commerce, Community, and Economic Development in partnership with the Alaska Community Foundation.

The Mat-Su CVB will use the ARPA grant to develop a Mat-Su Borough Sustainable Tourism Master Plan. The master plan will include a resident survey, research, stakeholder engagement, and a competitive and market analysis to identify the region's key strengths and weaknesses, prioritize tourism infrastructure activities, and outline key tourism-related issues facing the region.

"The Sustainable Tourism Master Plan process will help our communities recover from an unprecedented disruption in travel and tourism and improve our community as a destination for residents and visitors alike," says Bonnie Quill, President and CEO of the Mat-Su

Convention and Visitors Bureau.

The public is invited to help shape the future of the tourism economy by participating in any of the upcoming workshops for the Sustainable Tourism Master Plan (see box above for full schedule).

### **Upcoming public workshops**

May 3, 6-8 p.m.

**Government Peak Chalet,  
10690 North Mountain Trails Drive,  
Palmer**

May 9, 6-8 p.m.

**Susitna Valley High School,  
42748 S Parks Hwy, Talkeetna**

May 11, 6-8 p.m.

**Glacier View Elementary,  
Mile 104 Glenn Highway**

May 12, 6-8 p.m.

**Menard Center,  
1001 S Clapp Street, Wasilla**

## Summer kickoff barbecue May 4

Kick off the summer season with Mat-Su CVB at our annual member barbecue on May 4 at the Musk Ox Farm.

The free barbecue is a great opportunity to learn about what other members are offering, build referrals and network with others in the industry. You'll get to tour the new Musk Ox Farm barn and give a three-minute spotlight on your business. Bring your front-line employees so they can hear about what is going on around the Valley – the more the merrier.

"The summer kickoff barbecue is

a great way to get everyone connected and learn more about the experiences we can offer our visitors," said Mat-Su CVB's Justin Saunders. "We're grilling up hamburgers, we'll have pulled pork sandwiches and we'll have a fun time getting ready for the summer season."

The barbecue is from 4-6 p.m., so come hungry and ready to share what your company is doing this summer. For more information, e-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

**2021-2022  
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*From the Board Chair's desk*

## Summer outlook is positive, but major challenges face industry

It's hard to believe, but summer is right around the corner, and by all indications, we are in for a busy summer with visitors. I'm encouraged how fast the tourism industry has recovered following what transpired in 2020, and looking forward to welcoming guests back to Alaska this summer.

Last year, we saw the importance of the independent traveler. This year, we will see the return of cruise passengers to Southcentral Alaska and more group tours than the last two years combined. Many business owners I've talked to are expecting a record summer, which is amazing considering what we were talking about just two years ago.

Nationally, traveler sentiment is extremely high, and Alaska is poised to be a destination of choice as travelers look for wide-open spaces and outdoor experiences. People are ready to travel again, and we are ready to welcome them back to Alaska.

This is all great news, but it comes with some issues that we all need to be cognizant about and work to overcome.

One major challenge facing many of our members is workforce development. This issue isn't isolated to the tourism industry, however, and there are many layers to it.

Hiring full staffs has been hard for many businesses, and keeping employees has been even harder. It is not as easy as just offering more competitive wages or bonuses, however. Other challenges facing

many of us is the supply chain, and the cost of goods rising quickly.

With workforce challenges and the potential for a record number of visitors, we are going to be working harder than ever before and stretched thin.

One thing I'd like to remind our members about is that our greatest

ambassadors are visitors who return home with a positive and memorable experience, and tell their friends and relatives about their Alaska vacation.

Providing a positive visitor experience is imperative to us all. It is going to mean working longer and harder to make sure our guests are happy and content. It is going to take new ideas, innovation and the ability to adapt to a changing environment. We need to practice patience and kindness.

As we've seen many times, the tourism industry is resilient. It's time for that resilience once again as we lead the recovery from the pandemic and get back to providing our visitors amazing experiences that showcase our destination as being world-class.

I'm excited for what the summer holds for our industry and our destination, and I hope you all have a great summer season.

Thank you for your continued support of Mat-Su CVB!

Mark Fleenor ([info@sheepmountain.com](mailto:info@sheepmountain.com)) is the owner of Sheep Mountain Air and the chair of the Mat-Su CVB Board of Directors.



**Mark Fleenor,  
Sheep Mountain Lodge,  
Mat-Su CVB Board Chair**

## Trails luncheon set for April 29

The Mat-Su CVB is hosting an in-person luncheon on Friday, April 29 at noon at Turkey Red featuring trails and Hatcher Pass.

