



**POSSIBLE  
FUTURES  
FOR  
SOUTHEAST  
ALASKA**

### **Spruce Root, Inc.**

Spruce Root is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit Native Community Development Financial Institution (CDFI).

We amplify our Haida, Tlingit, and Tsimshian ancestral imperative to ensure Southeast Alaska thrives for future generations. We are a driver of a regenerative economy across Southeast Alaska so communities can forge futures grounded in this uniquely Indigenous place. Our services for small businesses include coaching, training and lending for startup enterprises, working capital, business expansion, leasehold improvements and other business capital needs. In addition to our services for entrepreneurs, we provide backbone support for the Sustainable Southeast Partnership. We operate with the belief that the entire community benefits from locally-owned businesses that are strong and contribute to the local economy. Learn more at [www.spruceroot.org](http://www.spruceroot.org).

### **The Sustainable Southeast Partnership**

The Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) is a dynamic collective impact network uniting diverse skills and perspectives to strengthen cultural, ecological, and economic resilience across Southeast Alaska. We envision self-determined and connected communities where Southeast Indigenous values continue to inspire society, shape our relationships, and ensure that each generation thrives on healthy lands and waters. Learn more at [www.sustainablesoutheast.net](http://www.sustainablesoutheast.net)

### **Reos Partners**

Reos Partners is a social impact organization focused on bringing transformational change to complex global challenges. We design and facilitate processes that enable groups of diverse stakeholders – be it an organization, a sector, or a society – to work together to make sustained progress and systemic breakthroughs. Learn more at [www.reospartners.org](http://www.reospartners.org).

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# Foreword

I have been fortunate over the past decade to be in a position to help to improve collaboration across Southeast Alaska. Our goal has been to support communities to build better solutions and become better positioned for the future, together. The work has been daunting, yet I keep at it, because I've seen the power in fostering relationships, creating common understanding, and learning from each other. When we do this, we become unstoppable.

What started as an effort to improve the way we work together in our region, the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP), has since become a model for collective impact in rural and Indigenous communities. We now have a strong foundation from which to work together and the work is clearly valuable to people as demonstrated by the growth of the network in recent years. But I find myself asking, where do we go from here? How can we amplify our collective impact even further?



It was through a conversation with my friend and former colleague Paul, who now works at Reos Partners, that I first learned about Transformative Scenario Planning. At first, I wasn't sure how it could be worth our time. But then, at an SSP retreat, I met Kamana'o, a Hawaiian who told me about the "Hawai'i's Soul" scenario planning process— and how it has led to a breakthrough shift in the way they were working together. I was intrigued.

Fast-forward a year, after further discussion and planning, we decided to take the leap and bring Reos Partners onboard to help us create a set of scenarios for Southeast Alaska. I now understand that storytelling is what shapes our futures. The scenarios, or *stories*, that were created by an unlikely team of uncertain people who took a leap of faith. In the end, they too could see the immense value of building stories to inform our future.

Alone, these are just stories. But when used as a strategic tool, they help us analyze what we are doing now and assess whether it's driving us closer to or further from the future we desire for the next generations. I am excited and hopeful that these scenarios can be used widely to shape robust dialogues and guide our collective planning. By envisioning multiple possible futures, we can work together to build the future we want for Southeast Alaska.

Alana Peterson

Spruce Root Executive Director



# Introduction

The Scenarios for the Future of Southeast Alaska are stories about what could happen in Southeast in the future, from 2025 to 2050. They are not stories about what will happen (forecasts) or what should happen (a vision). Rather, the scenarios hypothesize different ways the future could unfold for the region's communities, economy, environment, and culture. The purpose of these stories is to offer a shared language for talking together about what is possible and what must be done.

The starting point for these stories is the current environment. While some things about the future are certain and constant, such as Southeast's geography, these scenarios explore what is uncertain about the future, considering both factors within the region and external to it.





# Why these Four Scenarios, Why now?

Southeast Alaska faces uncertain times without an existing roadmap to guide the way. In an uncertain future, scenarios help build shared capacity to *kaagwa* (talk) together about how things could unfold. Thinking about the future together can help people *wooch.éen* (collaborate) to create the future they want. The intent of the scenarios is to provide a structure and language to help residents of Southeast Alaska have those discussions about the future of the region.

