

**ALASKA STATE LEGISLATURE
HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON TRIBAL AFFAIRS**

April 22, 2024

3:31 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT

Representative CJ McCormick, Chair
Representative Ben Carpenter
Representative Sarah Vance
Representative Thomas Baker
Representative Maxine Dibert

MEMBERS ABSENT

Representative Jamie Allard
Representative Ashley Carrick

COMMITTEE CALENDAR

PRESENTATION(S): CULTURAL TOURISM 101 - INVESTING IN ALASKA'S
FULL POTENTIAL

PREVIOUS COMMITTEE ACTION

No previous action to record

WITNESS REGISTER

EMILY EDENSHAW, President & CEO
Alaska Native Heritage Center
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Cultural Tourism 101 -
Investing in Alaska's Full Potential presentation.

KELSEY WALLACE, Vice President
Alaska Native Heritage Center
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Cultural Tourism 101 -
Investing in Alaska's Full Potential presentation.

SHERRY RUPERT, CEO
American Native Tourism Association
Albuquerque, New Mexico

POSITION STATEMENT: Co-offered the Cultural Tourism 101 -
Investing in Alaska's Full Potential presentation.

RICHARD CHALYEE EESH PETERSON, President
Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska
Juneau, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered committee questions on behalf of the presenters.

JULIE KITKA, President
Alaska Federation of Natives
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered committee questions on behalf of the presenters.

KIM REITMEIER, President
Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act Regional Association
Anchorage, Alaska

POSITION STATEMENT: Answered committee questions on behalf of the presenters.

ACTION NARRATIVE

[3:31:46 PM](#)

CHAIR CJ MCCORMICK called the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting to order at 3:31 p.m. Representatives Dibert, Vance, Carpenter, Baker, and McCormick were present at the call to order.

PRESENTATION(S): Cultural Tourism 101 - Investing in Alaska's Full Potential

[3:33:08 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK announced that the only order of business would be the Cultural Tourism 101 - Investing in Alaska's Full Potential presentation.

[3:33:45 PM](#)

EMILY EDENSHAW, President & CEO, Alaska Native Heritage Center, co-offered the Cultural Tourism 101 - Investing in Alaska's Full Potential presentation. She acknowledged that this is the first time in Alaska's history that a legislative committee would hear the issue of cultural tourism. She gave a brief history of the Alaska Native Heritage Center (ANHC) and explained to the committee what the term "cultural tourism" means. She highlighted that the State of Alaska currently does not spend

any money on cultural tourism and cannot afford to continue with the "status quo" of current tourism.

[3:43:00 PM](#)

KELSEY WALLACE, Vice President, Alaska Native Heritage Center, continued the presentation to the committee. She began a PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee packet], on slide 3, labeled "Mission" and "Vision," which described the mission statement of ANHC, as well as its vision of success. She moved forward to slide 4, titled "About," which explained the history and background of ANHC in Anchorage. She emphasized the importance and significance of ANHC to the Alaska Native peoples and said that it is the only living cultural center in Anchorage that promotes and celebrates all Alaska Natives. She proceeded to slide 5, which displayed a map of Alaska that delineated each specific Alaska Native culture as it relates geographically.

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MS. EDENSHAW moved to slide 6, which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

DEFINITION OF CULTURAL TOURISM

Cultural Tourism educates visitors about traditional Alaska Native knowledge and ways of life while providing for the perpetuation of culture by offering opportunities to experience and learn about Alaska Native peoples, cultures, and history.

VISION FOR CULTURAL TOURISM

- Content is driven and owned by Alaska Native people
- Cultural Tourism creates economic opportunity for Alaska Native people, organizations, and the State of Alaska
- Cultural Tourism authentically represents Alaska Native people
- Content allows culture to live and thrive
- Cultural Tourism educates and reshapes perception
- Cultural Tourism builds the capacity of Alaska Native people and organizations
- Cultural Tourism begins to redirect the narrative
- Cultural Tourism is experiential and brings in more revenue

MS. EDENSHAW concluded slide 6 by addressing certain perceived misconceptions about cultural tourism.

