



The rhythmic lap of sea-green waves against weathered harbor pilings sets the backdrop for a quintessential Homer scene. A boat full of adventurous Alaskans, their XtraTufs glistening with spray, heads out to time-honored fishing grounds. The air is rich with the mingled scents of salt and fresh catch, punctuated by cheers when another halibut tugs at a line from the depths of Kachemak Bay. Homer, while proudly bearing the crown of “Halibut Fishing Capital of the World,” offers so much more than bountiful waters. It’s a nexus of natural beauty, productive ecosystems, recreation, adventure, subsistence, and commerce, all connected and accessible through the City of Homer Port and Harbor.

For many, though, Homer Harbor is more than a port; it’s the heart of home. The maritime industry pumps life into the regional economy, fueling everything from recreation and leisure to bustling commercial enterprises. This vital hub’s circulatory system extends far beyond the local shores. A vast network of transportation and shipping routes plays a crucial role in nourishing the broader Alaska economy, facilitating the flow of goods, services, and people across the region and state.

“Homer Harbor is woven into the lifestyle of almost every Homer resident,” says Brad Anderson, executive director of the Homer Chamber of Commerce and Visitor Center. “Many young people had their first job with a business connected to the harbor.”

Homer Harbor

Additional capacity needed at the end of the road

By Jenny Carroll

City of Homer

Mako Haggerty, owner and operator of Homer-based Mako’s Water Taxi, is one example. Haggerty came to Alaska in 1982 with his heart set on fishing Dungeness crab in Kodiak. While waiting for a ferry out of Homer, he landed a job on a boat berthed in Homer Harbor that was heading to fish the commercial Dungeness fishery in Kodiak.

“Been here ever since,” shares Haggerty. “Homer is an easy place to work on a boat. All the necessary trades, welding, fiberglass, hydraulics—you name it—are here and close to the harbor.”

After retiring his crab pots, Haggerty put down roots in Homer and began a charter business, transporting people across Kachemak Bay for adventures he’d always dreamed about. Operating daily year-round, Haggerty now considers the Spit his second home, a testament to the harbor’s ability to transform careers and lives.

Many others share this love of Homer Harbor—and while there are consistent themes upon which this love is built, the list of benefits is long and varied. Abe Porter, co-owner of Snug Harbor Outpost, believes that Homer Harbor is the lifeline of the Kenai Peninsula. “In my opinion, Homer Harbor is a major hub for the marine world,” says Porter. “The Harbor is vital to many industries, providing access to Kachemak Bay and Cook Inlet, and countless national parks.”

Indeed, the Harbor’s significance extends far beyond its immediate vicinity and plays a pivotal role in Alaska’s broader economic landscape. Homer Harbor is an essential link between the Sterling Highway and the Alaska Marine Highway System. Vessels from Homer Harbor enable freight shipping from Seattle and Asia to Alaska and serve Cook Inlet; the Eastern Aleutian Islands; Lake Clark, Lake Iliamna, and Bristol Bay; Yukon and Kuskokwim River villages; and coastal communities up to Kotzebue—nearly 150,000 square miles.

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The City of Homer and US Army Corps of Engineers are evaluating a possible expansion of the harbor basin to improve accommodation for large vessels.

City of Homer



Highway to Villages

As a home base for pilot boats, Homer Harbor provides critical service for cargo and tanker vessels traveling north through Cook Inlet into the Don Young Port of Alaska at Anchorage, which handles 50 percent of all freight shipped to Alaska. More than 130 remote communities across coastal Alaska also depend on supply chains and cargo delivery services operating out of Homer Harbor, including 90 traditional Alaska Native communities extending from nearby Cook Inlet to the Bering Sea.

Haggerty’s water taxi business is just one example of the crucial role Homer Harbor plays in providing goods and services to remote communities. He delivers textbooks, household supplies, fresh produce, fuel, building materials, and more—helping to ensure that critical components of living and running businesses in rural Alaska reach the people who need them. In 2022 alone, Mako’s delivered 125 tons of freight per month from April through June, and 80 tons per month the rest of the year. Spenard Builders Supply estimates that it sends 1 million pounds of construction materials to non-road-connected communities in Southcentral and Southwest Alaska each year.

