Overview

A survey was administered at Federal lands in Alaska during summer 2016 to collect data on visitors' transportation-related experiences to inform Federal Land Management Agencies' (FLMAs) long range transportation planning. Eighty percent of visitors contacted agreed to participate in the survey, which consisted of two parts: an onsite survey and a follow-up survey. Two thousand seven hundred ninety-six respondents were recreational visitors and 247 were non-recreational visitors. Five hundred twenty-nine visitors responded to the follow-up survey.

The questions were designed to gather information on the following themes:

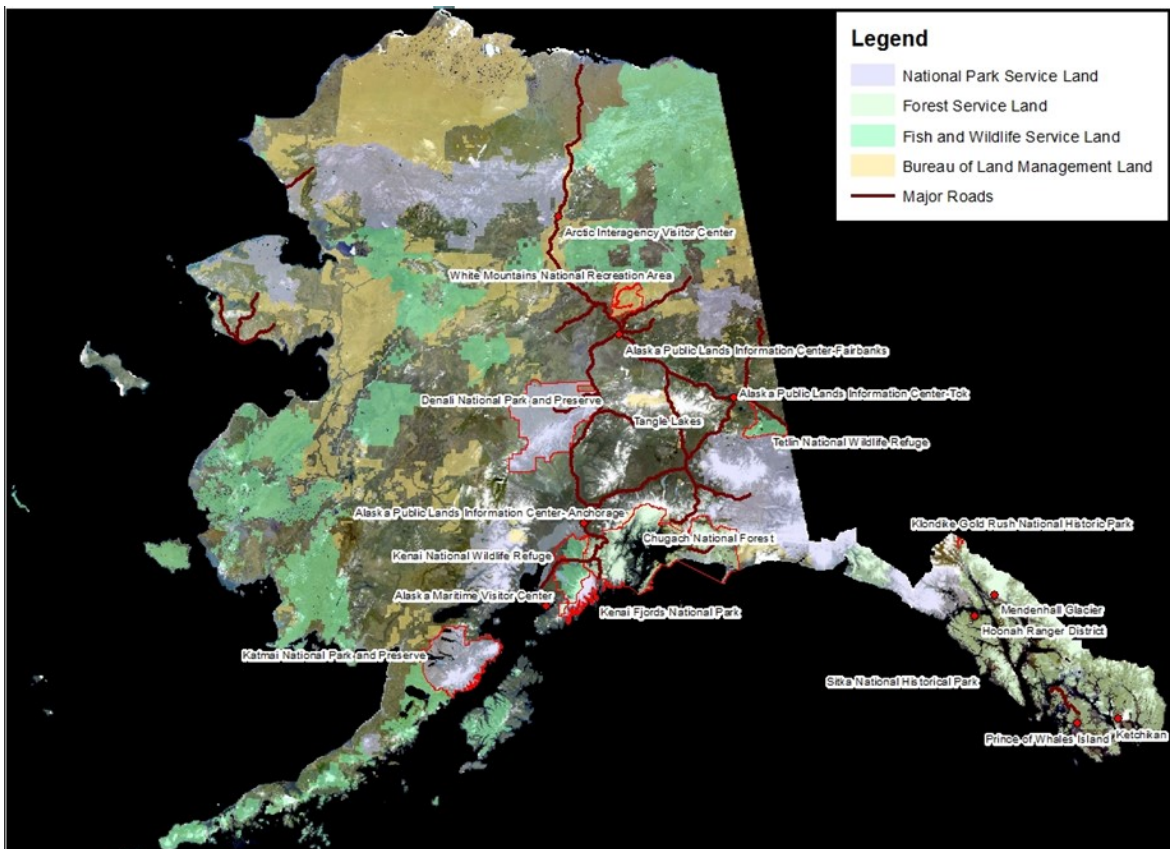
- Modes of transportation used
- Transportation satisfaction
- Sites visited and activity participation
- Information sources used and their helpfulness
- Infrastructure satisfaction and preferences
- Safety concerns and incidents
- Suggestions for improving travel

Methods

The survey was administered across a large geographic area of Alaska, including 20 sites (or units) distributed across FLMAs as follows:

