

TONGASS NARROWS VOLUNTARY WATERWAY GUIDE

Revisions

Est. February 28, 1999

October 1, 2006

April 30, 2007

April 10, 2010

April 24, 2012

The Tongass Narrows Voluntary Waterway Guide (TNVWG) is intended for use by all vessel operators when transiting Tongass Narrows from the intersection of Nichols Passage and Revillagigedo Channel on the Southeastern-most end to Guard Island on the Northwest end of the narrows. The members of the Tongass Narrows Work Group (TNWG), which included representatives from the following waterway user groups, developed this Guide in an effort to enhance the safety of navigation on this congested waterway:

United States Coast Guard · Federal Aviation Administration
Southeast Alaska Pilots Association · Cruise Line Agencies of Alaska
Commercial and private floatplane operators · Small passenger vessels
Commercial Kayak Operators · Commercial freight transporters
Pennock-Gravina Island Association · Charter vessel operators
Recreational boat operators · Local City-Borough · Waterfront Facility Operators
Commercial fishing interests · Alaska Marine Highway System

This Guide is published and distributed by the United States Coast Guard.

For more information contact the:
U.S. Coast Guard Marine Safety Detachment
1621 Tongass Ave. Ketchikan, AK 99901
(907) 225-4496

Disclaimer

The Tongass Narrows Work Group's TNVWG provides suggestions and recommended guidelines that are intended to assist persons operating vessels on the Tongass Narrows, regardless of type of vessel.

This Guide is meant to complement and not replace the federal and state laws and regulations that govern maritime traffic on the Narrows. Prudent mariners should not rely on the Guide as their only source of information about vessel traffic patterns and safe navigation practices in Tongass Narrows, and should comply with all applicable laws and regulations.

Vessel operating parameters and maritime conditions on Tongass Narrows constantly change. The TNWG and its members expressly disclaim any liability or responsibility, direct or indirect, which may arise from the use of the Guide, or reliance upon any information or recommendations in the Guide, by any person or entity.

Table of Contents

<i>Introduction</i>	1
<i>Table of Contents, Comments and Concerns.....</i>	2
<i>Purpose and Mandatory Requirements.....</i>	3-4
<i>Pollution Response & Salvage Companies.....</i>	4
<i>Operating and General Guidelines.....</i>	4-5
<i>Fishing Vessel and Cruise Ship Operations.....</i>	6
<i>Float Plane Operations.....</i>	7
<i>Kayak Operations.....</i>	8
<i>Recreational and Charter vessels.....</i>	9
<i>Personal Watercraft.....</i>	9
<i>Duck Boat Operations.....</i>	9
<i>Ketchikan Airport Operations.....</i>	9-10
<i>Tongass Narrows Chartlets.....</i>	11-17
<i>1998 Power Vessel Operator and Kayaker Suggested Guidelines for Safe Operations in Alaska.....</i>	18-21
<i>Using Sound Signals.....</i>	20
<i>Using a VHF Radio.....</i>	20
<i>Procedures for making a "MAYDAY" call.....</i>	20-21
<i>Contributors.....</i>	21

Comments and Concerns

Any questions, comments, or concerns can be submitted to the following:

United States Coast Guard Marine Safety Detachment Ketchikan at (907) 225-4496,
1621 Tongass Avenue, Suite 202A, Ketchikan, AK 99901

Ketchikan Harbormaster at (907) 228-5632 or 2933 Tongass Avenue, Harbor Master,
Ketchikan, AK 99901

Description: Tongass Narrows is a “Y” shaped body of water that stretches from Nichols Passage on the Southeast end to Guard Island on the North. Tongass Narrows is approximately 13 nautical miles in length and, at its narrowest point is only about a ¼ of a nautical mile wide. The narrows is bounded on the eastern side by Revillagigedo Island and by Gravina Island on the west. The Narrows is oriented in a southeast to northwesterly direction and is split into two channels in the southeastern most third of the Narrows by Pennock Island. The cities of Saxman and Ketchikan lie along the eastern side of Tongass Narrows.

Reason/Purpose: To provide a non-regulatory approach to deconflict traffic and improve safety in the Tongass Narrows waterway.

Because of the high volume of traffic, the geography of Tongass Narrows, and the multiple directions of travel, it is vital that operators on Tongass Narrows (both first time and experienced) adhere to all navigation safety regulations and follow, as closely as possible, the suggested operating guidelines found in this Guide.

Primary Waterway Users/Background: Tongass Narrows is home to a large variety of traffic ranging from some of the largest cruise ships in the world to kayaks. Types of vessels operating on the Narrows include: recreational vessels, passenger vessels, commercial fishing vessels, commercial freight vessels/barges, commercial tank barges, kayaks, floatplanes, charter vessels and passenger ferries.

Navigational Restrictions: For a detailed description of the navigational restrictions on Tongass Narrows, see the **COAST PILOT 8**. This volume of the COAST PILOT gives a complete and adequate description of Tongass Narrows from the North Entrance of Nichols Passage to Guard Island. Generally, the more restricted areas of Tongass Narrows are:

- 1) West Channel in the vicinity of Clam Cove.
- 2) East Channel from Idaho Rock to CG Base.
- 3) North Channel from Danger Island to South End of Bar Harbor.

Annual Marine Events: During the summer months, the Ketchikan Yacht Club holds sailboat regattas on each Wednesday night and on some weekends. All marine events require a formal permit issued by the USCG. Approved marine events will be published in the Local Notice to Mariners. In addition to the weekly sailboat regatta, permit requests for the following annual marine events are anticipated – the annual Pennock Island Swim and the Christmas Boat Parade.

Federally Regulated Navigation Areas: The following regulated navigation areas are in effect on Tongass Narrows and are **MANDATORY, NOT VOLUNTARY**:

- 1) [33 CFR 110.231](#), Ketchikan Harbor, Alaska, Large Passenger Vessel Anchorage. This regulation defines an anchorage area in which no vessel, other than a large passenger vessel of over 1600 gross tons, may anchor without the express consent of the Captain of the Port Southeast Alaska. This regulation also requires all vessels using propulsion machinery to proceed through the anchorage by the most direct route without unnecessary delay and prohibits sudden course changes.
- 2) [33 CFR 165.1708](#), Tongass Narrows, Ketchikan, Alaska-Safety Zone. This regulation designates a safety zone for the annual fireworks display on the fourth of July.

- 3) [33 CFR 162.240](#), Tongass Narrows, Ketchikan, Alaska; navigation. This regulation establishes a **maximum speed limit of 7 knots for vessels of over 23 feet** in length in Tongass Narrows, bounded on the north by Buoy '9' and to the south by the East and West Channel Regulatory markers, respectively. Float planes involved in take-off or landing are exempt.

Security Zones: The following security zone is in effect on the Tongass Narrows:

[33 CFR 165.1711](#), Waters of the Seventeenth Coast Guard District. This regulation establishes a 100 yard zone around escorted high capacity passenger vessels (HCPV, i.e. cruise ships and AMHS vessels). Persons desiring to transit within 100 yards of a moving, escorted HCPV or AMHS vessel in the Seventeenth Coast Guard District must contact the designated on scene representative on VHF channel 16 (156.800 MHz) or VHF channel 13 (156.650 MHz) to receive permission.

There is no type of vessel traffic control system in effect for Tongass Narrows.

