Tustumena Service Delayed Until June

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Jay Barrett/KMXT

The Alaska Marine Highway System announced yesterday that the ferry Tustumena needs two more months of work before it can return to service. That means instead of resuming its Kodiak to Homer runs in two months, it will be delayed until June.

As a result, the ferry Kennicott will be pressed into service to handle runs from Kodiak to Dutch Harbor in April in May.

However, not all the Alaska Peninsula communities usually served by the Tustumena will be called upon by the Kennicott, due to its much larger size. Old Harbor, Chignik, False Pass and Akutan will not have ferry service those two months, as their docks cannot accommodate the 382-foot Kennicott.

Ferry chief Captain Joh Falvey said the Tustumena, at 296-feet, is unique among the state's ferries, as it can handle the open ocean, but still serve the smaller communities, which also include Port Lions, Ouzinkie and Seldovia.

The Tustumena is currently laid up undergoing regular “Federal Capital Improvement” this winter. During that maintenance, additional repairs were discovered that needed attention, and the Tusty is not expected to return to service until June.

The one upside for the Kodiak community is that the Kennicott will be serving Kodiak at the end of May, during Crab Fest, something the Chamber of Commerce has long wished for. Larger carnival rides and more passengers can attend the Memorial Day Weekend fair aboard the Kennicott than on the Tustumena. Chamber Executive Director Trevor Brown said in an e-mail that he appreciates the Marine Highway System making the Kennicott available for the event, and urges the state to make replacing the 50-year-old Tustumena a top priority.

The ferry system will publish an updated schedule for the Kennicott in the next week, and is contacting any passengers that had reservations to or from the chain on the Tustumena.

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