Wes Hoskins of the Mat-Su Trails & Parks Foundation will give a presentation about trail projects taking place in the Mat-Su Valley this summer. Mandy Garcia of Salmon Berry Tours will also talk about

what to expect at Independence Mine this summer, including tours, guided walks and more.

The luncheon is free to attend, and lunch is available for \$15, payable to Turkey Red.

For more information or to RSVP, please e-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

## *From the President & CEO's desk*

# Sustainable funding and master plan a look to the future

The Mat-Su CVB board of directors met in late February for their annual planning retreat and the top priorities discussed were sustainable funding and developing a Tourism Master Plan.

When COVID hit in March 2020 the Mat-Su CVB was in the middle of a three-year funding grant agreement with the borough. With the uncertainty of bed tax collections, the mayor and assembly supported funding the Mat-Su CVB for two years with a federal CARES Act grant.

The borough assembly is currently in the process of debating and approving the FY23 budget and we are advocating to reinstate a three-year funding agreement with the historical formula of 65 percent of bed tax collections appropriated to the Mat-Su CVB, and 35 percent dedicated to tourism infrastructure projects.

We need the ability to plan for two major opportunities coming to the borough: hosting the 2024 Arctic Winter Games, and the encouraging EDA grant application to complete the Gateway Visitor Center. These two unprecedented events will promote awareness to visit the Mat-Su Valley and we need to be prepared to take full advantage.

Soon after the board planning retreat, we received notice that our grant application to develop a Sustainable Tourism Master Plan (STMP) was awarded (see story on Page 1).

A STMP is a critical step in identifying and prioritizing those opportunities (underutilized) for enhancements to the resident and visitor experience that will position the community as a desirable place to live, work and visit, and extend the benefits of

the visitor economy throughout our communities.

Trending throughout destinations worldwide in this pause of travel is evaluating the value and experiences that we deliver to guests and residents. It is a historic opportunity for stakeholders to collaborate and develop long-term strategies that benefit residents and visitors.

We encourage you to participate in one of the four scheduled workshops and help us answer these questions:

How can we best make the tourism industry sustainable many years into the future?

What level of tourism, and what types of tourism are desired by residents?

How do we prepare for potential increases in visitor volume?

How should different markets be prioritized in our promotional efforts?

What infrastructure and visitor services are required to reach our goals?

How do we maximize positive impacts, and minimize negative impacts?



**Bonnie Quill,  
Mat-Su CVB  
President & CEO**

Sustainable funding, a Tourism Master Plan, hosting the 2024 Arctic Winter Games and completion of the Mat-Su Valley Gateway Visitor Center, the Mat-Su CVB is focused on our tourism success into the future.

Bonnie Quill ([bonnie@alaskavisit.com](mailto:bonnie@alaskavisit.com)) is the Mat-Su CVB President & CEO.



## MTA Luggage Tag raffle returns with four prizes

The MTA/Alaska Airlines Luggage Tag Raffle is back, with more ways to win, but you better get your tickets soon – the drawing is May 4 during the Mat-Su CVB barbecue, as part of National Travel & Tourism Week.

This year, there are four prizes – two round-trip Alaska Airlines tickets; two round-trip tickets from Anchorage to Seward on the Alaska Railroad; two round-trip tickets from Anchorage to Denali on the Alaska Railroad; and a one-night stay for two at the McKinley Princess Wilderness Lodge.

Only 300 tickets are printed for the raffle. Tickets are \$20 each and include a sturdy luggage tag for your bags.

Tickets can be purchased by calling (907) 746-5000, by e-mailing [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com) or in person at the Mat-Su CVB office and barbecue on May 4.

## Animated video illustrates tourism's importance

The Mat-Su CVB recently produced a 2-minute animated video highlighting how the Mat-Su CVB promotes the Valley, and the importance a healthy tourism industry has on the community as a whole.

The video illustrates that when you build a place people want to visit, you build a place where people want to live, do business and recreate. It's a cycle that not only brings visitors to our area and bolsters the economy, but strengthens a destination.

"The animated video shows how Mat-Su CVB is a community resource to not only grow tourism, but to help grow our community," said Mat-Su CVB President & CEO

Bonnie Quill. "We not only promote our destination to visitors, but also the benefits that tourism brings to our residents long after the visitor leaves."

You can view the video on YouTube [HERE](#), or by scanning the QR Code.





## Mat-Su CVB attends cruise-focused consumer show

As Southcentral Alaska welcomes cruise visitors for the first time since 2019, the Mat-Su CVB participated in the Holland America/Princess Alaska Cruise Showcase in Seattle March 19.

