

# Whittier Tourism Best Management Practices

2023 Draft



<a href="#">COMMUNICATE</a>	<a href="#">3</a>
<a href="#">KEEP IT CLEAN</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Maintain Clean Air</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Maintain Clean Water</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Marine Debris</a>	<a href="#">4</a>
<a href="#">Gray Water and Black Water Discharge</a>	<a href="#">6</a>
<a href="#">PROTECT IMPORTANT USES</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Ensure Access for All</a>	<a href="#">7</a>
<a href="#">Preserve Quiet</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Public Address Announcements and Signals</a>	<a href="#">8</a>
<a href="#">Respect Others</a>	<a href="#">9</a>
<a href="#">Wilderness Values</a>	<a href="#">10</a>
<a href="#">Commercial Fishing Values</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">PREVENT OVERCROWDING</a>	<a href="#">11</a>
<a href="#">Practice Ethical Wildlife Viewing</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">Jet Ski Tours</a>	<a href="#">12</a>
<a href="#">KEEP THE BMP ALIVE</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Make it a Practice</a>	<a href="#">13</a>
<a href="#">Meet Regularly and Update the Document</a>	<a href="#">13</a>

## **Introduction**

With its access to stunning blue waters, glaciated fiords and abundant wildlife, the coastal town of Whittier is a natural gateway to a wide variety of outdoor recreation activities both on and off the water. As Alaska's tourism sector continues to grow, business owners and residents are keen to ensure that concerns around development, the environment, and operating logistics are heard from business owners and community members in an effort to minimize any potential negative impacts to the town of Whittier, its visitors, or its people. A broad coalition that includes business owners, tour operators, cruise lines, transportation providers, community members, Prince William Sound Stewardship Foundation, the City of Whittier and the Prince William Sound Economic Development District have drafted these 'best management practices' for tourism. Valuable input has been provided by the Chugach National Forest, Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation, and NOAA Fisheries.

TBMP guidelines are driven by community voices. This document is the result of several stakeholder meetings that started in January, 2023. Its purpose is not to be regulatory or disciplinary, but a voluntary endeavor that serves as an asset to operators, visitors, and community members. Active participation in the development and improvement of these guidelines demonstrates a commitment to enhancing visitors' experience in Whittier, fostering relationships between business owners, cruise operators, and the community, and protecting the very qualities that make Whittier the wonderful place it is. If you live, work, or run a business in Whittier, we'd love to hear your thoughts on how the tourist season could be improved. These community centered practices will help to ensure that Whittier remains not only a great place to visit, but a great place to live and work.

## **Mission**

Our mission is to support the town of Whittier in its role as a primary gateway to the natural beauty and biodiversity of Prince William Sound, celebrating its diverse culture and unique qualities while fostering sustainable tourism in Whittier and building strong connections within the Whittier community. This cooperative effort among Whittier tour operators, cruise lines, transportation providers, the City of Whittier and its residents is intended to address tourism operations in a manner that reflects both Whittier residents' and industry interests and concerns. It includes voluntary guidelines pertaining to operations both within Whittier and the broader Prince William Sound where so many businesses operate.

## **Values**

This document reflects values identified during public meetings and surveys conducted in 2023 that are critical to Whittier residents, tour operators, businesses, and visitors. We have identified four critical overarching values: Communicate, Keep it Clean, Protect Important Uses, Prevent Overcrowding, and Keep the BMP Alive. The practices suggested under each value are intended to support the collaborative fostering of each value by all involved parties from land managers to tour operators to business owners to residents.

# COMMUNICATE

A thriving tourism industry that respects residents, businesses, and other visitors depends on open and respectful communication. The signatories of this agreement agree to the following:

## Whittier

- Cruise Line Agencies of Alaska will continue to publish in a timely manner its season schedule of port calls for Whittier, Valdez, and College Fiord at
- Whittier port call schedule (and College Fiord visits) posted at Cruise Line Agency of Alaska, [claaalaska.com](http://claaalaska.com) so that the public and other tour operators can plan accordingly. and schedule from cruise dock managers. (Include a link to CLAA website on Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce website?)
- Outreach to independent boaters through City of Whittier Harbor Master office and private marina.
- Motorcoach parking is limited, no specific areas delineated/designated. By February 1, 2024, designate specific areas for motorcoach parking if needed.
- Bus tour routes: delineate and redirect where needed. Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce is providing marked maps to tour operators, and distributing at ADOT&PF tunnel kiosk in Bear Valley. Identify residential areas where operators should be limited.
- Guidelines for navigation by private operators and fishing fleet: no wake zones? Proximity to other vessels? Rights of way?