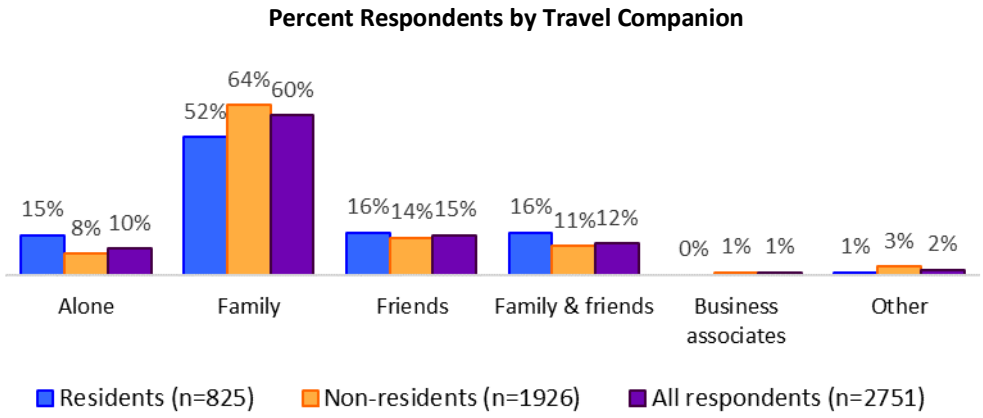
- National Park Service (NPS)—5 sites
- US Forest Service (USFS)—5 sites
- US Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS)—3 sites
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM)—2 sites
- Alaska Public Lands Information Centers (APLICs)—4 sites
- Arctic inter-agency visitor center (AIVC)
- In addition, the Alaska Marine Highway System Ferry

Within each site, there were several intercept locations, selected purposively in order to sample a range of visitor types. The onsite survey was administered via paper or iPad. After the onsite survey was completed, the respondent was asked if they were willing to participate in the follow-up survey, and were given the option of a paper survey or a web-based survey. Residents were mailed/emailed the follow-up survey within a week. Non-residents were asked when they were leaving Alaska, with the follow-up survey mailed/emailed after they left Alaska.