Pollution Response/Salvage Companies

Alaska Commercial Divers: (907) 247-0771

Diversified Diving Service (907) 247-3843

SEAPRO: (907) 225-7002

PSSC: (907) 617-3392

Federal Pilotage Requirements: For information on pilotage requirements see [COAST PILOT 8](#). As a general rule all U.S. vessels over 300 Gross Tons must have a federally licensed pilot onboard or must have a federal pilotage endorsement on their license for these waters. For non-U.S. flagged vessels over 300 Gross Tons, you must meet all applicable Alaska State Pilotage Rules, found in [Alaska Statutes, Title 8, Chapter 62](#).

U.S. Customs & Border Protection (CBP) Requirements: As a general rule, all persons entering U.S. waters from Canadian waters, after having stopped in Canada are subject to all applicable customs regulations. To arrange for a U.S. Customs service inspection, to notify the CPB of your arrival, or to get further information on this topic, you may contact the CPB Office at (907) 225-2254.

OPERATING GUIDELINES FOR VESSELS OPERATING ON TONGASS NARROWS

The items listed below are suggested guidelines (in bullet form) for operations on Tongass Narrows. This section is followed by user specific guidelines. These guidelines are not all-inclusive. These are suggested procedures designed to enhance the safety of all persons operating vessels of any type on Tongass Narrows.

(Note: A "vessel" is defined by the Navigation Rules [Rule 2(a)] as "every description of water craft, including nondisplacement craft and seaplanes, used or capable of being used as a means of transportation on water.")

The chartlets used in this guide illustrate suggested or preferred operational areas but are not all-inclusive. Mariners should be aware of this and should maintain their vigilance when transiting Tongass Narrows.

GENERAL GUIDELINES:

- All vessels in Alaskan waters are required to operate in accordance with the International Regulations for Prevention of Collisions at Sea, 1972 ([72 COLREGS](#)), also known as the Navigation Rules, per [33 CFR 80.1705](#).
- All vessels equipped with a VHF Marine band radio should monitor channel 16 when underway. Channel 13 should also be monitored if available. It is the policy of cruise ships and other large commercial vessels including tugs with tow and Marine Highway vessels to give “securite” call on channels 13 and 16, fifteen minutes prior to getting underway and at prescribed call points while transiting. Only concerned vessel affected should respond to these securite calls.
- **All mariners are responsible for the wake created by their vessel.** If your vessel causes a dangerous or damaging wake, in addition to civil fines, you may be held liable for damages resulting from that wake.
- When transiting the Tongass Narrows, please exercise caution, maintain extra vigilance and be courteous. Unlike other waterways, on Tongass Narrows you must also remember to scan the sky as there is a constant stream of floatplanes landing and taking off on these waters.
- Whenever possible, vessels should transit perpendicular to, or parallel with, the main channel.
- For moorage information, you may contact the local harbormaster’s office on VHF channel 73, or you may call them at (907) [228-5632](#).
- This Guide includes chartlets showing some of the suggested operating areas for various user groups. There is also a chartlet in each section for that specific waterway user. Please become familiar with these suggested operating areas prior to operating your vessel on the narrows.
- The Marine Safety Task Force has created a Southeast Alaska Voluntary Waterway Guide for use by cruise ships and other large vessels when transiting Southeast Alaska. A copy can be downloaded at <http://www.seapa.com/> for review. This guide gives additional information on cruise ship operations in the Tongass Narrows.

Because of the high volume and variety of traffic and the multiple directions of travel, it is vitally important for all vessel operators to follow the suggested operating procedures outlined in this Guide when traveling on Tongass Narrows.

FISHING VESSELS

- Fishing vessel operators should be cognizant of their wake at all times while transiting Tongass Narrows. This is especially critical when around kayakers or in the vicinity of the floatplane facilities. Remember, if your vessel causes a dangerous or damaging wake, you may be held accountable for any damage that is caused by your vessel’s wake as well as be subject to a fine.
- There is no Federally Regulated fishing vessel anchorage. Fishing vessels wishing to anchor in Tongass Narrows should anchor between East Clump and Clam Cove, near Gravina Island. These areas are shaded on the attached chartlet at the end of this section.
- If you anchor in the east channel of Tongass Narrows in front of the canneries and facilities, you must maintain a radio watch and should coordinate your anchoring with the canneries and facilities so as to not impede access to the shore facilities.

- Do not anchor in the Large Passenger Vessel anchorage at the north end of Pennock Island.
- When at anchor, all vessels should display the appropriate lights or day shapes required by the Navigation Rules. Care should also be taken to ensure you do not encroach upon the main channel and thus cause a hazard to navigation.
- Regardless of where you anchor, care must be taken to not impede navigation in the channel and to not block access to any waterfront facilities.
- Limit the use of Halogen deck lights at night as they can obscure the lights from navigational aids and make it more difficult for transiting traffic. Please reference the Sector Juneau *OCMI Advisory on High Intensity Lights* on fishing vessels for further guidance.
- The following is a list of waterfront facilities and their contact numbers:

Petro Marine Service (907) 225-2106
Northland Services (907) 225-2093
Alaska General Seafoods (907) 225-2906
Anderes Oil (907) 225-2163
Trident Seafoods (907) 225-4191
E C Phillips & Sons (907) 225-3121

CRUISE SHIP OPERATIONS

- Cruise ships shall anchor in the designated anchorages illustrated on the attached chartlet.
- Anchoring in this area will enable a cruise ship to have the maximum swing area and will help to ease congestion in the east channel of Tongass Narrows. If unable to use the designated anchorages, variations will be approved by the COTP prior to anchoring.
- When using tenders to transport passengers, all cruise ships are reminded that they need to be cognizant of the wake created by the tenders. A wake of 12 inches can cause problems for floatplanes landing and taking off. Given the proximity of the cruise ship anchorage to the float plane operations area, extreme care needs to be exercised.
- Tenders should transit by proceeding down the middle of the channel, parallel to the shore, until adjacent to the debarkation destination. This transit route will help to reduce the amount of congestion in the Narrows, reduce exposure to floatplane traffic and make tender traffic more predictable. The suggested traffic pattern is illustrated on the attached chartlet.
- Tender operators should be able to communicate effectively in English and should monitor VHF channels 13 and 16 for other marine traffic at all times.
- Inbound and outbound cruise ships must be cognizant of their wake and any potential damage their wake may cause. This is especially true when in the vicinity of Lewis Reef and Peninsula Point. This is applicable to all cruise ships regardless of size.
- The following is a list of contacts for this group:

Southeast Alaska Pilots' Association (907) 225-9696
Cruise Line Agencies of Alaska (907) 225-0999

FLOAT PLANE OPERATIONS

- Floatplane operators are reminded that when the plane is on the water, it is considered a vessel and is subject to the International Navigation Regulations ([72 COLREGS](#)). As the operator of a floatplane, you are reminded that under the 72 COLREGS, floatplanes on

the water shall, in general, keep well clear of all vessels and avoid impeding their navigation. In circumstances however, where risk of collision exists, she shall comply with the Rules of this Part.

