

Planning Commission Letter

Dear Planning Commission,

I would like to make some comments regarding the DOT's plan to upgrade the Haines Highway. As a tour operator, I am very concerned about the possible effects that this "upgrade" may have on my tours. The primary goal of most of my clients is to observe wildlife in their natural environment. If these projects degrade the natural environment along the roadside corridor, then the opportunities to see wildlife is diminished. Furthermore, if wildlife is seen but the natural environment has been significantly altered, the photographs taken on the tour will not reflect the true nature of the habitat that these creatures require to thrive.

I understand that DOT allows for opportunities for design flexibility on the Haines Highway Improvement Project and that DOT can also file for a federal exception from certain standards. I do not believe that it is in our best interest to have a "cookie cutter" highway project designed to federal standards. While this approach may work best for large trucks moving at high speed, there is a significant part of the local economy (ie tourism) that will not benefit, and in fact, may be harmed, by such an approach.

I plan to continue to take full advantage of the National Scenic Byway status of the Haines Highway in my marketing. I ask that maximum attention be given to creating safe pull-outs for photographers and sightseers, and interpretive information should be provided at areas of scenic, historical and cultural interest. Riverside walking areas and bike paths should be included.

Furthermore, I would like to see wildlife habitat remain intact, and minimal fill poured into the Chilkat River. Use of dynamite should be limited and timed not to impact nesting bald eagles. aSpeed limits should be limited and slower driving encouraged to protect bald eagles

and other wildlife. I am also concerned about any potential use of herbicides along the highway.

Some special areas of concern for me include the following:

4 miles Haines Highway (significant cultural, natural and historic resources)

10 mile Haines Highway (important wildlife habitat....pink salmon and brown bear)

13 mile Haines Highway (important chum salmon stream and eagle perching area in November)

19-23 mile Haines Highway (Critical Habitat area for Bald Eagles September, October, November and December. Important wildlife habitat year-round. Significant cultural resources)

25-27 mile Haines Highway (important historical and natural resources)

38 mile Haines Highway (trumpeter swan nesting area)

In conclusion, I am in support of increased pull-outs, interpretive signs, and safety upgrades to the highway. I am in favor of minimizing impacts to the natural environment. I do not think that designing and building the road with primarily ore trucks and high-speed traffic as the priority take into account a significant part of our local economy. Please consider allowing maximum local control and input on this project.

Sincerely yours,

Joe Ordonez
CEO Rainbow Glacier Adventures, LLC