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[AIANTA, WITH SOUTHEAST TOURISM SOCIETY BRINGS TRIBAL TOURISM TO CONGRESS](#)

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AIANTA

American Indian Alaska Native
Tourism Association

2014 Congressional Summit on Travel & Tourism Policy brings Indian Country tourism into national discussion



Sherry L. Rupert

WASHINGTON - Tourism leaders from across the country are meeting in Washington this week to reinforce to Congress the strength and importance of the travel and tourism industry, including tribal tourism and transportation initiatives.

The June 23-25 event is the Southeast Tourism Society Congressional Summit, staged in partnership with the American Indian Alaska Native Tourism Association (AIANTA) and NTA (formerly the National Tour Association), and serves as a platform to educate members of Congress on the broad diversity of the travel and tourism sector.

The summit will bring to light the significant contribution the travel and tourism industry makes to national and local communities through discussions about the National Park Service and its 2016 centennial, national transportation policy and reauthorization of Brand USA.

One of the most critical discussions to Indian country during the summit will be that of national transportation policy. Tomorrow, AIANTA will sponsor and moderate an expert transportation panel discussion at the Travel and Tourism Policy Briefing during the annual summit.

The panel discussion will be moderated by AIANTA Executive Director Camille Ferguson and feature three transportation experts, Greg Cohen, President of the American Highway Users Alliance; Jim Tymon, Director of Management and Program Finance at the American Association of State Highway and Transportation Officials; and Kevin Kilcullen, Chief of Visitor Services for the National Wildlife Refuge System at the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service.

Discussions will center on the travel and tourism sector, in which it is critically important that the nation's surface transportation policy focuses on more than just basic roads, and also include programs like Scenic Byways, Rails to Trails, bike paths, roads on federal lands, and the Bureau of Indian Affairs' tourism program.

“TRANSPORTATION IS AN ISSUE OF CRITICAL IMPORTANCE TO INDIAN COUNTRY AND TO COMMUNITIES, LARGE AND SMALL, ACROSS THE COUNTRY. ON BEHALF OF AIANTA, WE ARE EXCITED TO PLAY A CENTRAL ROLE IN IN THIS IMPORTANT DISCUSSION,” SAID FERGUSON.

AIANTA and its representatives will also be participating in a number of other key meetings and discussions on Capitol Hill this week, including a verbal testimony given by AIANTA Board President Sherry L. Rupert, on behalf of AIANTA, before the Senate Committee on Indian Affairs at the Oversight Hearing: Economic Development Encouraging Investments in Indian Country.

At the hearing, Rupert will appear before the Committee on Indian Affairs to discuss Indian Country tourism and its current and potential impact on Indian economic development in the U.S.

Also during the summit, Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA) Transportation Specialist and Tourism Coordinator, Edward Hall III, will join another panel discussion along with Alexa Viets, National Park Service and Mary Coulombe, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. This June 24 discussion will focus on encouraging stronger engagement of tribal and rural communities in transportation and tourism.

Indian Country has only recently won a seat at the table of these policies and discussions. It was not until the 1991 Surface Transportation Law that the transportation needs of tribal communities were specifically included into law. Congress recognized that transportation was essential to provide access to basic community services to enhance the quality of life in Indian Country.

The AIANTA Board of Directors Executive Committee as well as At-Large Representative LaDonna Allard are in DC this week meeting with Congressional members from all of AIANTA's region. Other events include a June 23 reception in the U.S. Capitol with the Congressional Travel and Tourism Caucus, a policy briefing June 24 featuring key federal agency partners and a June 24 food, culture and tourism dinner at the National Museum of the American Indian.

To learn more about the Annual Congressional Summit on Travel and Tourism, visit:<http://www.southeasttourism.org/Meetings/Congressional-Summit>.