- It is recommended that “Step Taxiing” in floatplanes be minimized. “Idle Taxiing” is preferred.
- Floatplane operators should keep a close eye out for kayaks and other small vessel traffic when landing and taking off.
- Landing through fish processing outfalls should be avoided.
- Floatplane operators should be aware of changing wind conditions when in the lee of a cruise ship.
- When landing and taking off in the vicinity of a cruise ship keep a sharp lookout for vessels that may be screened from your sight by the cruise ship.
- Floatplane operators are encouraged to extend their taxi to the west when operating under the East Wind Pattern. This will aid the pilots in avoiding most of the congestion.
- There is no set distance a floatplane should keep from the waterfront facilities. However, pilots are reminded that many vessels depart from these facilities and by keeping more to the outside of the channel, you will decrease your risk of being surprised by a vessel leaving one of these facilities.
- When using the floatplane facilities at the Ketchikan International Airport, floatplane operators should avoid operating in the vicinity of the airport ferry. The attached chartlet illustrates a suggested landing and take-off zone to the northwest of the floatplane dock. By using this area for your landing and takeoffs, you are helping to ease the congestion in this, the narrowest portion of Tongass Narrows. You are also limiting the amount of vessel traffic that you will have to contend with when using this facility.
- Floatplane operators, when landing or taking off in the vicinity of any vessel should avoid doing so in a manner that will impede or surprise the operator of that vessel.
- The following is a list of contacts for this group:

Taquan Air (907) 225-8800
 Promech Air (907) 225-3845
 Pacific Airways (907) 225-3500
 Ketchikan Flight Services (907) 225-9481
 Seawind Aviation INC (907) 225-1206
 Southeast Aviation (907) 225-2900
 Alaska Seaplane Tours (907) 225-1974
 Misty Fjords Air & Outfitting (907) 225-5155
 Temsco Helicopters INC (907) 225-5141
 Family Air (907) 247-1305
 Island Wings Air Service (907) 225-2444

KETCHIKAN YACHT CLUB SAILBOAT REGATTAS

- Two days prior to each race, the sailboat race will be announced in the Events section of the Ketchikan Daily News. This announcement will give the times of the race, the name of the race committee boat if known and a method for contacting the race committee boat. The attached chartlets illustrate the usual routes used for these regattas.
- Whenever possible, races should be held in non-peak operation times for other vessels.
- All races must have an approved “Marine Event Permit” prior to their being conducted.
- Whenever possible, races should be coordinated with the local Coast Guard Auxiliary Flotilla so they may provide a safety patrol craft for the race.

- Once it is determined a race is going to be conducted, the race committee boat should initiate a “Securite” broadcast advising marine traffic of the race course, number of vessels participating, and how to contact the committee boat if a conflict exists.
- All race participants equipped with a marine radio should monitor VHF channels 13 and 16 during the course of the race and are reminded at all times, they must abide by all applicable navigation safety regulations.
- Mariners wishing to contact the race committee boat may do so on VHF channel 16, 13 or 69.
- The Ketchikan Yacht Club can be contacted at: (907) 225-3262.

KAYAK OPERATIONS

All Kayakers should abide by the “1998 Power Vessel Operator & Kayaker Suggested Guidelines for Safe Operations in Alaska” (Appendix 1 to this Guide). Although it’s several years old, the information is still very useful for safe operations.

In addition to the guidelines in the above mentioned pamphlet, when on Tongass Narrows, kayak operators should:

- At no time should kayaks be operated around the stern or bow thruster area of cruise ships preparing to depart the pier. This is especially critical when ships are preparing to depart their berth or anchorage. Some ships have controllable pitch propellers. On these ships, propellers and shafts may be turning even when the vessel is not making way. They may be started up to an hour prior to the vessel getting underway to warm up the engines. Cruise ships when in berth or at anchor, as well as ship’s agents, usually monitor and work on VHF channel 12. Ships or agents may be contacted on channel 12 to verify departure times. Cruise ship pilots give securite calls on channels 16 and 13 approximately 15 minutes prior to getting underway.
- Kayak operations around any cruise ship should be avoided in the fifteen minutes immediately prior to the cruise ship’s scheduled departure. If you are unsure as to the time of the vessel departure, contact the vessel and notify them of your intentions.
- Guided kayak operations should maintain a guide to client ratio of 1 to 6, unless a motorized rescue boat accompanies your group. Guides should maintain a radio watch on VHF channels 13 and 16.
- When crossing Tongass Narrows, groups of kayaks should cross in a side by side formation, not strung out end to end. When traveling in a group, you will be more visible than when you form a line and you will also limit your exposure to other vessel traffic.
- When crossing from Revillagigedo Island to Pennock Island, you should cross at the suggested crossing corridor depicted on the attached chartlet. The corridor runs from Thomas Basin, straight across Tongass Narrows to Pennock Island. By transiting across the narrows at these points you will be in an area where cross traffic normally occurs.
- When weather conditions exceed safe operating levels or the skill level of the kayaker, operations should be halted.
- “Securite” broadcasts should be made when groups are departing Thomas Basin or transiting to or from Pennock Island, to advise marine traffic of your intended route of travel and numbers in your group.
- For kayakers traveling through Tongass Narrows, we suggest that you stay to the side of the main channel and avoid traveling in the center of the channel whenever possible.
- All kayakers should be extra vigilant. Because of the low profile of a kayak, it is very difficult for other vessels or floatplanes to detect your presence.

RECREATIONAL AND CHARTER VESSELS

All recreational and charter vessels should abide by the “1998 Power Vessel Operator & Kayaker Suggested Guidelines for Safe Operations in Alaska” (Appendix 1 to this Guide). Although it’s several years old, the information is still very useful for safe operations.

- Like all other vessels, recreational and charter vessel operators must comply with all applicable navigation safety regulations, including the [72 COLREGS](#).
- Vessel operators should ensure they are traveling at a safe speed for the given weather and traffic conditions.
- Whenever possible, vessels should transit perpendicular to, or parallel with, the main channel.
- Vessels should transit using the middle of the channel when possible. Near shore operations are more hazardous because visibility is obstructed by shore infrastructure and other traffic.
- Do not anchor in the Large Passenger Vessel anchorage at the north end of Pennock Island.
- When transiting perpendicular to the main traffic flow, extra caution should be used. This is especially true if your view of an area is blocked by another vessel, such as a cruise ship at anchor.
- Rapid course changes should be avoided whenever possible, especially in front of large vessels and floatplanes.
- If you are transiting through the Narrows, you are encouraged to use the West Channel between Pennock and Gravina Islands if at all possible. This will help to reduce the congestion in the East Channel of Tongass Narrows.

Personal Watercraft

Although these craft are not restricted in Tongass Narrows, due to the high volume and variety of traffic, mariners wishing to operate personal watercraft should not operate them in Tongass Narrows.

- Personal watercraft are considered motorized vessels and are subject to all applicable navigation safety regulations. This includes the [72 COLREGS](#).
- Rapid course changes should be avoided whenever possible.

