

Southeast Conference

by James M. Kohler, Southeast Conference Executive Director

Southeast Alaska stretches over 600 miles, encompasses a land area the size of New York state, and hosts a range of economic activities from government and tourism, to mining, wood products and fishing.

Seventy thousand people, spread between 33 communities, make Southeast their home. Twenty-eight thousand of these residents live in the state's capital, Juneau.

The Southeast Conference was organized in 1956 to create the Alaska Marine Highway System. Today it continues to focus on regional issues and projects that improve the economic and social well-being of the region's residents.

SEC membership boasts local governments, chambers of commerce, large and small businesses, and individuals. In addition to its Alaska members, cities and businesses from British Columbia and Washington State are also actively involved in the conference.

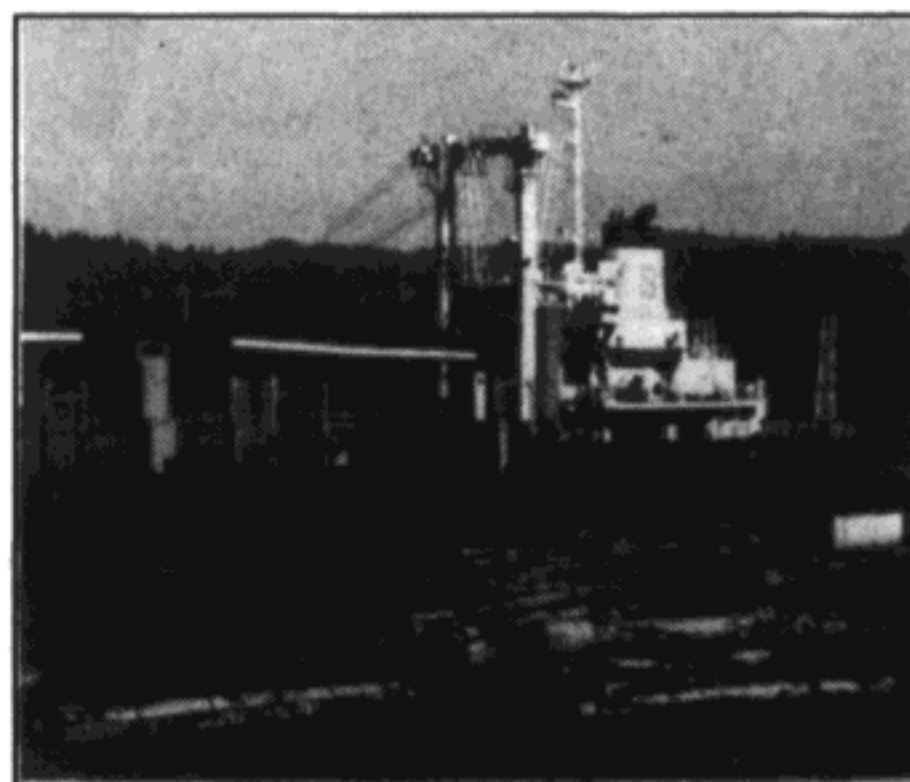
With significant reductions in state spending projected throughout the rest of the 1990's, the SEC has been concentrating on expanding the region's non-government economic base. The efforts include:

■ Tourism

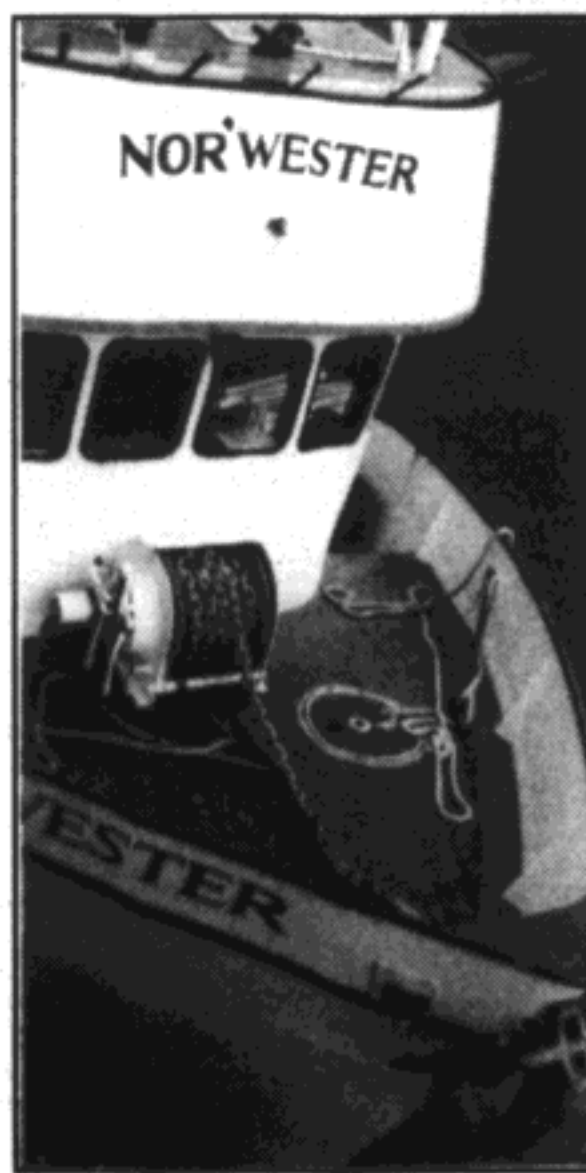
Seventy percent of Alaska's visitors enter or leave the state through Southeast. One of every two visitors cruises or ferries through Ketchikan, Alaska's "Gateway City."

Initially a working committee of the SEC, the Southeast Alaska Tourism Council is now a driving force in tourism marketing for the region.

The Conference is currently leading a capital campaign to finance the completion of the exhibits in the new 20,000-square-foot Southeast Visitors Information Center under construction in Ketchikan and slated for completion in 1994.



top left - Transporting forest products is big business in Southeast Alaska.



right - Tour ships and visitors give Juneau's waterfront the bustle and feel of a resort town.

left - The beauty of the region's fishing vessels belies their participation in one of our nation's most hazardous industries.



Gordon Harrison

■ Mining

Mining will be a mainstay of the region's economy into the future. Sealaska Corp. is actively exploring potential commercial properties on Prince of Wales Island. In addition, Echo Bay could see two major gold projects begin within the City and Borough of Juneau by year's end. Two major Canadian projects within 15 miles of the Alaska/U.S. border could be in production by the mid 1990's.

The SEC is working with supply and service businesses to expand their operations into Canada and the Lower 48.

■ Wood Products

The region has two international pulp mills in Ketchikan and Sitka. The three sawmills of the region have been reduced to one, which is in Wrangell.

The SEC is actively working to reopen the Klawock mill.

■ Energy

An SEC energy committee has formed to push for state investment in an energy inter-tie grid. The goal is to bring less expensive energy to the entire region.

SEC membership fees provide for annual operating expenses and membership is open to all. For more information contact Jim Kohler, Executive Director, in Juneau at (907) 463-3445. ■

■ Seafood

The fishing industry has long been vital to the region's economy.

To help diversify Alaskan activity in this industry, the Conference works with processors and fishing organizations to develop value-added salmon products such as salmon-entree dishes packaged in microwaveable cans.

Also, the organization is supporting efforts within the industry to promote the formation of cooperative marketing associations.

■ Solid Waste Management Programs

The SEC is in its second year of developing regional solid waste management programs.

By the summer of 1993, these efforts should result in regional collection and disposal programs operating for waste oil, hazardous wastes, scrap metal and used tires.

■ Labor Force

Driven by a survey conducted by the SEC in 1991, the organization has initiated a cooperative program with regional employers, the University of Alaska Southeast and secondary schools to ensure that the needs of the region's expanding labor force are filled from within the region. The survey identified employment needs in more than 350 specific job classifications during this decade.