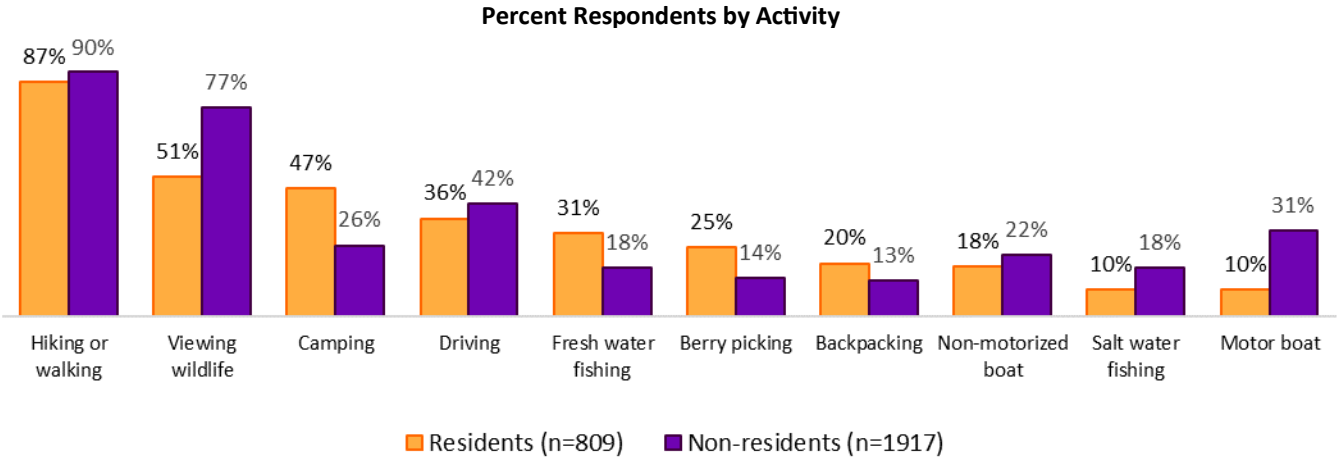
Characteristics of Respondents

- Thirty percent (838) of the recreational onsite surveys were completed by residents and 70% (1,958) by non-residents. Most residents (99%) were traveling independently. Among non-residents, 65% reported traveling independently, 20% as part of a pre-purchased package tour, and 15% both independently and as part of a pre-purchased package tour. Forty two percent of residents were on a day trip. All non-residents stayed at least one day in Alaska, with 56% staying 3 – 14 nights and 43% staying 15 or more nights.
- Onsite respondents were evenly split between male and female, with no significant gender differences between residents and non-residents. With respect to race, nearly all respondents identified as white (94%). Four percent identified as Hispanic or Latino.
- Respondents reported high education levels, with 64% indicating a Bachelor's degree or higher and high income (nearly two-thirds earning $75,000 or more in annual household income, and 20% had household family incomes of $150,000 or more).
- More than one-half (56%) were traveling with group members who were 45 to 64 years of age, about one-third (36%) with group members 65 or older, and nearly one-third (31%) with children aged 18 or younger. Residents were significantly more likely than non-residents to be traveling with children (53% vs. 24%), whereas non-residents were more likely to be traveling with those aged 65 or older (44% vs. 20%).



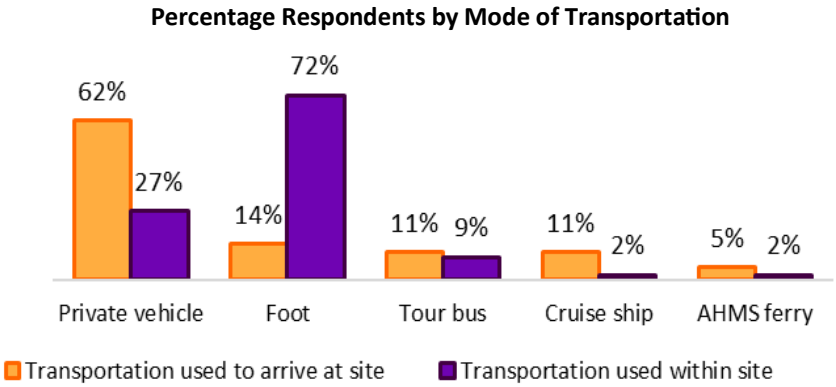
Activities

- Residents were more likely than non-residents to engage in camping, fresh water fishing, and berry picking/food gathering, while non-residents were more likely to engage in water travel and salt water fishing.
- Nearly all respondents (88%) reported that they were able to engage in all the activities they had planned. Among those who were not able (12%), key reasons included weather (37%) and not enough time (29%). Fewer respondents cited safety concerns (16%), area closures (11%), or rules/regulations did not allow for the activity (10%).

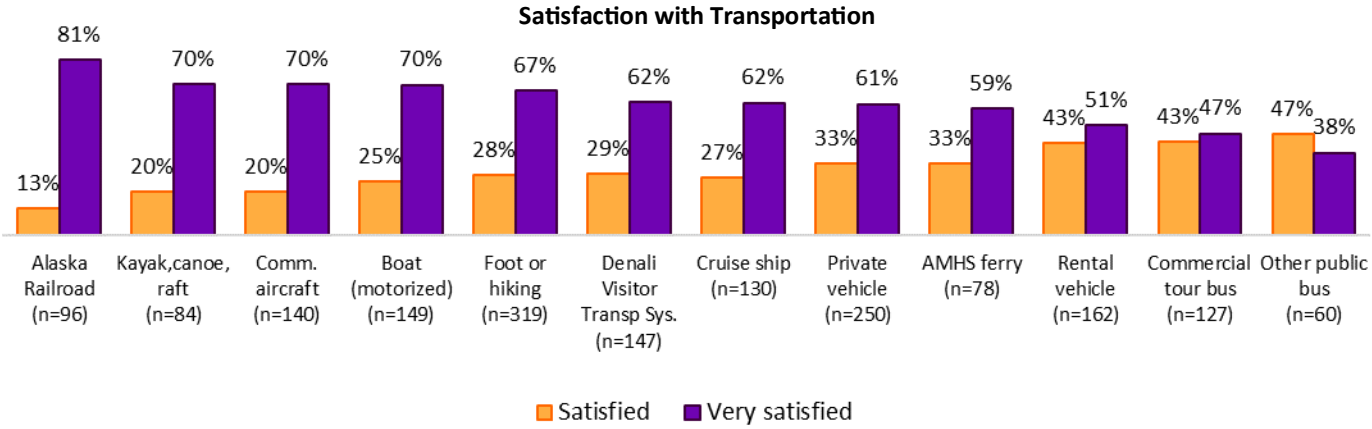


Transportation

- Nearly two-thirds of visitors arrived at the site using a private vehicle, (92% residents vs. 49% non-residents). Non-residents were more likely to indicate using commercial shuttle and tour bus than residents. Compared to non-residents, residents were more likely to travel by private vehicle, a non-motorized water mode, bicycle, and all-terrain vehicle (ATV).
- Within the site, a large majority of respondents traveled by foot (72%), with one-quarter also reporting they traveled by private vehicle (27%).

