

AFN session reviews ecotourism

Some economic ventures have built-in conservation incentives. Ecotourism, done right, helps protect the natural values of an area, thus linking economic benefits for landowners and tour operators to conservation of those values.

Native landowners and tour operators will be able to share experiences and learn more about the opportunities, the challenges and the potential pitfalls of ecotourism Wednesday, October 18th at a workshop during the Alaska Federation of Natives convention. The workshop, coordinated by The Nature Conservancy of Alaska and held at the Egan Convention, will focus on ecotourism operations that support conservation goals, subsistence and other compatible local resource uses. The session will also examine the requirements for business success with ecotourism clients.

Workshop sponsors include Alaska village Initiatives, the Chugach Heritage Foundation, National Bank of Alaska, and the Native American Fish & Wildlife Society. Funding is provided by the Botwinik-Wolfesohn Foundation through the conservancy.

Ecotourism is small-scale tourism based on the attractions of wildlife, wilderness and learning about traditional cultures and lifestyles. Unlike most other forms of tourism, ecotourism makes a direct financial contribution to sustaining the natural world or the traditional communities that travelers visit.

Ecotourism is growing rapidly in Alaska as in other natural areas of the world. Here, ecotourism takes place mainly in national parks, wildlife refuges and other protected areas. Increasingly, however, ecotourists are seeking out the many scenic places and wildlife concentrations on Native-owned lands. These tourists, who travel in small groups to have minimal impact on the environment and have a higher quality experience, are often interested in conservation, and in learning about traditional cultures and the ways of living on the land that Alaska Native peoples have practiced for generation.

The day-long session will include displays and information on Native-run tourism businesses in Alaska, sources of information and assistance for businesses, and examples of ecotourism elsewhere in the world (destinations that compete with Alaska for ecotourists and their dollars.) A series of presentations of ecotourism will be given in the

afternoon. Workshop agendas will be available in the morning of Oct. 18th at the Egan Center. Admission is free.

The Conservancy recently published the "Ecotourism Planning Guide for Alaska Native Landowners," which provides an outline of major points to be covered during the Oct. 18 workshop, including:

- The key role of conservation in sustainable ecotourism;
- The importance of community consensus before launching

a tourism venture;

- What ecotourism is, and visitor industry trends in Alaska and worldwide;
- The need to fit ecotourism into an overall land-use plan;
- Steps to ensure ecotourism's compatibility with conservation, subsistence and culture;
- The importance of careful business planning.

For more information, call workshop organizer Jim Allaway at The Nature conservancy of Alaska, (907) 276-3133.