## Prince William Sound

- Vessel operators agree to monitor marine radio channels 16/13 along with their other working channels.
- Captains will use marine radios to share pertinent information such as operator intentions and updates on sea and ice conditions.
- Operators agree to keep communications respectful and concise.

# KEEP IT CLEAN

## Maintain Clean Air

The clean air and waters of Whittier and Prince William Sound are resources valued by residents and visitors alike. Visual emissions from vessels can negatively affect scenery and the enjoyment of our landscape and may carry health impacts. The following guidelines will help keep local air and water clean.

- Bus and van operators agree to shut off their engines when parked for more than 10 minutes.
- All vessel operators agree to comply with the Marine Vessel Visible Emissions Standards (18 AAC 50-070) and take all available and reasonable steps to minimize visible stack effluents while in port and while transiting Prince William Sound. Operators recognize that visual emissions can become concentrated in narrow, steep-walled fiords such as Passage Canal and College Fiord and agree to take any other proactive steps, whether operational or engineered, feasible to manage visible emissions.

## Maintain Clean Water

### **Wastewater Discharge from Ships**

All vessel operators agree to comply with XXXXX EPA and DEC statutes related to black water and gray water discharge while in port in Whittier and while operating in Prince William Sound. (For now this guideline is a placeholder. DEC is currently reviewing language and possible BMPs that may relate to PWS for the group to consider. When this guideline is drafted it will be distributed to the group.)

### **Marine Debris**

Gulf of Alaska Keeper, the PWS Stewardship Foundation, Chugach National Forest, and others spend hundreds of thousands of dollars each year to remove tons of marine debris from Prince William Sound beaches. Evidence shows between 10-30% of the garbage originates from PWS boats, work sites, or communities.

The Prince William Sound tourism industry can be a leader in the prevention and clean-up of marine debris in our region. The signatories of this agreement agree to the following voluntary practices to educate the public about marine debris, prevent its deposition, and support its removal from PWS beaches.

### **In Whittier**

- Since plastic and other trash can catch a ride to the ocean on the wind, Whittier restaurants, storefronts, and the Municipality will manage their properties and outdoor trash receptacles in a way that prevents loose trash, overflowing receptacles, or access to trash by wildlife. This includes the use of functioning bear-resistant dumpsters and other trash receptacles, which prevent wildlife from spreading garbage.
- When storefront, harbor, or municipal trash receptacles are overflowing or breached by birds, bears, and other wildlife, the appropriate business owners or municipal department will resolve the problem in a timely manner so that plastic and other trash does not enter marine waters.

- To protect nearby ocean waters, businesses agree to favor, whenever feasible or affordable, the use of paper, cardboard, and other non-plastic materials and avoid single-use Styrofoam and plastic bags and food/beverage packaging to prevent plastics from entering the ocean.
- Consider participating in or supporting the annual Leave it Better Campaign or annual marine debris clean-ups or town clean-ups.

### **In Prince William Sound**

- Vessel operators will educate passengers about preventing litter during their trip;
- Captains will secure loads to prevent overboard loss of gear or litter;
- To prevent loss of plastics overboard, when feasible and affordable operators agree to favor the use of paper, cardboard, and other non-plastic packaging and avoid single-use Styrofoam and plastic bags and food/beverage packaging;
- To protect wildlife and prevent litter, operators and guides will carefully dispose of used fishing line, hooks, and other tackle in an appropriate container. Use monofilament recycling bins when feasible;
- So that timely action can be taken on marine debris, vessel operators and guides agree to report marine debris to **XXX (Glacier Ranger District of Chugach NF can volunteer to receive calls)**
- Remote fish camps, research camps, and aquaculture operations agree to prevent litter from entering the ocean by limiting the use of single-use plastics, keeping clean camps and facilities, securely stowing equipment and supplies against weather and wildlife, and inspecting gear to prevent its loss to the ocean.

## **PROTECT IMPORTANT USES**

### **Ensure Access for All**

- **Anton Anderson Tunnel comments made in spring, 2023(may be best addressed through dedicated working group):**
  - **Schedule, and tunnel traffic priorities. One recommendation made requests a priority for people coming in to work in Whittier or going on small charters because of minimal time allowed between tunnel traffic release and boarding time**
  - **From commercial fishing operators: Tunnel operators and tour bus fleets recognize that Prince William Sound commercial fishing is an important part of the Prince William Sound economy and culture. Commercial fishers depend on**



regular, reliable, and efficient access to and from Whittier to supply or repair their vessels and to reach the Sound in time for fishery openings. During commercial fishing season, commercial fishers will be given appropriate priority for tunnel access.