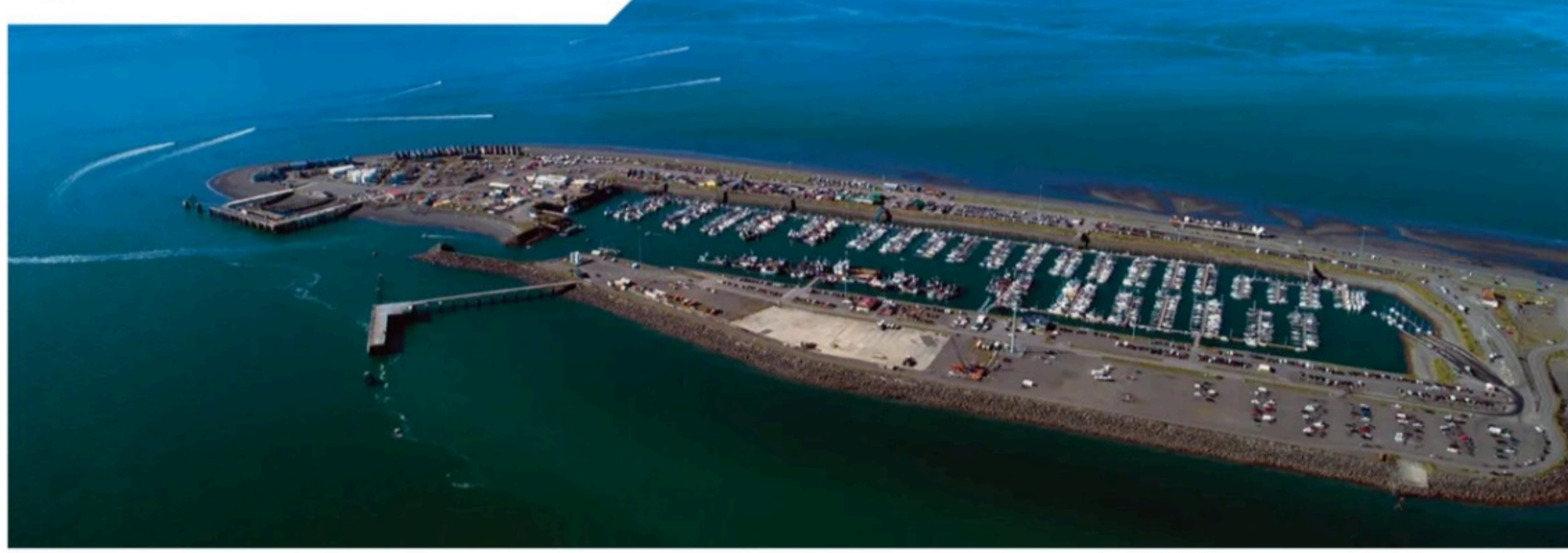
Homer Harbor is also a critical gateway for Bristol Bay fishermen. Bristol Bay is home to the world’s largest, most valuable wild salmon fishery. Its economic benefits exceed \$2.2 billion, generating more than 15,000 jobs while feeding hundreds of thousands of people. This commercial fishery supplies as much as 57 percent of the world’s sockeye salmon catch, driving \$990 million in economic activity in Alaska and \$800 million in induced impacts for the Pacific Northwest. But wait, there’s more! More than 177 Homer-area commercial fishermen are involved in Bristol Bay’s short yet productive six-week season, and Homer is home port for many of the fishing vessels and commercial fish tenders working Cook Inlet, Prince William Sound, Kodiak Island, and the Alaska Peninsula.

According to Frances Bursch, program manager for Bristol Bay Regional Seafood Development, “While seemingly far away, many fishermen keep their boats in Homer for storage, maintenance projects, and services when traveling to Bristol Bay through Lake Iliamna or False Pass.” Bursch, whose family has a long history of fishing in Bristol Bay, echoes others in her assertion that Homer Harbor has regional importance as a fishing and recreation port for Southcentral, Southeast, and Southwest Alaska due to its central location in the Gulf of Alaska and the fact that Homer’s maritime services are accessible, convenient, and second to none in the state.

“My family, like many Bristol Bay fishermen, kept our boat in Homer to work on over the winter,” recalls Bursch. “This option supported our fishing business, and the trip from Homer through Lake Iliamna and back has become a favorite adventure for our family.”

Homer Harbor’s current float systems are considered overused, which strains docks that have aged beyond their engineered lifespans.

City of Homer



Regional and Global Safety

Beyond connecting communities and industries to essential goods and services, Homer Harbor plays a key role in the regional maritime safety. As a port of refuge and safe harbor for vessels transiting through Cook Inlet and the Great Circle Route, Homer provides shelter for local and international vessels needing assistance during foul weather and awaiting ice-free conditions in their destination port.

Homer Harbor serves as a hub for regional oil spill response personnel and equipment and as home port to two US Coast Guard vessels in support of their coastal security and safety missions. Fast-response cutters and vessels deployed under the Coast Guard’s Arctic Security and Global Resilience missions also schedule moorage for layover, repair, and provisioning. Additionally, no one can predict where or when a natural disaster will strike, so Homer Harbor’s road connection makes it essential for food security and resiliency in Southcentral.

Closer to home, Homer Harbor’s emergency medical transfer site serves a critical role in regional health and safety, ensuring swift transport to critical care at South Peninsula Hospital for patients arriving from remote communities.

Capped Capacity

Despite being Alaska’s largest single-basin harbor, Homer Harbor struggles to meet growing demand. The harbor operates year-round, providing roughly 92,000 vessel-days of transient moorage annually, with an additional 727 vessels occupying reserved moorage and more than 400 vessels on the stall waitlist. It supports 92 freight shipping vessels, facilitates 480 piloted cargo and tanker trips each year, and handles more than 200 daily vessel launches each summer.

Demand for moorage far exceeds the harbor’s capacity. Many people, including Porter, have been on a waiting list for a stall for years. In response, the City of Homer, in partnership with the US Army Corps of Engineers, is currently conducting a multi-year study to evaluate the feasibility of expanding the harbor basin with a focus on improving accommodation for large vessels. The expansion would relieve overcrowding and congestion in the existing harbor to improve navigational safety and access for sport and private boating.

It would also relieve overuse of the harbor’s current float systems, which puts undue strain on Homer’s docks, some of which have long surpassed their engineered lifespans. Any loss of moorage capacity would negatively impact rural communities that depend on marine transportation and cargo delivery through increased expenses for air travel, vessel delays, and disruptions in reliable, affordable transportation of goods and people.

Anderson, Haggerty, Porter, and Bursch represent a small sample of Harbor supporters who are excited to grow in tandem with the Homer harbor.

“Homer is home to many fishermen and marine tradesmen,” says Haggerty. “Without the harbor, our quality of life would be greatly diminished.”

As Homer looks to the future, the harbor remains at the center of its identity—a lifeline connecting communities, supporting livelihoods, and embodying the spirit of coastal Alaska.

Jenny Carroll is the Special Projects and Communications Coordinator for the City of Homer. With more than thirty-five years in public service in Alaska, she excels in community engagement, external relations, and grant development to advance sustainable infrastructure and community services in support of public health, safety, community resilience, and quality of life.



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