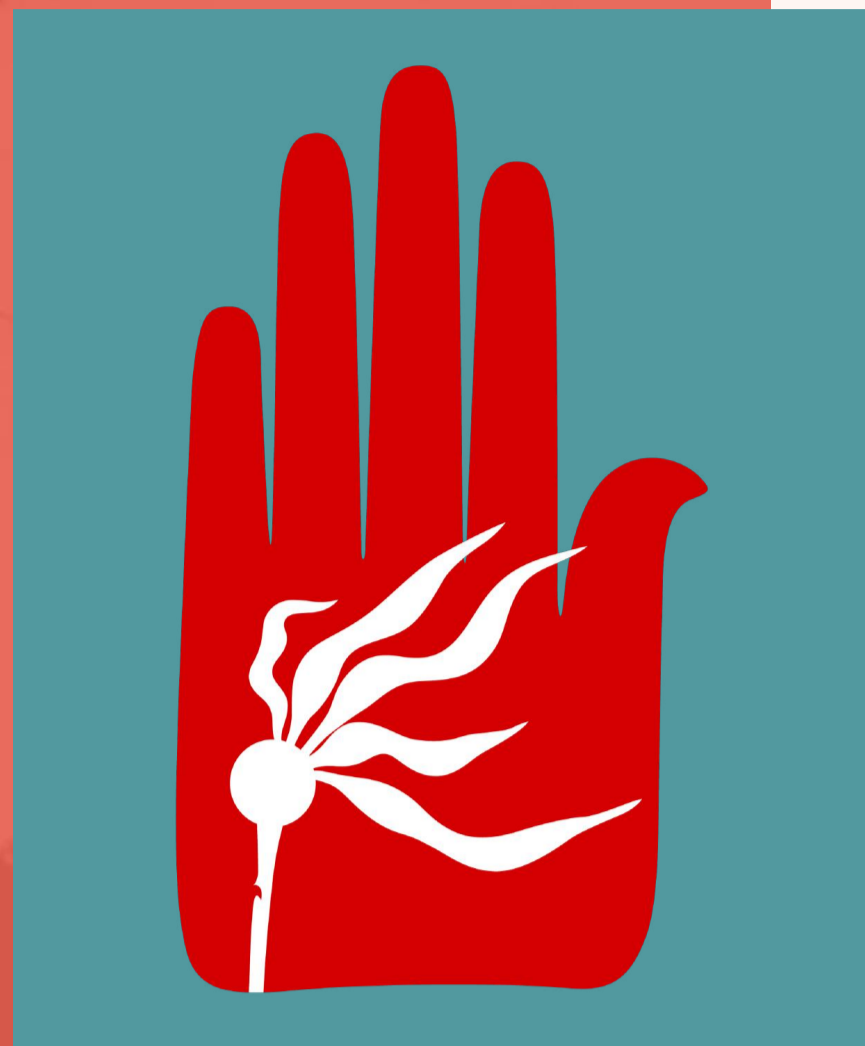
These scenarios do not aim to predict the future or state a desired vision. They aim only to provoke new thinking, make opportunities and threats more visible, and enable richer, more useful conversations about what Alaskans must do.

These four *malshg* (stories) are relevant, challenging, plausible, and clear. They are intended to support an open and constructive search for answers to core questions of what we must do together to ensure a prosperous future for the lands, communities, and people of this place.

Scenarios play a unique role in strategic planning. Because they are fictional, and because they come in sets of two or more different, plausible stories, they offer the advantage of supporting informed debate without committing anyone to any particular policy position. Although we cannot predict or control the future, scenarios show us that we can work with and influence it.

The content of these scenarios was created by a scenario team — a group of Native and non-Native Alaskans, artists, the business community, philanthropy, recreation, education, housing, timber, fishing, conservation, social services, and tourism sectors — who, together, explored questions about Southeast Alaska's future.