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MS. EDENSHAW moved on to slide 7, titled "ANHC and Cultural Tourism," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

5-Year Cultural Tourism Plan executed by McKinley Research Group Interactive Map of Cultural Tourism Offerings executed by Resource Data Cataloged and displayed over 100 cultural tourism institutions (next slide) Business Plan Templates executed by Spruce Root Jewelry Business, Social Enterprise Business, Driving Tour Business Prospective businesses to benefit: Hospitality, Museum and Cultural Centers, Art, Outdoor Recreation, Transportation, non-Indigenous Government entities Cultural Tourism Development Plan Increase visibility of Alaska Native culture and experiences in marketing programs Leverage the strengths and resources of key organizations including state and community destination marketing organizations, tour operators and cruise lines, Tribes, and economic development organizations. Expand Alaska Native involvement in business ownership, destination marketing, and industry advocacy. Informed by a SWOT Analysis Resulted in 7 Objectives, 16 strategies, 15 metrics ANHC has secured partnerships with AIANTA, Department of Interior, Alaska Venture Fund (\$25K), Municipality of Anchorage (\$25K), the Economic Development Administration, and other institutions resulting in over \$250K in funds. ANHC is hiring a Cultural Tourism Manager to build out capacity within the industry for coordination of entities, development of products for the tourism market, and advancement of formation for a 501c6 nonprofit.

MS. EDENSHAW noted that all of the resources prepared by ANHC are federally funded through the Economic Development Administration (EDA) and noted that Mayor Dave Bronson of Anchorage allocated \$25,000 to form a cultural tourism task force in Anchorage.

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MS. WALLACE continued the presentation on slide 8, titled "Alaska Cultural Tourism Opportunities," which displayed an

interactive map of over 100 different cultural tourism businesses and organizations throughout Alaska. She emphasized that this interactive map is the first of its kind and said that it is meant to highlight Alaska Native-run businesses.

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MS. WALLACE moved to slide 9, titled "Untapped Potential in Alaska," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

When visitors experience cultural tourism, they stay longer than other visitors and spend more money. Injects new money into the economy, boosting businesses and tax revenues Creates new jobs, funds new businesses, events & attractions, diversifies economy Supports businesses including small businesses like artists, guides, educators Increases customer base for local businesses Promotes active preservation and protection of important local resources Allows Indigenous people and communities to define and tell our own stories

MS. WALLACE emphasized the term "untapped potential" mentioned in slide 9 and explained that cultural tourism injects new money into Alaska's economy which creates jobs and incomes for people living in urban and rural Alaska.

[4:02:15 PM](#)

MS. EDENSHAW continued to slide 10, titled "Alaska's Untapped Potential cont.," which read as follows [original punctuation provided]:

ANHC and State of Alaska Partnerships: Develop business efforts focused on creating culturally educational accommodations, tour options, fishing/hunting/guiding, and more. Need support and investment from government partners to ensure entities are set up for success and sustainability. GROWTH Potential: Alaska navigates questionable futures for sustaining budget on oil/gas/fishing/mining. Cultural Tourism impacts can help offset budget deficits. More local businesses owned and operated by Native companies means that money tourists are spending isn't funneled into the international cruise industries Increased cruise industry: Alaska Port Improvement Project in Anchorage means an increase in Southcentral

Alaska - yet most cruise industry marketing and business development efforts are geared towards Southeast Alaska ANHC and Cultural Tourism entities can incorporate cultural demonstrations into businesses for cultural preservation, advancing our collective mission, and education.

MS. EDENSHAW shared that ANHC has prepared a statewide cultural tourism economic impact report, the first of its kind in Alaska, and she noted that Denali has little to no cultural tourism in the entire borough and park.

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SHERRY RUPERT, CEO, American Native Tourism Association (AIANTA), gave her name for the record.

[4:06:18 PM](#)

The committee took an at-ease from 4:06 p.m. to 4:07 p.m. to address technical issues.

[4:07:24 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK noted that Ms. Rupert was sharing her screen in order to give her presentation.

[4:08:20 PM](#)

The committee took a brief at-ease at 4:08 p.m. to address technical issues.

[4:08:54 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK asked Ms. Rupert to continue even though the presentation could not be seen at the moment.

MS. RUPERT began a PowerPoint [hard copy included in the committee packet], on slide 2, titled "AIANTA's Mission," which explained the mission statement of AIANTA. She emphasized that it is the only national Native organization dedicated to advancing cultural tourism in Native nations and communities across the United States.