- Ventilation (maybe not really a BMP but wanted to capture the concern)
- Communication on AK Railroad Corporation Master Plan process and opportunities for community input. Concern about number of railroad crossings on new roads.

## Preserve Quiet

### Public Address Announcements and Signals

Shipboard announcements, including on outdoor decks, are important for safety and to provide passengers with interpretive information about the natural history of Prince William Sound. Some announcements, horns, and signals are also required by the US Coast Guard or are necessary for inspections, drills, and other safety reasons. However, announcements and signals may also disrupt Whittier residents and businesses or people hunting, working, or recreating in Prince William Sound. The following guidelines are designed to balance the need for safety, interpretation, and quiet. Operators agree to ensure that shipboard staff understand the importance of following these guidelines.

#### In Whittier:

- To respect Whittier residents and businesses, all vessel operators will work to minimize vessel announcements, whistle signals, and outdoor entertainment (movies/video screens and use of music, bands or DJ) while docked or anchored in Whittier Harbor and within Passage Canal between Whittier and Trinity Point. Safety drills should not begin before 9 a.m. local time.

#### In Prince William Sound

- To respect the importance of quiet and solitude to other visitors, particularly near recreation areas such as Alaska State Marine Parks and the Wilderness Study Area of western Prince William Sound, operators agree to limit the number and duration of outside announcements. Operators agree to lower loudspeaker volume on outside decks to the minimum required for communication and safety and to avoid announcements between 8:00 am and 8:00 pm whenever possible.
- Operators agree not to use whistles, horns or other noisemaking devices except as required for navigational, safety or emergency purposes.
- By February 1, 2024, the BMP group will negotiate specific areas in Prince William Sound such as those close to recreation sites in Blackstone Bay where outdoor announcements should be avoided to respect onshore visitors.

## Respect Others

Whittier is home to people and businesses and is popular among visitors seeking a variety of experiences. The broader Prince William Sound is also a place where people live, work, hunt, fish, hike, paddle, and enjoy a wilderness setting. To respect this wide range of residents, businesses, and other visitors, tour guides and vessel operators agree to the following:

### In Whittier:

- Guidelines for navigation by private operators and fishing fleet: no wake zone (in Whittier Harbor), proximity to other vessels, rights of way.
- All motorized vessel operators agree to maintain a safe and respectful distance from other users, including kayakers and other non-motorized users.
- To respect other boaters and activity at the fuel dock, all vessel operators agree to travel at no-wake speeds within Whittier Harbor to and at the mouth of the harbor.
- Guidelines on trail use etiquette for tour operators. Tour guides providing hikes in and around Whittier will have necessary city, state, or U.S. Forest Service permits and follow their stipulations. Hiking groups will practice Leave No Trace principles, including by hiking on durable surfaces, staying together as a group, yielding to faster hikers, and taking other actions to respect other users. Groups will work to avoid degrading sensitive areas like meadows, wetlands, and alpine vegetation.
- Operators and tour guides will not fly drones in front of Begich Towers or other residential areas, along public trails, or close to any marine vessel.
- Visiting cruise ships will notify ship captains to turn off completely (both visual and sound) large shipboard outdoor and indoor screens in passenger common areas when entering Whittier at night to reduce light and noise pollution.

### In Prince William Sound

- All motorized vessel operators agree to maintain a safe and respectful distance from other users, including kayakers and other non-motorized users.
- Operators acknowledge the importance of commercial fishing to the Prince William Sound economy and culture and will operate in a manner that gives a wide berth to active commercial fishing operations. Look for buoys marking nets in the water, these may be located several hundred yards from a fishing vessel.
- To respect other visitors, vessel operators will not play loud music or use fireworks or outdoor loudspeakers (unless for safety) while anchored or traveling near campers or other boaters.

- Operators and tour guides agree not to fly drones within one mile of people seen hiking, camping, hunting, fishing, recreating, or working in Prince William Sound.
- Operators and tour guides agree not fly drones near other vessels or within anchorages shared with other vessels.
- Operators who guide people ashore will have the appropriate State or Chugach National Forest permits, follow their permit stipulations, and be aware of the location of Alaska Native Corporation or other private lands..
- Guides who offer campfires ashore agree to follow Leave No Trace principles by building fires on gravel or other durable surfaces below the high tide line, extinguishing fires before they leave, scattering burned debris, and removing all garbage.
- Guides who offer hiking or camping ashore agree to respect other commercial and private groups by not encroaching on their space or making loud noise.
- Guides who offer hiking and camping ashore will follow the latest Leave No Trace principles provided by the Chugach National Forest and abide by the stipulations of their permits, including direction for proper disposal of human waste.
- Helicopter and airplane pilots will maintain respectful distances from vessels and people ashore, including kayakers, campers, and boats on anchor.