# The Scenarios



## **Bull Kelp**

### **geesh**

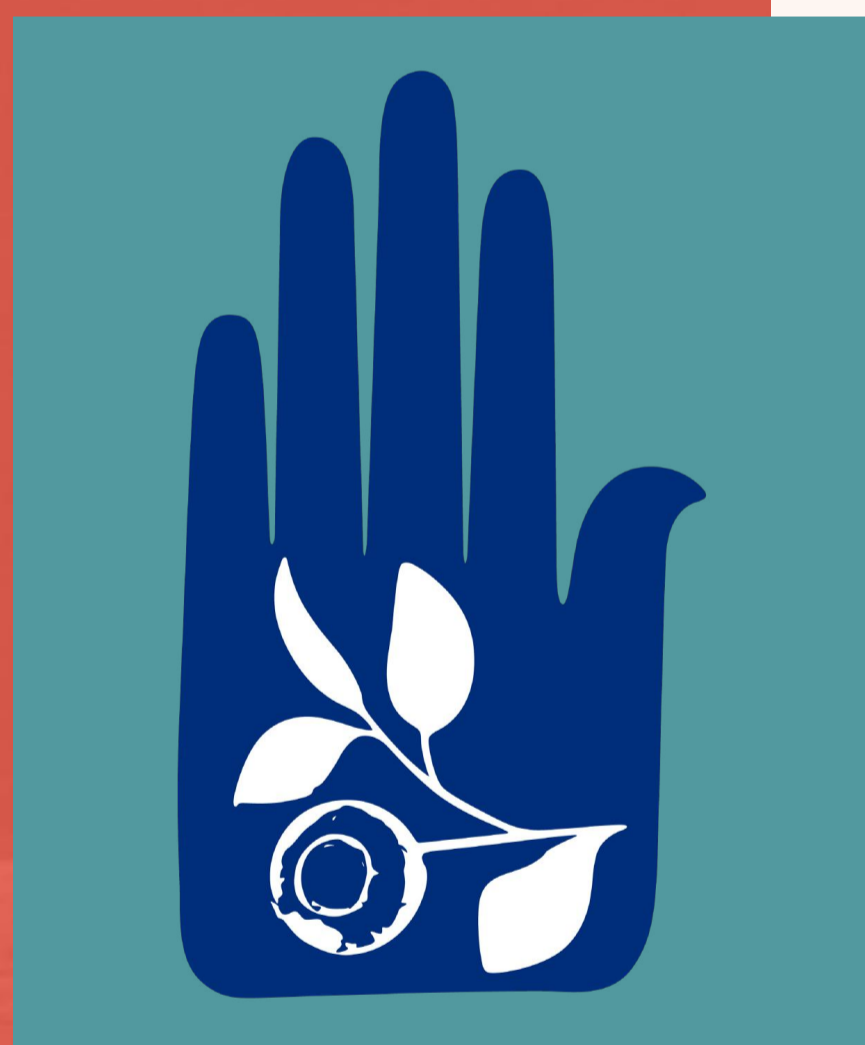
In this scenario, the trajectory of the region is shaped by external forces, the ebbs and flows of power, and priorities beyond the control of local communities. Just as bull kelp can quickly dominate a marine ecosystem and crowd out other more delicate species, this future sees outside wealth and power increasingly influencing the region. Bull kelp also provides important nutrients and habitat, and these waves of external influence may similarly bring certain benefits, but at the risk of undermining the region's cultural foundation and regenerative relationship with the land.