Nearly 2,000 potential cruisers attended the free one-day event that featured Alaska destinations and companies.

Mat-Su CVB distributed 500 visitor guides and talked about the many options available in the Mat-Su Valley for cruise passengers doing a land itinerary, including packaged tours and independently.

"The excitement level of the attendees was off the charts," said Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler. "People are eager to cruise to Alaska, and they wanted information on what to see and do when they get off the ship and explore Southcentral Alaska."

The event is hosted by Holland America/Princess each spring. Attendees were able to take advantage of show-only discounts and book their cruises at the event.

"We're expecting a solid return and the interest in cruising to Alaska is very



**Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler mans the booth during the Holland America/Princess Alaska Showcase in Seattle.**

high," said Holland America/Princess's Bill Fletcher at the event. "We're excited about this summer."

Because of the show's success, Fletcher

said Holland America/Princess may expand the show to two locations next spring, in Seattle and Phoenix, a major market for Alaska cruisers.

## Outdoor shows get Alaskans ready for summer adventures

With summer right around the corner, the Mat-Su CVB attended three in-state outdoors show, promoting the Valley to Alaskans and their visiting friends and relatives.

The Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show was held in Wasilla at the Menard Sports Center on March 25-27 and attracted nearly 10,000 attendees, making it the largest Mat-Su Outdoorsman Show ever, with more than 100 vendor booths on both the ice arena side and the turf side of the arena.

"It was great to see the success of the show and the interest in learning more about the outdoor recreation opportunities in the Mat-Su," Casey Ressler said. "I think after the last two years, people are ready to get out and enjoy summer activities more than they ever have before."

The Great Alaska Sportsman Show returned to Anchorage after a two-year hiatus on April 1-3 at the Dena'ina Center. Attendance dipped from 2019 levels, but show-goers were actively looking for recommendations on what to see and do this summer.

The Fairbanks Outdoors Show on April



**Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler talks about the Valley with an attendee at the Great Alaska Sportsman Show in Anchorage.**

8-10 finished the outdoor show season with a bang.

"Fairbanks is always a great show because it has a lot of military attendees who are eager to explore Alaska during their time here," Ressler said.

Like the Anchorage show, the Fairbanks Outdoors Show has not been held for two years due to Covid.

"At all three shows, you could feel the energy people have about a sense of normalcy returning," Ressler said. "It was really encouraging to see."

## In-state campaign starts May 24

The spring in-state marketing campaign will begin on May 24 and run for three weeks, targeting Alaskans and their visiting friends and relatives.

The campaign includes print ads, social media promotion and targeted digital ads, in addition to radio advertising in Southcentral Alaska.

Members are encouraged to participate by submitting special offers or packages to [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com) to be featured on the special offers page.

Each week, a different community is featured as part of the campaign. A "trails" theme has been developed highlighting adventure, hiking, dining, microbreweries and activities.

"Alaskans and their visiting friends and relatives is an important audience, and the spring campaign shows them why they should explore their own backyard," Mat-Su CVB's Casey Ressler said.

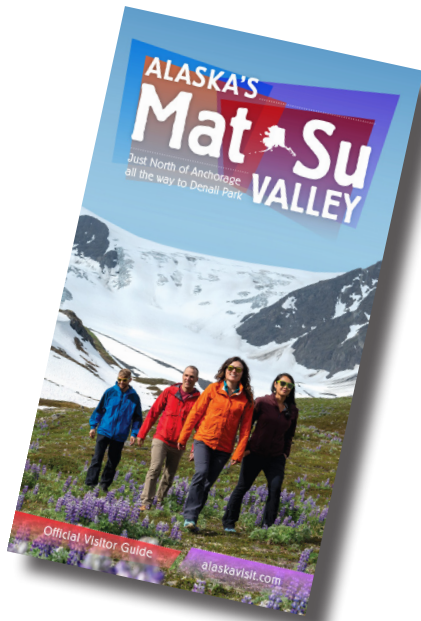
## Visitor Guides sent to 60,000 leads

The 2022 Mat-Su Visitor Guide is hitting the hands of high-potential visitors in the Lower 48 this week, as 60,000 copies are being mailed to visitors who have requested more information through the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

Each year, Mat-Su CVB purchases the leads because they are highly qualified and have indicated they plan on traveling to Alaska either this summer or next summer. They have already requested a State Vacation Planner.

The annual visitor guide is an important marketing tool, and national research has shown that travelers still value a printed a guide.

In addition to member listings, the Mat-Su guide features inspiring photography, trip planning tools, sample itineraries and local tips from all corners of the Mat-Su Valley.