Duck Boat Operations

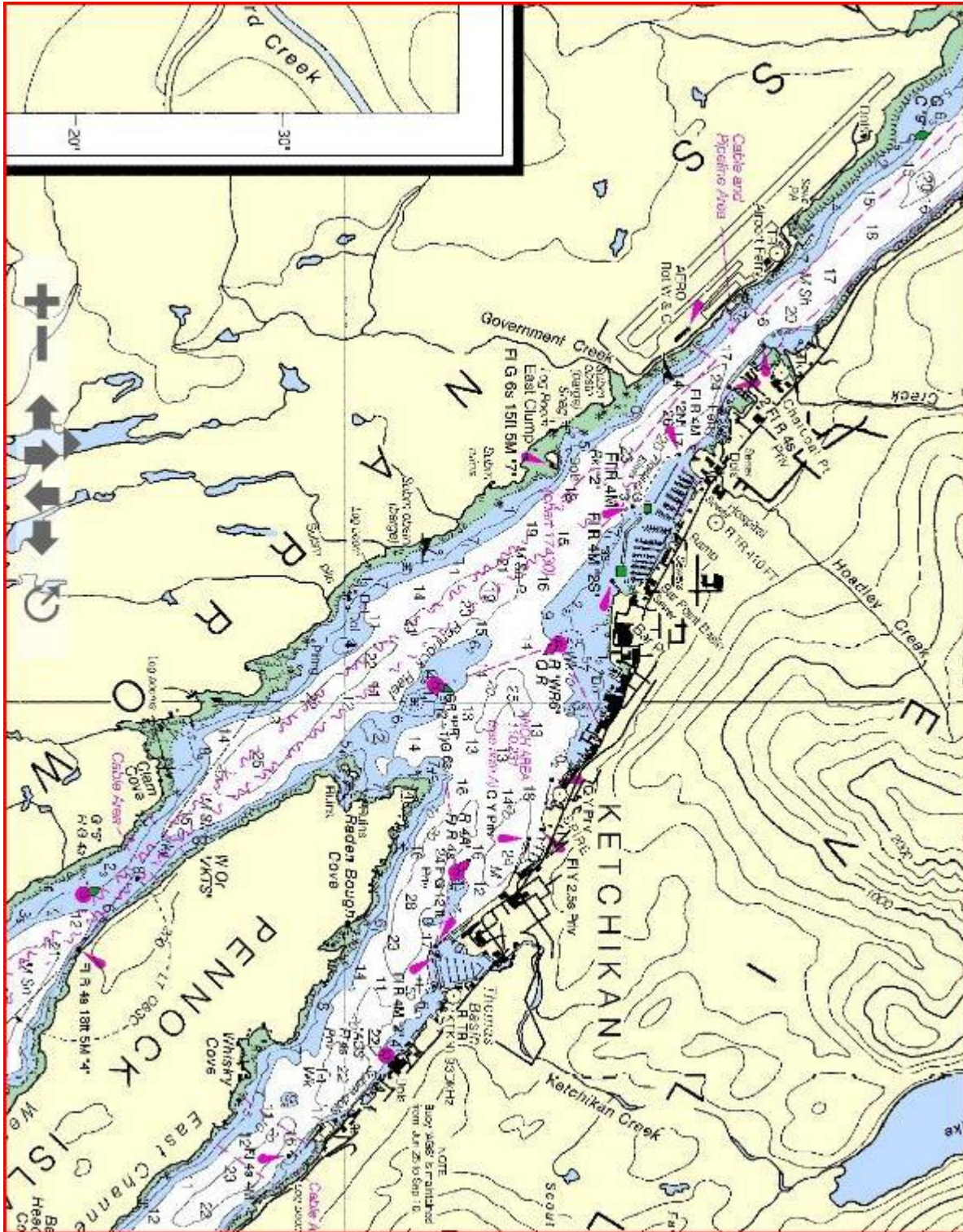
Duck boats operate at a very slow speed and are reduced in maneuverability. Other vessels in their vicinity should realize that duck boats have a minimal amount of steering and to stay clear of their heading. The duck boats enter Tongass Narrows at Bar Harbor public boat launch, head south out of Bar Harbor Marina, and make their turn back north in front of the Westflight Building at 1621 Tongass Ave. before departing from Bar Harbor boat launch again.

Airport Operations

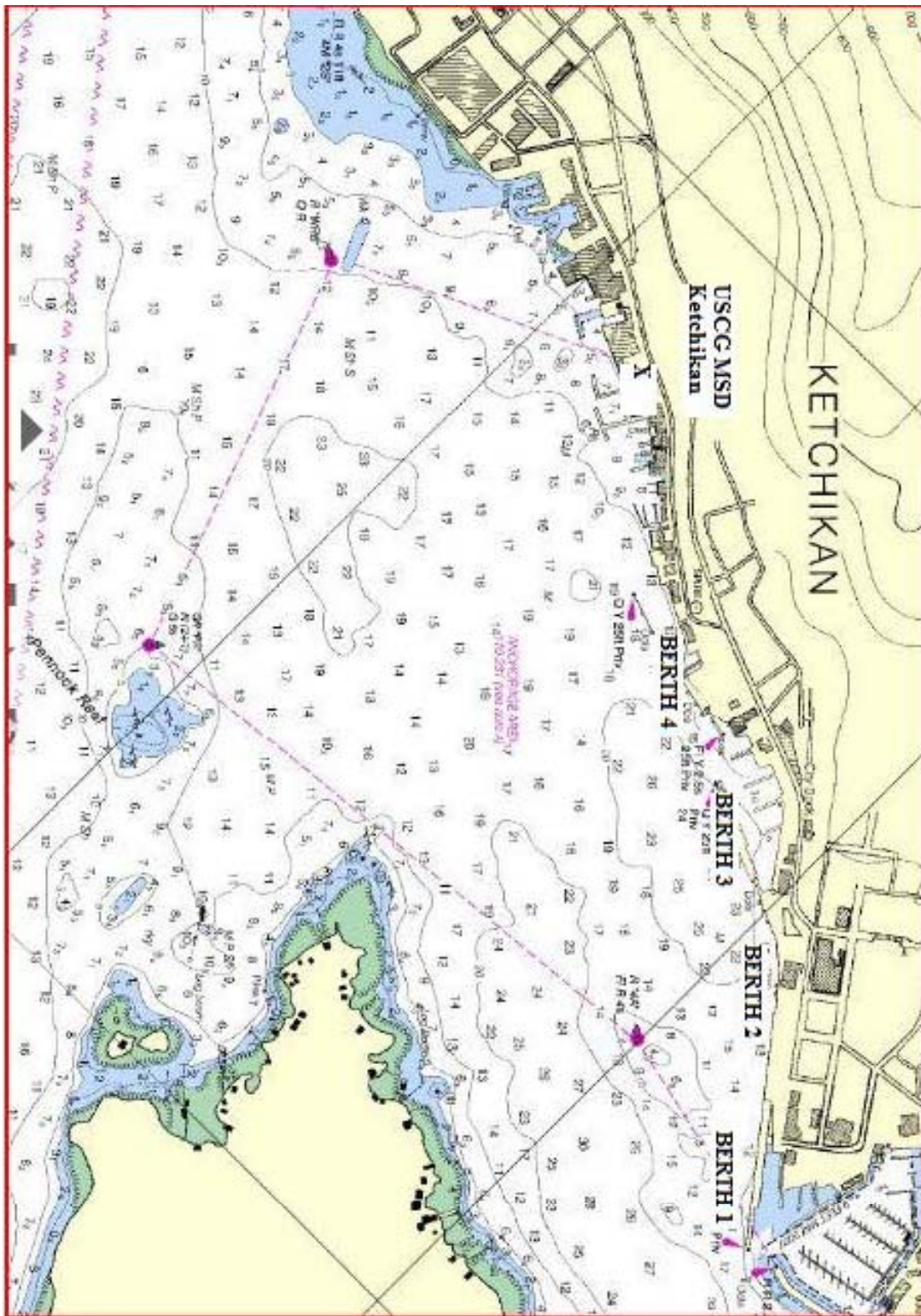
The Ketchikan Airport has a ferry that operates every 30 minutes in the winter and every 15 minutes during the busy summer months. The ferry runs from the Ketchikan side directly across from the airport to Gravina Island where the airport loading ramp is located. The Ketchikan Airport also operates a float dock and vessel traffic is monitored on CH 16.