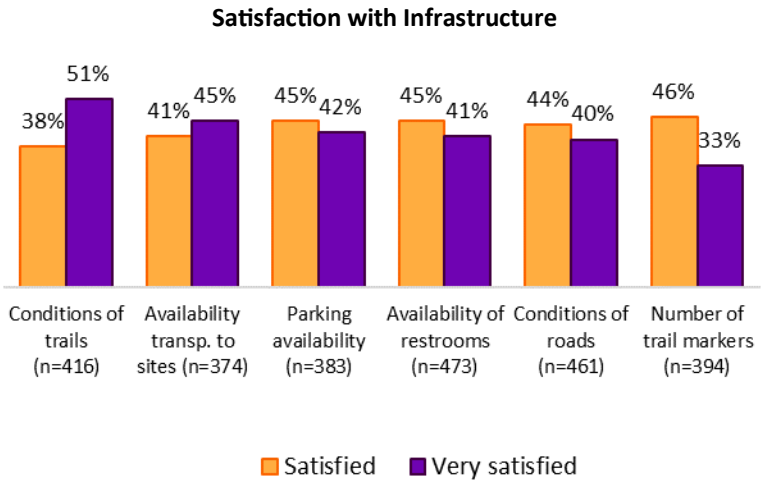


- Across all forms of transportation used during the trip, most respondents were "satisfied" or "very satisfied." There were some differences by mode, with respondents indicating higher levels of satisfaction with rail, boat, and air travel, and somewhat lower levels of satisfaction with bus and vehicle travel.
- Nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated that their travel experience was either above their expectations (44%) or significantly above their expectations (28%); one-quarter reported that it met their expectations. Roughly two-thirds rated the overall travel experience as "excellent" and nearly one-third rated it as "good."
- When asked specifically if they had encountered problems making a connection between different modes of transportation, nearly three-quarters of respondents indicated "no" and 12% said "yes" (15% responded not applicable).



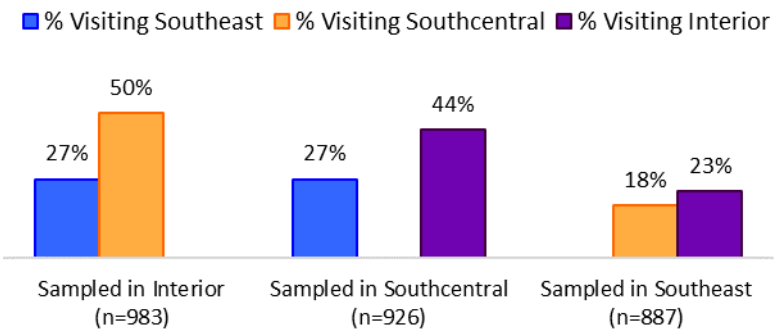
Infrastructure

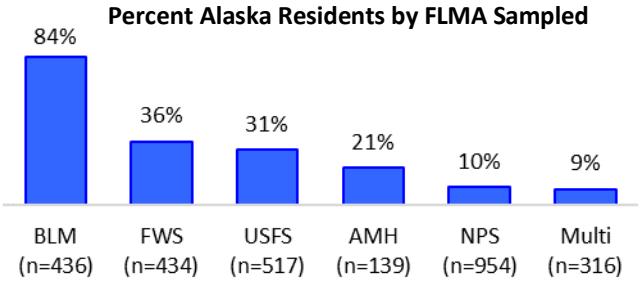
- Respondents were asked if they would like to see "less," "the same," or "more" of 10 types of transportation infrastructure. "No opinion" was a prevalent response and was excluded from analysis. Of those expressing a preference, with the exception of trails for all-terrain vehicles, the majority of respondents (ranging from 54% to 81%) preferred the current levels.
- Eight in ten visitors reported being satisfied or very satisfied with infrastructure.
- Respondents were also asked to rate the extent to which different issues (e.g., traffic congestion, crowding) were a problem. Large majorities indicated the issues were not a problem. About one-quarter had a problem with motor vehicle or aircraft sounds or too many people at scenic overlooks.