## Ad sales begin for 2023 Visitor Guide

While the 2022 summer season is just beginning, the work begins on the 2023 Mat-Su Visitor Guide. Advertising packets will be mailed to members soon, so keep an eye out for this marketing opportunity.

In 2023, 100,000 copies will be printed – the same number as in 2022. Every member received a complimentary listing in the guide, and affordable listing enhancements and display advertising are available, starting at just \$170 for a directory ad.

“We have advertising opportunities for every size business and every budget,” said Mat-Su CVB Membership Manager Justin

Saunders. “It’s a great way to promote your business to potential visitors who are planning their vacation.”

The Mat-Su CVB distributes guides at national travel shows, in-state outdoors shows and throughout Alaska at high-traffic visitor spots like airports, hotels and visitor centers. Guides are also mailed to high-potential visitors who have requested more information through the Alaska Travel Industry Association.

Ad sales will take place throughout the summer. For more information on this opportunity, e-mail [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).

## Online marketing available through DTN

The Mat-Su CVB offers affordable online advertising packages on AlaskaVisit.com through a partnership with Destination Travel Network (DTN).

Advertising on AlaskaVisit.com lets you leverage Mat-Su CVB’s investment in digital marketing and bring visitors to your web site – and ultimately, to your door.

The Mat-Su CVB partners with DTN, which handles all the sales, design and delivery of ads on the website, and DTN employees typically reach out to members on Mat-Su CVB’s behalf.

Packages include page sponsorships, featured listings, run-of-site ads and mobile ads. Every member has a complimentary listing online, and DTN ads only amplify your presence on the site.

Mat-Su CVB has robust paid search engine marketing and search engine optimization programs, so by placing a digital ad on the site, you reap additional benefits.

If you are interested in learning more about online advertising opportunities, contact Justin Saunders at [justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com).



Heide Brandes enjoys a snowmachine trip with Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours on a February trip.

## Mat-Su CVB hosts national travel writer

Mat-Su CVB recently hosted national travel writer Heide Brandes on a two-day familiarization trip that included the Knik River Valley, the Matanuska Valley and Talkeetna.

Brandes is a freelance journalist who Mat-Su CVB has met several times at Alaska Media Road Show. She was focused on winter adventure, and the Mat-Su Valley was the perfect destination for her.

During her time here, she did glacier ice climbing with Alaska Sundog Guides and Alaska Helicopter Tours; stayed at Alaska’s Harvest Bed & Breakfast; did a snowmachine tour with Alaska Backcountry Adventure Tours; stayed at Talkeetna Inn; went flightseeing with K2 Aviation; and did guided snowshoe hiking with Go Hike Alaska.

“Thank you to all our partners who helped out with this itinerary. We were excited to showcase winter products for Heide,” Mat-Su CVB’s Casey Ressler said.



# Denali Park Road open for first 43 miles only in 2022

Due to a landslide near Pretty Rocks, the Denali Park Road into the national park will not be fully open in 2022, prompting changes to how visitors can access the park.

The road will be open for visitor transportation as far as Mile 43 of the 92-mile road. The National Parks Service has announced that up to 25 transit buses a day will be on the road during peak season (June 16-August 17). Up to 24 long tours and 39 short tours will be offered daily. Additionally, the free Savage River Shuttle will depart the park entrance every 15 minutes. The free Riley Creek Shuttle will loop around the entrance area continuously.

The National Parks Service has also

announced some changes to popular visitor experiences within the park, due to the road closure.

## Tundra Wilderness Tour

The Tundra Wilderness Tour will operate a modified tour. The 5 to 5 1/2-hour tour will turn around at Mile 43. As part of the tour, there will be a 20-minute interpretive walk and talk at the historic East Fork Cabin. Wildlife viewing will be offered in Igloo Canyon and Sable Pass, and a snack box will be provided.

## Denali History Tour

The Denali History Tour is 4 1/2 to 5 hours long and will turn around at Mile 17. There will be a 30-minute theater

viewing of "Across Time and Tundra" and a 20-minute cultural talk at Primrose. At the historic Savage Cabin, there will be a half hour interpretive walk and talk. A snack will be provided.

## Denali Backcountry Adventure

The Denali Backcountry Adventure is a new tour offered by Alaska Collection by Pursuit, who owns and operates lodges and attractions across Alaska. The tour departs from Denali Cabins and follows the Denali Highway (not the Park Road) for 65 miles with narration provided by guides. A hearty lunch will be served at Alpine Creek Lodge. The trip includes stops for wildlife viewing and photography and will operate June 4-Sept. 16.



The Denali Highway is a great alternative for visitors looking for a Denali backcountry experience.