- The 7 Knot restriction zone begins at buoy number “9” on the north end of the Narrows. This encompasses the Ketchikan Airport operations.
- Mariners are reminded of the Ketchikan Airport Ferry that crosses the Tongass Narrows, and small vessels are asked to give way to the ferry operations due to its time restrictions.
- The Ketchikan Airport operates a float plane dock for passenger pick ups, passenger drop offs, and for mail and package deliveries. Mariners are reminded that you are responsible for your wake and due to the dock being intended for float planes a small wake can have a very big impact. Many times tourists or other passengers are being loaded or off loaded when vessels pass.
- The Ketchikan Airport Float Plane dock is for float planes only. Vessels mooring at the dock could receive a violation ticket up to \$500.00.
- Vessels may moor on a first come basis on the south end of the Ketchikan Airport Float Plane Dock. The dock only has a 50’ boat moorage and cannot receive any vessel larger than 50’.

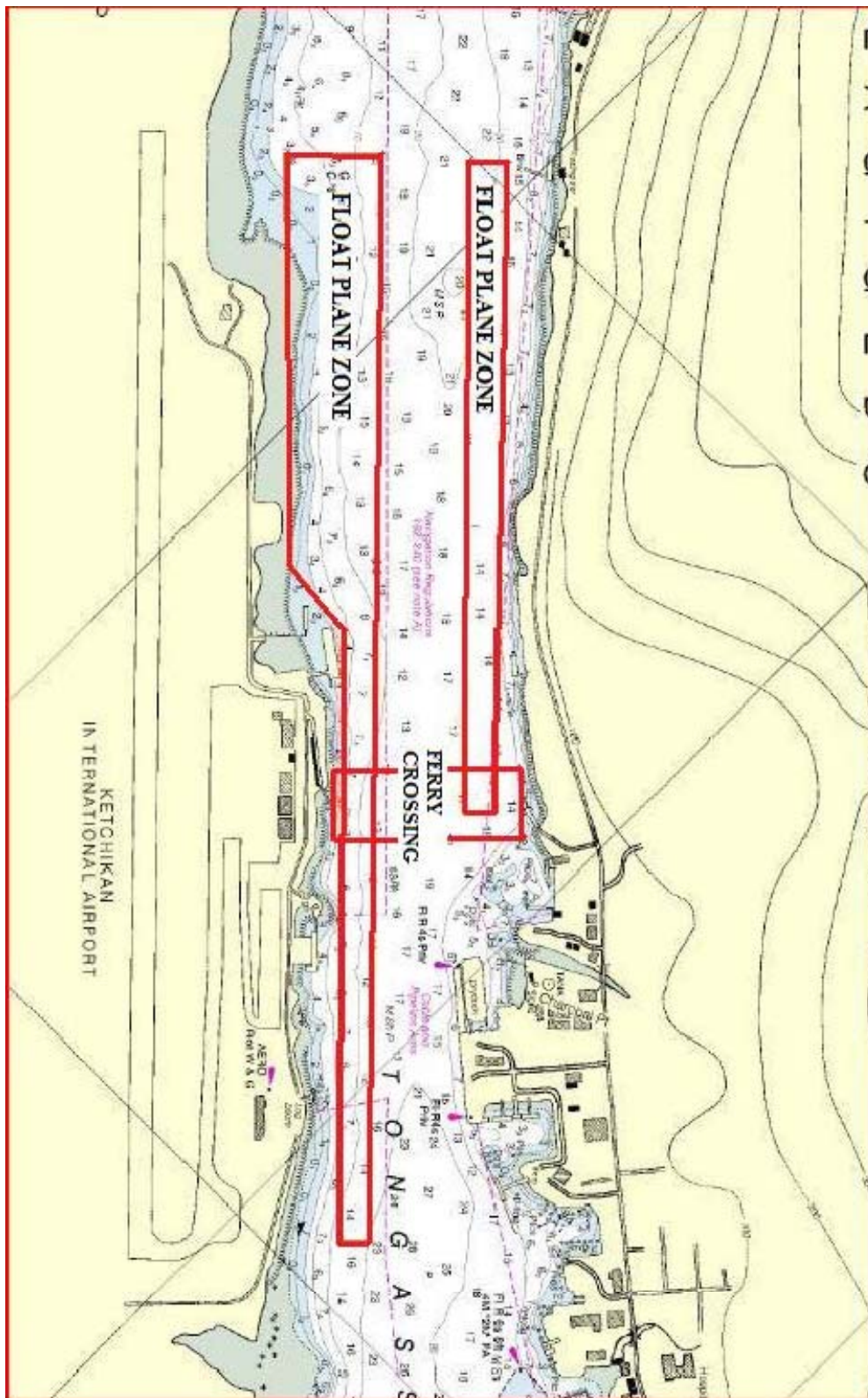
KETCHIKAN OVERVIEW



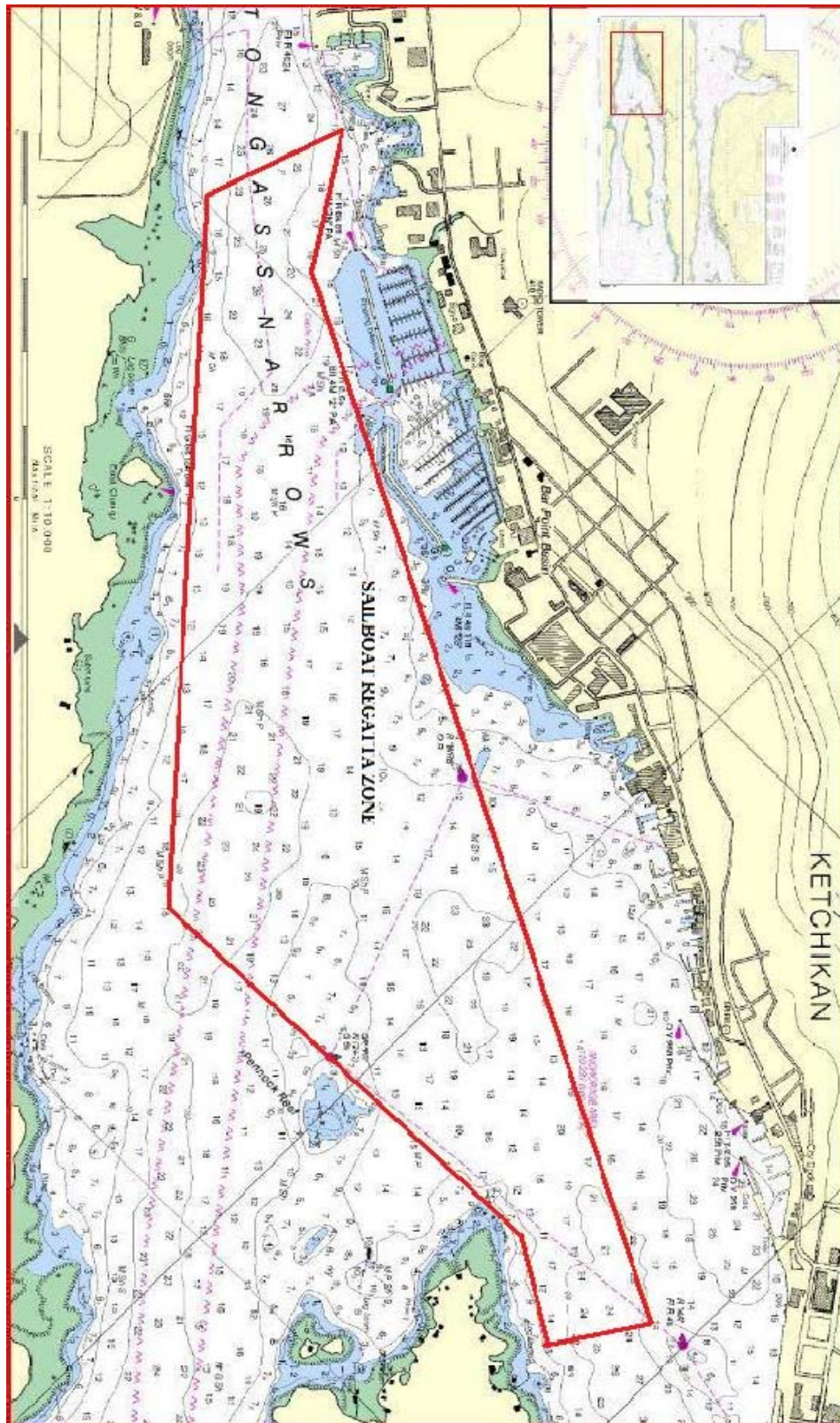
CRUISHIP BERTHS



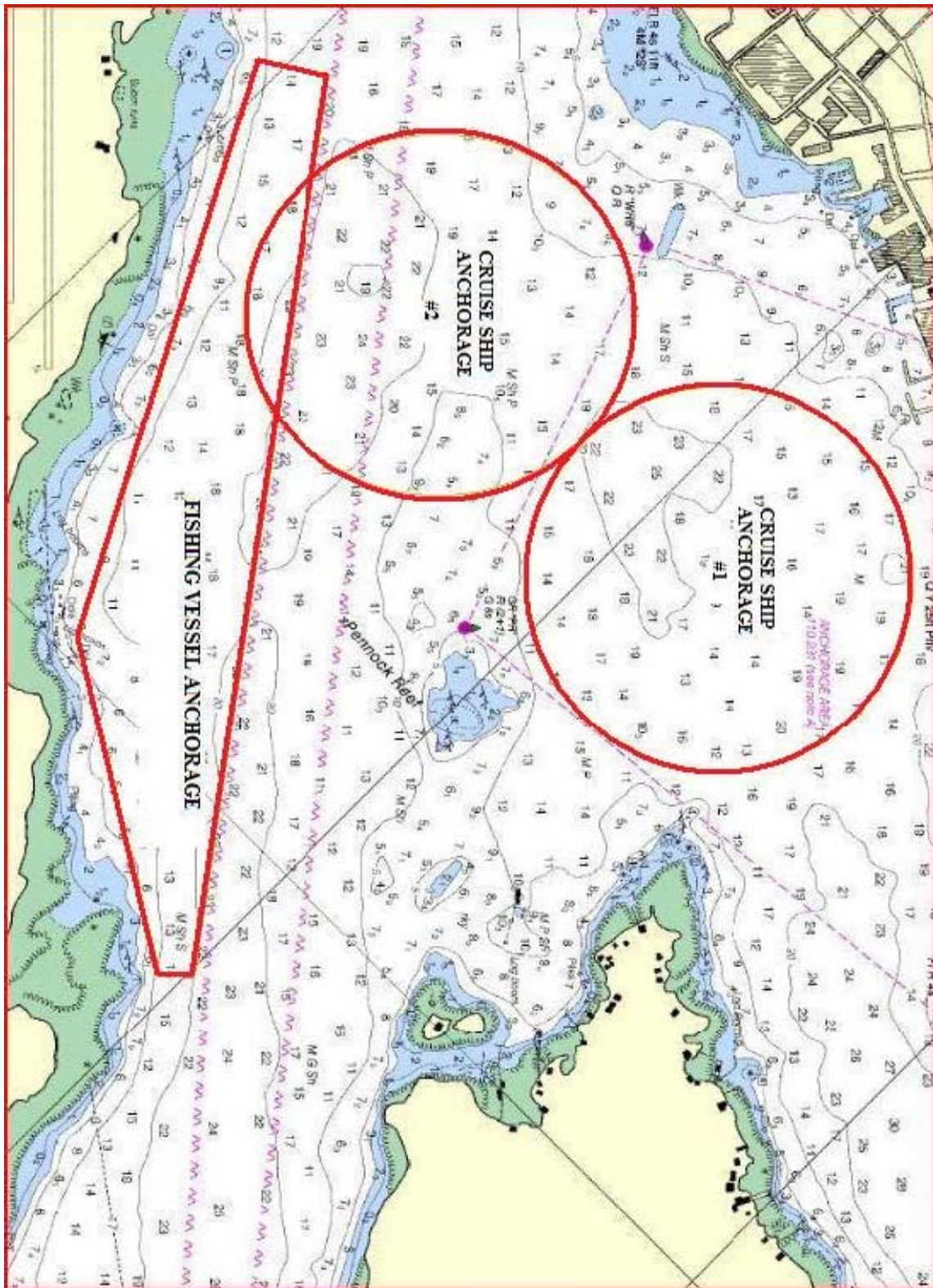
AIRPORT HIGH TRAFFIC ZONE



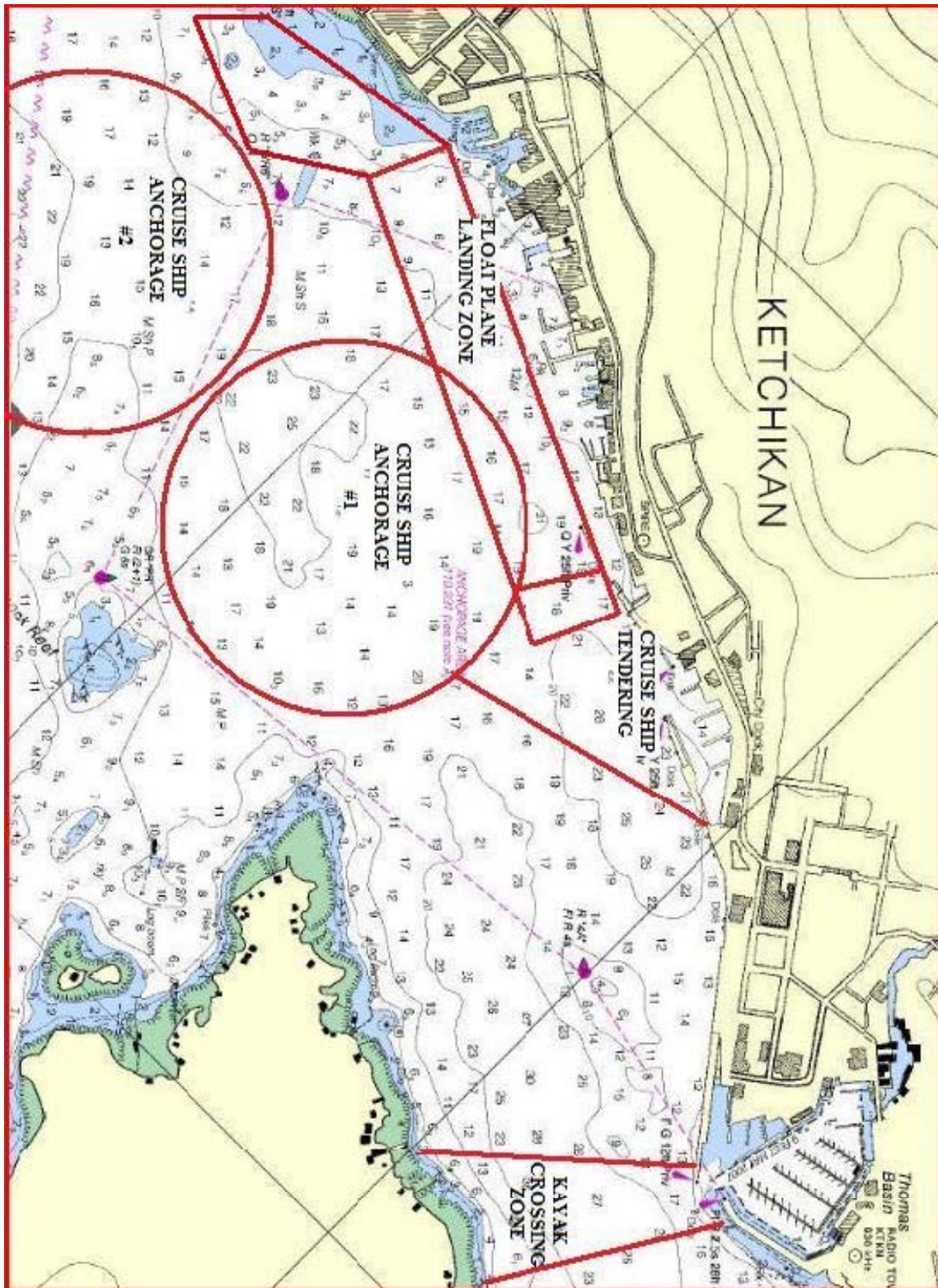
SAILBOAT REGATTA ZONE



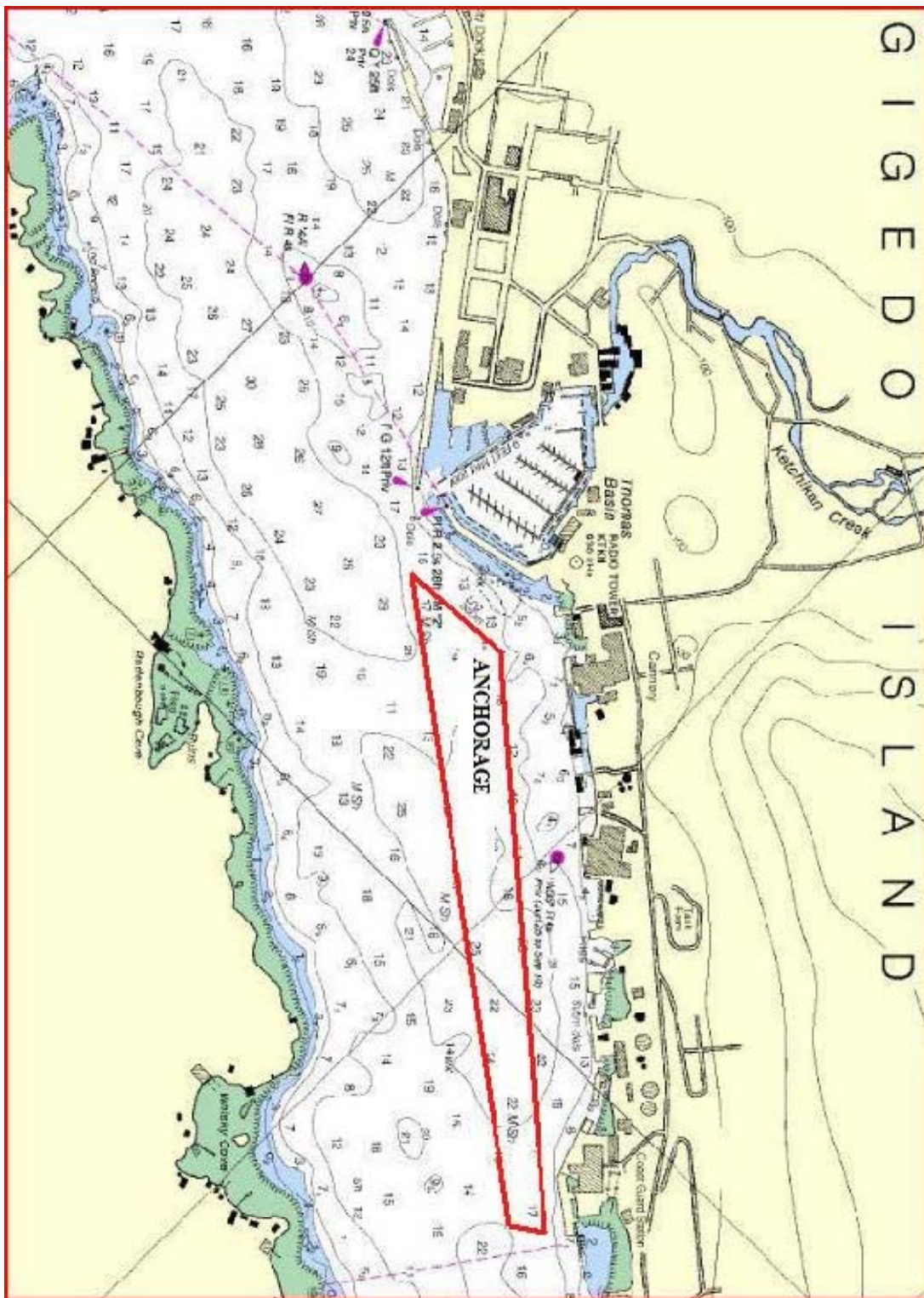
CRUISE SHIP ANCHORAGE AND FISHING VESSEL ANCHORAGE



**FLOAT PLANE LANDING, CRUISE SHIP ANCHORGE & TENDERING,
& KAYAK CROSSING ZONES**



OFFLOADING FISHING VESSEL ANCHORAGE