## Wilderness Values

Prince William Sound has long been valued as a place where residents and visitors can enjoy a wilderness setting. Approximately 2 million acres of the western Sound are designated by Congress as the Nellie Juan-College Fiord Wilderness Study Area. The Chugach National Forest manages this area to maintain its wild character, including its undeveloped landscape, natural conditions, and outstanding opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation in a generally non-motorized environment (on land; does not include marine waters). The tourism industry recognizes that these characteristics are important to small tour operators, subsistence users, hikers, boaters, kayakers, hunters, and many others.

- Operators agree to conduct tours in a manner that preserves the on-shore wilderness experience of others.
- To help maintain Wilderness Study Area conditions, operators agree to teach guides, employees, and guests about the public lands surrounding Prince William Sound, including their wilderness values. Educational materials are available for free through the Chugach National Forest and are referenced as part of US Forest Service permitting materials. (link them here?)



- When feasible and practical, operators will seek engineered and operational solutions to reduce engine and generator noise.

## Commercial Fishing Values

Tour operators recognize that commercial fishing is an essential part of the Prince William Sound economy and is embedded within the regional culture. Operators will conduct tours in a way that does not interfere with active commercial fishing operations, which often must occur during limited fishery openings.

- All vessel operators will observe US Coast Guard Navigation Rules and Regulations Handbook direction that all vessels will stay out of the way of vessels engaged in commercial fishing (Rule 18, except where rules 9, 10, and 13 apply).
- Vessel operators agree to give wide berth to commercial fishing operations and keep a sharp eye for commercial fishing nets, including in the busy fishing zones around Coghill River, Esther Island, the north entrance to Culross Passage, and along Main Bay and Eshamy Bay, among other areas.
- Charter fishing boat operators acknowledge recent Alaska Board of Fish actions that prevent the commercialization of subsistence fishing.
- Sport fishing charter vessels in Main Bay or other zones will conduct operations in a way that steers clear of commercial fishing operations.

## PREVENT OVERCROWDING

Whittier is a small town that is easily impacted by large volumes of traffic or visitors. The broader Prince William Sound, including the Alaska State Marine Parks and the Chugach National Forest Wilderness Study Area, is also valued for its opportunities for solitude and primitive recreation. As tourism in our region grows, tour operators agree to operate in ways that respect and maintain Whittier's small-town environment and the wilderness setting of the Sound.

### **In Whittier**

- The Prince William Sound Economic Development District, Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce, and City of Whittier are developing wayfinding signs around Whittier to address vehicle and pedestrian interaction adjacent to Phillips Cruises terminal, around the harbor, and throughout the town of Whittier.

### **In Prince William Sound**

- Tour operators agree to respect independent visitors and other tour operators by not conducting on-shore activities where other groups are already hiking, picnicking, or camping.

## Practice Ethical Wildlife Viewing

Whether close to Whittier or in the broader Prince William Sound, vessel operators and tour guides agree to maintain a safe and respectful distance from all terrestrial and marine wildlife. Whenever possible, operators will avoid changing the natural behavior of wildlife in their vicinity, including bears, mountain goats, marine mammals, and nesting birds such as terns and oystercatchers. Operators will provide employee training that includes the latest wildlife viewing laws, regulations, and recommendations from appropriate state and federal agencies.

- Vessel operators and pilots will carry the latest NOAA Marine Mammal Viewing [Guidelines](#) Brochure with them and make sure employees and visitors follow its recommendations. The brochure includes guidelines for watching whales, sea lions, and harbor seals.
- Harbor seals nurse pups and molt on floating icebergs in Harriman Fiord, Blackstone Bay, Chenega Bay, Columbia Bay and other glacial fiords. It may not be possible to follow every NOAA guideline on every visit, but vessel operators from kayaks to cruise ships should strive to maintain 500 meters (~.25 mile) from resting seals, minimize wakes, avoid sudden or loud noises, minimize outdoor announcements, and avoid travel through thick ice. The complete Alaska Harbor Seal Approach Guidelines in Glacial Fjords may be found at: <https://alaskafisheries.noaa.gov/pr/harbor-seals>.
- **Include Whale Sense as a standard?**
- Recognizing that marine tour operators may be the first to encounter stranded, dead, entangled, or injured marine mammals, operators agree to promptly report the date, location, number of animals, and species to the NOAA Fisheries Alaska Statewide 24-hour Standing Hotline at (877) 925 7773. Operators recognize that the public cannot handle stranded marine mammals without authorization from NOAA. Reporting strandings helps NOAA biologists understand populations and other useful information.