Visitation

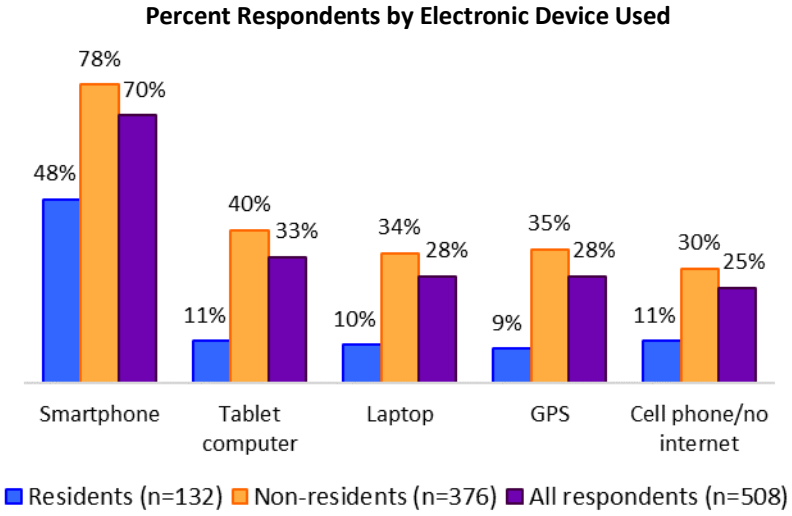
- Among non-residents, a majority (61%) reported that this was their first time visiting Alaska. Among the 39% who had made a previous trip in the last ten years, most had either visited Alaska once (40%) or two to three times (31%).
- Non-residents were more likely than residents to visit multiple FLMA sites during their trip (80% vs. 55%). Fifty percent of respondents sampled in the Interior also visited FLMA sites in southcentral and 27% visited FLMA sites in Southeast . Of those sampled in Southcentral, 44% visited FLMA sites in the Interior, 27% in Southeast, and 24% in the Southwest. Eighteen percent of those sampled in the Southeast visited FLMA sites in Southcentral and 23% in the Interior.
- BLM sites received much higher resident visitation (84%) than the other sites. The FWS and USFS sites were similar (36% and 31% residents, respectively), and the NPS had the lowest percent of resident visitors (10%).