*Appendix One: Power Vessel Operator and Kayaker Guide***1998 POWER VESSEL OPERATOR AND KAYAKER
SUGGESTED GUIDELINES FOR SAFE OPERATIONS IN ALASKA**

Overview: Alaska's coastal communities are connected by thousands of miles of waterways. As Alaska's economy diversifies and develops, more people are and will be using Alaska's coastal waters for business and pleasure. Commercial fishing, sport fishing charters, transportation, large vessel tourism and the sea kayaking industry each contribute millions of dollars annually to Alaska's economy and help to provide economic diversification and stability in small coastal communities. However, with this growth come increased opportunities for inadvertent adverse impact between various boating groups. Of particular concern is the possibility of collisions, capsizing or injury to sea kayakers. The Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association with the support of the U.S. Coast Guard held a meeting in Anchorage and decided that increased boater education was one way to help reduce the risk of such an event.

What kayakers should know about power vessel operators

- When powerboat operators are heading into the sun, it is virtually impossible for them to see kayakers. Powerboat operators rated colliding with a kayak when heading into the sun as the most likely cause of a fatality.
- Kayakers are not visible on radar. Kayakers should not rely on a boat's radar to alert a skipper to their presence.
- When a power vessel traveling at high speeds slows down, it creates a larger wake as the vessel settles into the water.