## **Spruce**

### **shéiyi**

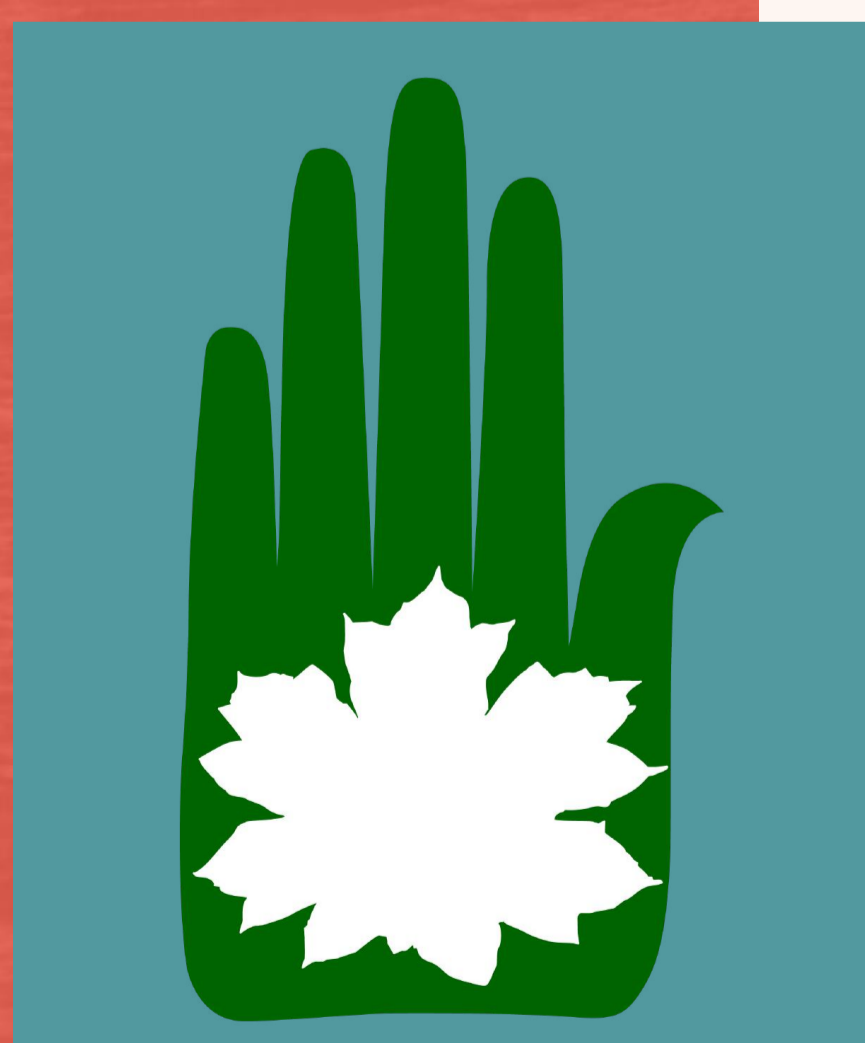
This scenario envisions a future where the region's economy and culture are heavily dependent on and shaped by the seasonal tourism industry, which, much like the spruce tree, has a distinct cycle of growth, dormancy, and renewal. The scenario explores how this reliance on a cyclical, external industry could both benefit and challenge the region over time. Just as the spruce tree is central to the ecology and livelihoods of Southeast Alaska, the tourism sector becomes a dominant force—sometimes helping to sustain communities, other times leaving them vulnerable when the industry inevitably wanes.



## **Blueberries**

### **kanat'á**

In this scenario, Southeast Alaska experiences a significant influx of climate migrants who bring new ideas, cultures, and economic opportunities to the region. Similar to how blueberries are not exclusively native to Southeast but are important in many cultures around the world and used in various ways, this future depicts the region adapting and evolving as it absorbs an infusion of new people and perspectives. While not originally "from" the region, the new residents become a vital part of the landscape, for better or worse.



## **Devil's Club**

### **S'áxt'**

This scenario describes a future where Indigenous sovereignty, values, and self-determination become increasingly central to how the land and resources of Southeast Alaska are managed and used. Like the prickly but medicinally valuable Devil's club, self-determination for Native communities is centered in this scenario, and is met with resistance or discomfort from some non-Native interests. The Devil's club is a metaphor for the region reclaiming its Indigenous identity and worldview, even if that process is challenging and painful at times.