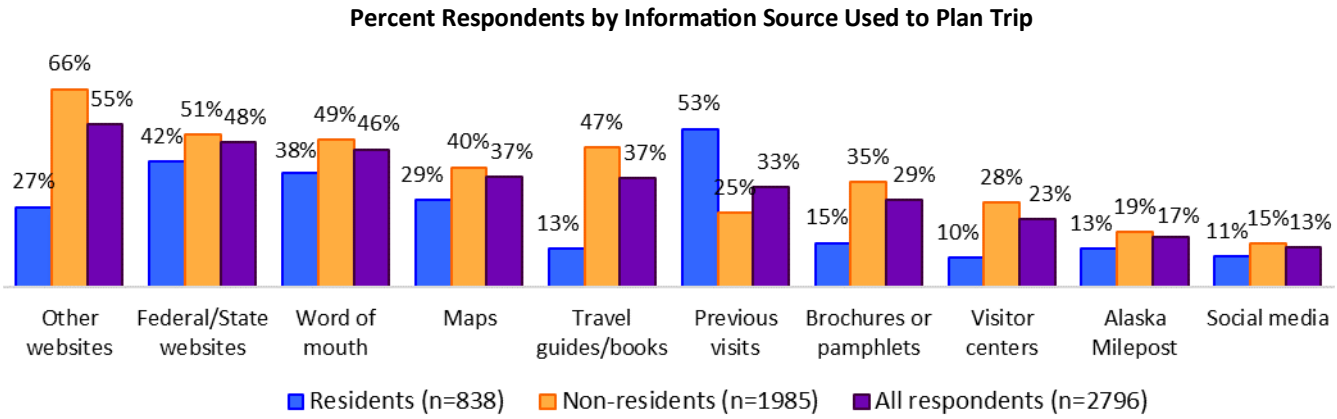




Information Sources Used

- Respondents were asked about electronic devices that they carried with them on their trip. Among those who used an electronic device, 63% experienced a problem, and nearly all cited a lack of Wi-Fi or internet service (96%). Non-residents were significantly more likely to indicate problems using their electronic devices (71% vs. 42%).
- Websites were the most often used information source to plan the trip. Response patterns were similar across residency, but there was an uptick in the use of brochures/pamphlets and visitor bureaus/information centers. among non-residents. Residents were more likely to rely on previous visits. Overall, 76% of respondents reported that they received the information needed <u>when planning</u> their trip.
- The sources that were most likely to be perceived as very helpful included previous visits (78%), Alaska Milepost (70%), package tour companies (69%), and visitor bureaus/information centers (68%). Nearly all respondents reported that they received the information needed (94%) <u>during their trip</u>.

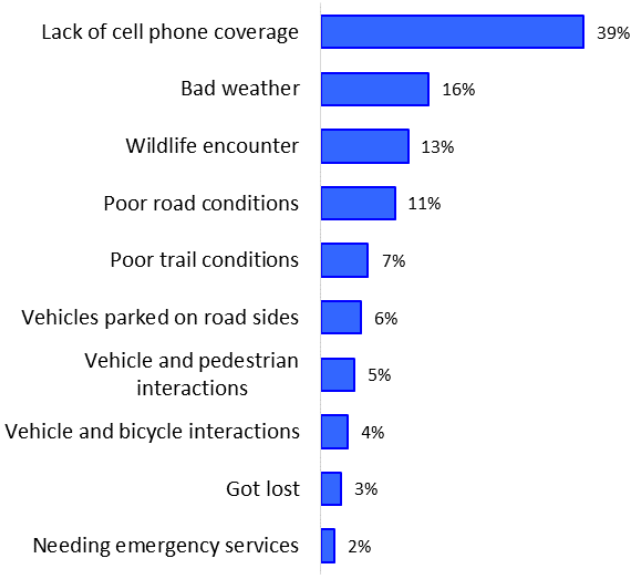




Safety Issues Researched

- Thirty-five percent of respondents reported researching safety issues prior to their trip. Non-residents were significantly more likely than residents to do such research (41% vs. 20%).
- If respondents indicated they researched safety measures, they were asked to explain what safety measures were researched. One hundred forty-four respondents provided explanations (20 residents and 124 non-residents). Among these, the largest category of safety measures researched related to wildlife (83%), with 65% of residents and 86% of non-residents indicating they researched this issue. Seventeen of the responses related to road conditions and 12 responses related to communications.

Percent Respondents by Safety Issue Experienced (n=500)



Safety Issues Experienced

- Lack of cell phone coverage was the most frequently cited safety issue experienced (38% of residents and 40% of non-residents).
- Respondents were asked if they had ever experienced a safety incident or accident on Federal Lands. Only 3% reported that they had.

Travel Experience

- Respondents were asked to provide additional feedback on their travel experience; 226 respondents (49 residents and 177 non-residents) provided comments. Thirty-one percent (n=70) expressed satisfaction with the travel experience and an additional 18% (n=41) indicated they had no problems.
- Forty percent (n=90; 19 residents and 71 non-residents) related to travel and/or transportation. Of these 90 responses, 10 expressed satisfaction with specific travel-related issues (e.g., "The roads were better than expected. The Denali Highway was pretty rough but that was to be expected."
- Other transportation/travel-related comments referenced poor road conditions (n=22), issues related to AMHF (n=14) or public transportation (n=8), the cost of transportation (n=8), construction-related delays (n=5), and signage issues (n=4).

For additional information contact:

Paul Schrooten, National Park Service, Paul_Schrooten@nps.gov

Randy Goodwin, Bureau of Land Management, rgoodwin@blm.gov

Amy Thomas, United States Forest Service, aethomas@fs.fed.us

David Morton, United States Fish and Wildlife Service, David_Morton@fws.gov

Roxanne Bash, Western Federal Lands Highway Division, Federal Highway Administration, Roxanne.Bash@dot.gov

Suggested citation for this document:

Fix, P. J., Wedin, A., Shaw, J., Petersen, K, & Petrella, M. (2018). Executive Summary: Collaborative Visitor Transportation Survey, Summer 2016 Alaska Survey. Project report for the Alaska Long-Range Transportation Planning Team. Fairbanks, Alaska: School of Natural Resources and Extension, University of Alaska Fairbanks.