



**Seward Chamber of Commerce  
Conference and Visitors Bureau**

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Seward, Alaska

Thank you for traveling to Kenai and for this opportunity to testify at your field hearing.

The Seward Chamber currently has 315 members. Our small seaside town has a population of just under 3,000. The Chamber partners with the City of Seward for Economic Development using Strategic Doing. Our current focus is on the Seward Marine Industrial Center and Alternative Energy ~ with the Sea Water Heat Pump at the Alaska SeaLife Center featured as the central project.

Historically, Seward has struggled with a seasonal economy. We are very lucky to live in such a beautiful place and appreciate our thousands of summer visitors, but for years we've been searching for ways to encourage people to visit in the shoulder season, along with promoting and encouraging winter tourism in our community.

Many of Alaska's smaller coastal communities are challenged to maintain a viable and consistent year-round economy. Those without a strong year-round economic basis rely on the state to assist their residents in maintaining basic standards of living. Communities that can successfully maintain a year-round economy, with stable year-round employment ~ support populations that are generally more self-sufficient and rely less on state assistance.

Because Silverton Mountain Guides based their heli-skiing operation out of Seward last year, we saw a real boost to our local economy during the winter months. Aaron Brill, owner and operator of SMG, and his client guests supported many businesses through purchases in food and beverage, lodging accommodations, leasing hangar and office space at Seward Airport, and purchasing aviation fuel.

There's a huge opportunity for Silverton Mountain Guides to grow their business, but to do so it is imperative that they be able to utilize USFS terrain. Representing my Board of Directors and the Seward chamber membership I would very much like to see SMG be awarded permits for the USFS designated heli-skiing exploratory zones including East Moose Creek, Mt Ascension, East Ptarmigan, West Bench Peak, Mid Seattle Creek and East Seattle Creek.

With the ability to fly inland at higher elevations and colder temperatures ~ and where the sun shines more frequently, Silverton Mountain Guides could increase client capacity upwards to 24 clients per week. The current DNR heli-skiing terrain is located along the low coastal areas of Seward which doesn't work very well during low snow years and warmer temperatures like we've been experiencing the past few years.

Silverton Mountain Guides needs to be able to expand the terrain options for clients in order to have the ability to fly inland at higher elevations for optimal snow (powder) that is the goal of every heli-skier!

Winter Tourism is good for Seward ~ and Silverton Mountain Guides is good for winter tourism!

And finally – I would like to address the permit application process. Anything that the USFS could do to streamline this process would be very much appreciated. As communities are encouraged to stand on their own by the State of Alaska during these very challenging economic times, the business community seeks to thrive ~ and our Federal partners can help.