

Cordova Chamber Summer 2020 AMHS Talking Points

Thank you for the opportunity to share our suggested adjustments to the proposed AMHS Summer 2020 schedule. After 9 months without any form of road-system access to PWS communities, the originally proposed schedule landed another severe blow to the community of Cordova by scheduling no sailings into Cordova until May 20, 2020. Without marine highway transportation during this critical window in April and early May, Cordova's commercial fishing industry and local economy would be significantly impacted, detaining many fishers from reaching the fishery with their vessels in time to participate in the most lucrative fishing periods of the season and possibly affecting the ability of some hatcheries and processors to effectively move seasonal staff, materials, and supplies into town.

The April 23 and 24 sailings on the Kennicott and related tunnel openings will be a tremendous help and we are grateful these have been added to the proposed schedule.

Even with these additional sailings, however, we are concerned there still may not be enough capacity for this historically very high-volume time of travel in our region. Unless sailings to Cordova are added, Cordova residents and businesses are not still provided an opportunity to make a roundtrip sailing to Whittier and make it to Anchorage and back for needed medical, work or shopping until the busy commercial fishing season is in full swing. Other events of concern include the SERVS oil spill response drill scheduled for April 24-May 1 and the Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival (a large draw for tourism) on May 7-10.

The following four adjustments will provide critical ferry service for Cordova earlier in the 2020 season, **generating significantly more ridership/revenue** and **accommodating community events** WITHOUT altering crew change schedules dramatically (i.e. less than 12 hours delay in return to a home port of the vessel).

1. **Add a sailing from Whittier to Cordova, then Cordova to Yakutat on April 27th/28th on the Kennicott's southbound voyage from Kodiak to Ketchikan.** This stop in Cordova would add less than half a day to the overall sailing time of that voyage but would accommodate a critical volume of particularly fisheries-related traffic coming into Cordova. This week in April is when hundreds of fishermen are returning for cod fishing, and the upcoming Copper River salmon gillnet season and all are using the ferry to get to Cordova. This is also the week of Alyeska's state and federally mandated annual SERVS oil spill response training for over 350 contracted Cordova fishing vessels. AMHS should be reminded that the Kennicott was built in part with EVOS funding so should be made available for getting fishers to Cordova for this critical annual SERVS training.
2. **Change the Kennicott schedule to stay in Prince William Sound May 7 – 10th with several round trips between Cordova, Whittier and Valdez.** This change would leave Kodiak without service for only 4 days, while Prince William Sound has been without service since September 2019. This is the week of Cordova's annual Copper River Delta Shorebird Festival, a nationally renowned birding festival which is a dramatic tourism driver for the community and will be celebrating its 30th year in 2020. AMHS has always been a promoter of this event in the past and brings significant numbers of fellow Alaskans to this four-day event. The Cordova Chamber of Commerce has abundant opportunity and means to influence event attendees on their method of transportation for this event and could help fill that boat. As noted earlier, this is also the time when the gillnet fleet pours into Cordova.

3. **Bring the LeConte into service in PWS/ Cordova at least one week earlier than proposed May 20th date, instead entering service on May 13th.** With Copper River Salmon fishing season poised to open the week of May 11th, freezer vans and box trucks loaded with fish product valued in the 100s of thousands of dollars is usually shipped on AMHS for rapid transport to Anchorage and Anchorage International Airport during this critical time. The state, the hatcheries, as well as Cordova, collect tax revenues from these fish products. By shipping them out fresh on AMHS, **Cordova fishermen get a higher price for their product, and the resulting tax revenue generated is also greater.** AMHS is the most efficient and cost-effective means for shipping fresh and fresh frozen fish product out of Cordova to markets within the state. In addition to passengers and cars, these commercial vehicles and van loads generate substantial revenue for AMHS and are consistently booked from our port on every available sailing.

In summary, by changing only 5 sailing days of the Kennicott (April 27th and May 7-10) and adding one week to the LeConte's service dates (May 13-19), AMHS will have minimal additional expense and will generate significantly more revenue. The City of Cordova's economy will not be diminished during a critical spring start-up and the hatcheries of PWS, as well as the City of Cordova and the State of Alaska, will not lose valuable tax revenue. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,