## Denali Highway provides backcountry experiences

With the Denali Park Road only open to Mile 43 in 2022 and 2023, the Denali Highway is a great alternative for your guests who want a Denali experience. Mat-Su CVB has been promoting the Denali Highway as an excellent option for visitors.

For those who have not been on the highway recently, it is one of the most breathtaking drives in Alaska. The 135-mile road connects Cantwell to Paxson.

The Denali Highway was the only road into Denali National Park & Preserve before the Parks Highway was completed. Today, the gravel road offers visitors spectacular views of the Alaska Range and glaciers. Conditions on the road vary, so informing your guests is important. Travel speeds of between 35-55 mph are possible, but the rugged route is best enjoyed at a slower pace. Roadhouses, lodges and inns can be found along the highway.

## Stay connected to tell our story!



[www.facebook.com/visitmatsu](http://www.facebook.com/visitmatsu)

[www.twitter.com/visitmatsu](http://www.twitter.com/visitmatsu)



YouTube  
"yahoomatsu" channel

Instagram  
[matsuvallleyak](https://www.instagram.com/matsuvallleyak)



# AlaskaVisit.com continues to see increased traffic

Traffic to AlaskaVisit.com has continued to increase through the first quarter of 2022, following a record number of site visitors in 2021.

Through April 26, site visitation is up 131 percent over the same time period in 2021.

The Mat-Su CVB has robust search engine marketing and search engine optimization programs to drive online users to the site for trip planning information, including member listings.

“Our paid search program continues to be highly efficient and effective,” said Mat-Su CVB Marketing Manager Casey Ressler. “And we’ve seen tremendous growth in organic traffic, which is great.”

Organic traffic is considered traffic that

arrives through a basic search on Google. Having strong and relevant content is the key to growing organic traffic.

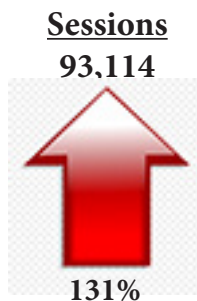
Through April 26, organic traffic has increased by 62.5 percent over the same time period in 2021.

“Organic traffic is a great measuring stick because it’s traffic you simply can’t buy, like you can with a paid search campaign,” Ressler explained. “They both are very important in attracting site visitors and engaging them to explore more of it.”

In 2022, organic traffic accounts for 48 percent of all site visitors, while paid search accounts for 42.5 percent. Other channels include social media, direct, referral and e-mail marketing.



*Web site traffic, January 1 - April 26 compared to 2021*



## Mat-Su CVB featured in Travel Weekly story about recovery

The Mat-Su CVB was recently featured in the national industry magazine Travel Weekly, which focused on resilient destinations in Alaska.

Journalist Renee Brincks wrote the story about how destinations like the Mat-Su Valley and Skagway rebounded in 2021, as opposed to the challenges they faced in the first year of the pandemic, when virtually no visitors arrived in Alaska.

Mat-Su CVB has met with Brincks several times at Alaska Media Road Show, and Marketing Manager Casey Ressler said it shows the importance of developing relationships with travel writers.

“We’ve worked with Renee in the past, and through developing that

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relationship, she knows she can reach out to us for national stories.

You can read the entire article at <https://www.travelweekly.com/North-America-Travel/More-resilient-destinations-await-in-Last-Frontier>

## Welcome to these new Mat-Su CVB members!

Susitna Sled Dog Adventures  
Alyssa Buser  
(505) 414-3858

[www.susitnasleddogs.com](http://www.susitnasleddogs.com)  
[susitnasleddogadventures@gmail.com](mailto:susitnasleddogadventures@gmail.com)

Revel Treks & Tours  
Kierre Childers  
(907) 903-1664  
[www.reveltreksandtours.com](http://www.reveltreksandtours.com)  
[info@revelak.com](mailto:info@revelak.com)

Go Hike Alaska  
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**You're invited!**

# **Mat-Su CVB Summer Kickoff Barbecue**

Start the summer right with the annual Mat-Su CVB barbecue! We'll be grilling up burgers and pulled pork sandwiches. Have a burger and give a three-minute spotlight about your business. Bring your frontline employees so they know about all the amazing things happening in the Mat-Su this summer.



*"I musk ox you a question. Will we see you at the farm on May 4?"*

**Wednesday, May 4  
4 p.m. to 6 p.m. It's free!  
Palmer Musk Ox Farm**

**[justin@alaskavisit.com](mailto:justin@alaskavisit.com) for more information**

**YAHOO!**  
**Mat-Su**

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Palmer, AK 99645