- Large powerboats and tour-boats can be blown off course by strong winds when traveling too slowly, such as when they must pause in harbor entranceways because kayakers are blocking the passage.
- If a vessel does not respond to your VHF radio call, call again. The vessel operator may have been on the radio to another boat or using the PA system to speak to passengers.

What power vessel operators should know about sea kayakers

- Because sea kayakers carry their "life support" systems (food, clothing, tents, sleeping bags, etc.) in their kayaks, a fully loaded kayak may weigh 250 or more pounds. Kayakers and survival equipment are particularly vulnerable to being damaged by large wakes when loading or unloading on a beach as the kayakers cannot be quickly picked up and carried out of the wake zone.
- Wakes breaking onshore against a loaded kayak may push the kayak into a kayaker causing severe injury or a broken leg.
- Kayakers usually travel close to the shore to stay out of the way of power vessels. However, large wakes breaking against cliffs give kayakers a "double whammy". First they get the incoming wake, then the refracted wave off the cliff.
- A power vessel with a large wake traveling at high speeds close to sea kayakers can capsize a sea kayak if the kayakers do not have sufficient time to turn "bow-into" the wake.
- In bad weather (winds over 15 knots), kayakers are less likely to be able to maneuver. Giving them room is the best option unless assistance is clearly being requested.