[4:11:12 PM](#)

MS. RUPERT moved to slide 3 of her presentation, titled "Economic Impact," and she said that 92 percent of Indigenous-owned tourism businesses were firming without paid employees. She moved to slide 4 of her presentation, titled "Economic Impact," which displayed a graph of jobs gained under cultural tourism employment. She continued the subject of economic impact on slide 5, which displayed the number of American Indian/Alaska Native/Native Hawaiian-owned cultural tourism businesses, and she touched on the potential for visitation to rural communities in Alaska, not just urban centers. She noted the specific experiences that visitors aim for when they travel to the United States, in particular Alaska and Hawai'i, one of the most important ones being cultural experiences.

[4:22:12 PM](#)

MS. RUPERT moved to the penultimate slide of her presentation, titled "seizing the opportunity," where she spoke of various state-funded travel agencies throughout the United States that fund and support cultural tourism and explained how this form of tourism benefits each tribe in its respective state. She concluded her presentation and reiterated that now is the prime time for Indigenous tourism across the country and emphasized the high demand for cultural tourism through her evidence of economic prosperity.

[4:28:27 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK thanked Ms. Rupert and reminded the committee that the presentation would be made available shortly.

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MS. WALLACE commented that Alaska is different from the rest of the United States when it comes to cultural tourism because it requires more acute marketing to get people to experience "authentic Alaska."

[4:30:30 PM](#)

RICHARD CHALYEE EESH PETERSON, President, Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska ("Tlingit & Haida"), answered committee questions on behalf of the presenters. He began by emphasizing the "profound responsibility" of those participating in cultural tourism to ensure that the narratives and experiences of Native people are not only included in cultural tourism but honored and uplifted. He used an historical example of a misconception

about Alaska Native history at the Mendenhall Glacier as an example of how cultural tourism could be used to combat misinformation in the future. He explained that cultural tourism could have substantial economic benefit to Indigenous peoples and used Tlingit & Haida's recent acquisition of lands at Tee Harbor in Juneau, Alaska, as an example of such benefits.

[4:37:11 PM](#)

JULIE KITKA, President, Alaska Federation of Natives, answered committee questions on behalf of the presenters. She spoke of the creation of an Indigenous tourism corporation in 2021 and explained how it relates to the overall effort of cultural tourism in Alaska and explained the Alaska Federation of Native's understanding that any state money invested in cultural tourism would be more beneficial than an investment in conventional tourism.

[4:41:56 PM](#)

KIM REITMEIER, President, Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act Regional Association, answered committee questions on behalf of the presenters. She began by providing her background in cultural tourism and said that the one common note across the tourism industry in Alaska is that there is "missed opportunity" to fully embrace cultural tourism and embrace the Indigenous people of Alaska. She explained the role that Alaska Native regional corporations play in boosting cultural tourism in Alaska and used a \$1.5 billion figure that was invested back into the regional corporations' local communities as an example of their commitment to their localities.

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CHAIR MCCORMICK thanked Ms. Reitmeier for her testimony and asked Ms. Wallace what the legislature can do as a body to help forward cultural tourism in rural Alaska.

MS. WALLACE advised that it all comes down to strength in partnerships between the state and local Native entities, and she gave examples and hypotheticals of ideas for possible cultural tourism activities in Alaska.

[4:51:39 PM](#)

MS. EDENSHAW commented that this is an historic hearing for the Alaska State Legislature and the House Special Committee on

Tribal Affairs and emphasized the importance of creating open spaces of conversation for the idea of cultural tourism in Alaska.

[4:53:07 PM](#)

MR. PETERSON added his opinion that the first step is engaging in the conversation surrounding cultural tourism, but the next step is to engage in the budget process to direct state funds to the local Indigenous entities across the state.

[4:53:41 PM](#)

MS. KITKA commented that an investment from the state in cultural tourism would be a great gesture of respect from the state to the tribes.

[4:54:45 PM](#)

MS. EDENSHAW added that the formation of a statewide taskforce on cultural tourism would forward the efforts of expanding cultural tourism in Alaska.

[4:56:05 PM](#)

MS. RUPERT thanked the other invited testifiers and shared her hopes and visions of the future of cultural tourism in Alaska.

[4:57:09 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK thanked all of the presenters and invited testifiers.

MS. EDENSHAW shared a quote from an Alaska Native elder and thanked the committee and invited testifiers for their testimony.

[4:58:08 PM](#)

CHAIR MCCORMICK concluded his remarks and said that he would work on making cultural tourism a statewide phenomenon.

[4:58:39 PM](#)

ADJOURNMENT

There being no further business before the committee, the House Special Committee on Tribal Affairs meeting was adjourned at 4:58 p.m.