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Visitor Industry Task Force
Juneau City Clerk's Office
155 S. Seward Street
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Distinguished Members of the Task Force,

As a longtime Juneau resident, I want to first thank you for your service on the Visitor Industry Task Force, a very necessary, timely, and formidable task. Our beautiful city is fortunate that the Task Force has been formed, and that it is in your capable hands.

As the lead captain for Gastineau Guiding Company's whale watching trips I, and many of our whale watching captains, share Juneau's deep concerns about the effects of increasing tourism.

I am writing to share some of the positive efforts of Juneau's whale watching industry.

Whale watching companies are working extensively to research, understand, and mitigate impacts including:

- Working closely with Tourism Best Management Practices to develop and enforce clear guidelines and protocols to mitigate impacts on whales as well as on local residents on the water;

- Partnering with NOAA's (National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration) "Whale Sense" program that increases safeguards far beyond federal whale protection regulations when approaching, observing, and departing whale observation areas and;

-Developing practices to lessen impact of whale watching boats on local residents including increasing distances from recreational boats when under way, special agreements with neighborhood associations on boat routes, and wake wave reduction research and commitments, including, for example, a transit lane when departing Auke Bay Harbor. These are just a few of the ongoing efforts of Juneau's whale watch industry.

Our guests experience an amazing and unique experience when on whale watching trips. Naturalists share information that ranges from the history of Juneau and southeast Alaska to the incredible cycle of how our local glaciers grind and transport nutrients that feed the krill that feeds the whales. And when they see a whale breach or bubble net feed,.... well, that's an experience of a lifetime.

And what an opportunity it is for our guests to return home and support conservation of our Alaska whales as well as other wildlife around the world. To see it is to appreciate it!

In summary, Juneau's whale watching industry's owners, operators, captains, naturalists, and other employees are listening and working with Juneau residents and our local whale scientists.

We are passionately developing methods and agreements to protect and lessen impact on whales, as well as lessening impact on local residents recreating on the water.

Thank you for your time and for your efforts to balance tourism with our quality of life in our amazing city. I believe strongly that working together in the manner you have initiated we will develop positive outcomes for the challenges we have now and that lay ahead.

Respectfully,

Fred Hiltner
Lead Captain
Gastineau Guiding Company