Guidelines for sea kayakers

- Increase your visibility by wearing bright clothing, using a bright (not dark) colored kayak. Paddles with white rather than black blades, and putting reflector tape on our kayak paddles and life jackets. Use of a bicycle flag pole may interfere with your ability to right and climb back into the kayak should you be rolled. Test this in a pool before using.
- Learn the boating sound signals so you can understand a vessel operator's intentions when he gives you a sound signal.
- Carry flares to use in distress.
- Carry a good, submersible, VHF radio where it is readily available for use. Be aware of large boats and subsequent wakes and avoid landing and launching in a potential surf zone when their wakes are approaching. Use beaches that are protected from possible surf and wake for rest breakers and/or carry your boats up out of the surf zone if possible. When loading or unloading for camp, empty and move the kayaks up the beach as quickly as possible.
- In narrow passages or places where power vessels have limited maneuverability, stay out of the main channel. Do not impede traffic in a harbor or harbor entrances.
- Move into and away from harbor entrances quickly to avoid wakes from vessels accelerating and slowing down.
- If you are traveling in a group and see a vessel approaching, move into a tight group to increase your visibility. Wave your paddles high above your head to alert the vessel operator to your presence.
- If a power vessel approaches you heading into the sun, try waving your paddles high above your head in a back and forward motion to alert them to your presence.
- When rounding blind corners or areas with submerged reefs be aware that boat wakes can be dangerous. Wait until the boat and subsequent wake pass by before proceeding.
- When crossing a passageway or open water, cross in a tight group. In areas or high traffic, give a "securite" call on your VHF radio before crossing.

Guidelines for Power Vessel Operators

- Always travel at a safe speed for the conditions. Reduce speeds when weather conditions or blind corners reduce your visibility. Never travel faster than you are capable of responding to avoid an accident or close encounter.
- Stay sufficiently far away from kayakers that they have time to maneuver "bow-into" your approaching wake.
- On leaving and approaching harbor entrances look for kayakers and plan your acceleration or slowing down so they have time to turn into the wake. Kayaks have been capsized in this situation.
- Avoid traveling close to shore especially around blind corners. Kayakers ranked encountering a vessel rounding a blind corner as the most likely cause of a sea kayaking fatality. When rounding a blind corner in an area sea kayakers use, give one prolonged blast as a warning. Listen to your radio for response. Take action to avoid close encounters or collisions.
- When kayakers are near cliffs, consider reducing your speed well before you reach them to minimize your wake or give the area a wider berth.
- If you inadvertently place a large wake close to kayakers when they may not be able to head "bowinto" it, look back after passing and make sure you have not capsized a kayaker.

Sound Signals

The following maneuvering signals are used when vessels are in sight of one another or to announce a vessel's presence when vessels are in sight of one another.

1 short blast: I am altering course to starboard

2 short blasts: I am altering course to port

3 short blasts: I am operating astern propulsion

1 prolonged blast: Power driven vessel underway in reduced visibility

5 or more short blasts: Danger signal

Sound Signals at Blind Corners

Power vessels rounding a blind corner in areas routinely used by kayakers should indicate their approach with 1 prolonged blast. Kayakers should immediately respond on their VHF radio giving a "securite" announcement on channel 16 as follows:

"Securite, securite, securite, vessel rounding the blind corner, there is a kayaker (or group of kayaks) at _____ (location: such as - 100 yards from Point Roberts)."

Communications

Channel 16 is the standard hailing and distress channel for vessels in Alaskan coastal waters. Initial contact is made on channel 16, and then if more discussion is necessary the parties agree to switch to another channel. Channels 21 and 22 are for communication with the Coast Guard. It is advisable that kayakers carry and know how to use a VHF radio. VHF radios require a station and operator's license. The best VHF radios for Alaskan coastal conditions are water repellent and have 5 watts of power.

Using a VHF Radio

- Listen to make sure no one else is speaking.
- Establish contact on channel 16 giving first the NAME of the boat you are calling (if known, or type of boat and description of its location "tour-boat approaching Point Decision", this is NAME (of your boat) and CALL SIGN. To avoid confusion, never reverse this sequence. You may repeat the name of the boat you are calling a few times, but do not repeat your name and call sign. Keep your call short. If the boat does not respond, wait two minutes before trying again unless it is an emergency.
- When contact is established, switch to a working channel (9 if with a commercial boat or 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, or 78 for recreational boats). Listen to make sure no one else is using the channel.
- Communications should be short and about operational or safety concerns.
- Sign off giving your NAME and CALL SIGN when you are finished on the working channel.

Making a "MAYDAY" Call

"Mayday" calls are made only when one is in grave and immediate danger. Being weathered in or overdue are not "Mayday" situations. For less severe situations call the Coast Guard or harbormaster. Use VHF channel 16.

“MAYDAY” Procedures

1. On VHF channel 16 state: “MAYDAY, MAYDAY, MAYDAY, THIS IS A KAYAK PARTY (repeated three times; normally the name and call sign of the vessel goes here, but kayaks usually don’t have names)”.
2. “WHERE” you are. Give the most exact information possible.
3. “WHAT” is wrong (collision, sinking, injured person, etc.).
4. “NUMBER” of persons in party and the condition of any injured.
5. “PRESENT SEAWORTHINESS” of the kayak(s).
6. “DESCRIPTION” of the boat (yellow single person kayak, etc.)
7. Give “YOUR LISTENING FREQUENCY” and schedule.
8. Conclude: “THIS IS A KAYAK PARTY, OVER”.

Local Knowledge

- Inexperienced kayakers often do not know where they are. Follow your charts and note the local names for points and bays.
- Never kayak in an unfamiliar area without a local chart or special map. Keep track of your location.
- When kayaking in an unfamiliar area, seek local knowledge even if you have a chart.
- It is advisable to fill out a trip plan and leave it at the harbor office.
- If you are in an unfamiliar area, check with the harbor staff about local high traffic areas, such as small boat ramp areas, cannery docks, and harbor entrances, where there might be a potential conflict. Try avoiding these areas. If you cannot avoid them, enter these areas with caution and try to stay out of the way of vessel traffic. If visibility is poor, you may wish to give a Securite call.

This Guide was developed in partnership with the U.S. Coast Guard. For more information call your local Coast Guard Sector.

Contributors

The Alaska Wilderness Recreation and Tourism Association took the lead in developing this brochure and received invaluable help from the Knik Kayakers and Canoers. Over 80 businesses and individuals from Ketchikan to Kodiak participated in the scoping process, risk assessment and development of this brochure. Personnel from the U.S. Coast Guard in Juneau, Valdez, and Anchorage have provided support and assistance.

Notice

This Guide is meant to complement and not replace the federal laws that govern maritime traffic. Prudent mariners should not rely on the Guide as their only source of information about vessel traffic patterns, Navigation Rules, and safe boating practices in Alaska, and should at all times comply with applicable law. The companies and agencies that have contributed to the publication of this Guide expressly disclaim any liability or responsibility, direct or indirect, which may arise from the use of this Guide, or reliance upon any information or recommendation in the Guide, by any person or entity.