## Jet Ski Tours

Jet ski tours are a new opportunity that has grown in popularity in recent years in Prince William Sound, creating a unique way for people to enjoy the area and access tidewater glaciers. Recognizing that jet ski tours have increased in volume, operators agree to the following guidelines to avoid adversely impacting other visitors to the Sound. These guidelines were collaboratively developed by participating jet ski companies and sea kayak companies, with facilitation from the Chugach National Forest.

- For marine safety and to minimize impacts on others, tour guides will keep jet skiers together in a uniform group.
- If an operator offers free time or play time as part of their tour, they will focus the activity in X geographic area (west of Tebenkof? entrance to Shotgun?. Play time or free time will not occur in common traffic lanes, around blind corners, or near popular camping areas such as the 13-Mile, 17-Mile, “avalanche,” East Willard, and Lawrence Glacier beaches in Blackstone Bay.
- To respect onshore visitors seeking a wilderness experience in Passage Canal and Blackstone Bay, jet ski tours will not broadcast music over external speakers. In-helmet communication devices are encouraged. External loudspeakers will be used minimally and only for safety purposes.

## KEEP THE BMP ALIVE

### Make it a Practice

- Statement of Agreement signed annually by groups wanting to be involved in BMP (including tour operators, businesses, etc.)
- Build a shared identity and stewardship
  - Share a compelling story for why people love to live in and visit Whittier
  - Highlight Whittier as a home, not just a playground to visit
  - Establish Whittier’s place in the wider context of Alaska
    - Celebrate Whittier’s diverse culture and accentuate Whittier’s unique qualities
- Make employees aware of the BMP document and associated maps, materials, and guidelines. Use the materials referenced in the BMP as resources in training.

### Meet Regularly and Update the Document

- Pre-season meeting with tour operators (April 2024): cruise ship operators, small commercial tour operators (kayak guides, fishing charters, jet ski tours, charter tours), USFS permitted operators, AK DOT&PF Tunnel Director

# WHITTIER TOURISM BMPs STATEMENT OF AGREEMENT

As a *voluntary practitioner* of the Whittier Tourism Best Management Practices, I understand that our business agrees to:

- Participate in periodic de-brief sessions to discuss progress made in attaining program goals.
- Train all relevant employees on the program's objectives and practices and to conduct periodic training sessions for employees. Participants will train employees and strive to conduct business in a manner that exhibits common courtesy throughout the season.
- Participants agree to provide the Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce with an accurate contact name, telephone number and e-mail address to communicate any changes to Tourism BMPs as soon as possible if they occur.
- Response to lapses noted: An important ingredient for a successful TBMP program is consistent, respectful and prompt responses to observations made of lapses in following Whittier's TBMPs. Participants agree to respond promptly to reports of a lapse in following our Tourism Best Management Practices by taking corrective action, such as providing training to employees, or notifying staff of a needed change, and/or documenting the changes to company operating procedures in writing.
- Support compliance with Whittier TBMPs by actively using the TBMP e-mail account to document an observation of a company who may not be observing the TBMP guidelines. For 2023, all observations submitted to the e-mail account will be shared with businesses in the fall for review and correction in 2024. These actions honor the spirit of TBMP and ultimately help all companies reduce tourism impacts in the community of Whittier.
- Recycling: all Whittier TBMP practitioners are strongly encouraged to commit to a recycling program that is effective for their individual size and type of business. Recycling information can be found at \_\_\_\_\_.
- All businesses will agree to dispose of and secure trash in a manner that does not attract wildlife.

In its turn, the Greater Whittier Chamber of Commerce is responsible to my business for:

- Distributing periodic updates to Whittier Tourism Best Management Practices as they are agreed upon.
- Monitoring the [WhittierTBMP@gmail.com](mailto:WhittierTBMP@gmail.com) email account seasonally and coordinating responses to observations made regarding compliance with these Tourism BMPs.
- Coordinating seasonal meetings of participating businesses so that we can determine which parts of this program are successful and which elements might need revision.

---

Signature

---

Date