# Comparison of the Scenarios

	Bull Kelp geesh	Spruce shéiyi	Blueberries kanat'á	Devil's Club S'áxt'
Where is the power held that influences the region?	Power sits in federal, state, and corporate interests, dictated by federal responses to global trends.	Power is held outside the region, primarily with the federal government and the cruise industry.	Regional development strategy is collaboratively designed by local authorities, governments, and community groups.	Tribal governments and Native corporations develop a model of shared sovereignty, and employ traditional values in more regional decision making processes. The capital moves to Anchorage.
What is driving the Southeast economy?	Mining, other natural resource development, and support industries.	The visitor industry and an emerging mariculture sector.	Remote tech workers, commercial fishing, immigration, and public works.	Economic output shrinks as the capital leaves Juneau. Small-scale value-added manufacturing and Native arts sustain rural communities.
What is the state of public and social infrastructure?	New infrastructure development is driven by and benefits those who live in and around industrial mining projects.	Seasonal needs of the visitor industry are prioritized. Improvements include airport renovations and new tourist attractions. The ferry service closes indefinitely.	Innovations in housing development, healthcare, renewable energy and social service programs spurred by increased needs of local communities. The ferry system is transferred to a state corporation, and service is stable.	Infrastructure investment lags as the regional population declines. The ferry system restructures to small short crossing vessels.
How do we relate to each other?	There is an imbalance of power. We don't trust our governing bodies. Development decisions are contentious and frequently litigated.	Communities are insular, with year-round residents carving out a lifestyle alongside seasonal tourism operations.	Increasing diversity of the population results in both tension and cultural exchange as climate migrants move into the region.	Living in harmony with land and community is centered. Reconciliation and healing initiatives are widely embraced.
How is the land managed and who has access to it?	Resource development is prioritized, especially the mining industry, and environmental protections are relaxed.	Federal lands are closed to new resource development.	The triple bottom line sustainability paradigm and renewable energy use are paramount in land use decisions.	The Tongass National Forest transitions to a full co-management regime with Tribal governments and Native corporations.
What happens to haa kuusteeyí 'our way of life'?	Relationships with waters and land are impacted by increased industrial activity. Many Alaska Native people move out of traditional communities.	Alaska Native cultures are tokenized and commodified by the large-scale tourism industry, but are perpetuated by Native people living in the region.	It continues to be practiced by Alaska Native people, but tensions flare as migrants move into the region.	Alaska Native cultures guide relationships between people, communities, and the land, and is practiced widely throughout the region.
How do we respond to climate change?	In an effort to become independent from China, there is a federal mandate to increase domestic supply of metals.	Responses to industrial activity place a premium on protections for "at risk" species resulting in strict limits on natural resource development.	State and local actors collaborate to position the region as a destination for climate migrants.	Guided by Indigenous values and stewardship practices, management decisions and climate response are determined locally.
What will our demographic profile look like?	Urban centers account for most of the region's population, while economic fluctuations influence overall population trends.	A transient, seasonal workforce is concentrated during the summer months. Young families and white-collar workers move away.	A diverse and growing population with climate refugees of all ages and ethnicities. Regional population increases dramatically.	Population growth declines. Urban areas experience a downward trend in population, while rural population increases slightly.



## Bull Kelp geesh

In **Bull Kelp**, the trajectory of the region is shaped by external forces, the ebbs and flows of power, and priorities beyond the control of local communities. There is an increase in investment in new mining projects across Alaska, including in Southeast. The regulatory changes benefitting mining also enable increased timber harvest and expansion of tourism. Economic and social impacts to the region are often closely connected to mine lifecycles. Infrastructure development accelerates, predominantly geared toward industry needs. Rural communities with nearby mines see increased high-wage employment. The political accommodation of industry exacerbates the gap between communities. Relationships between state, local, and Tribal governments are marked by distrust and competing priorities. The Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) continues operation, but with routes and service prioritizing communities in proximity to new mine sites. Non-mining communities see ferry service decline, and increasingly rely on commuter flights with regular service but high fares. Indigenous values are given cursory acknowledgment in official proceedings. Government and corporate entities do not engage meaningfully with Tribal governments. Water and lands degrade slowly over time. While the demand for responsible development still exists, creating a shared understanding of “responsible” between conflicting parties requires concerted effort to resolve resulting conflicts. In **Bull Kelp**, power over the region is primarily held by external forces.

In **2025**, worsening US-China relations usher in a new era of geopolitical turbulence. Amidst a national initiative to increase domestic natural resource development, Alaska, including Southeast, faces a surge in demand for minerals and rare earth elements. Bipartisan support for increasing mining activity gains traction. The federal government provides subsidies for investments in mining infrastructure and workforce development. A state-specific compromise loosens restrictions on development in the Tongass National Forest, opening opportunities for more old-growth logging, and improving access to timber, mining, mass-tourism, and energy development opportunities. Industrial tourism is growing, and 3-4 new cruise ports are in various stages of development.





In **2030**, a major economic crisis results in a flip in control of both chambers of Congress. The continued focus on opening Alaska to resource development results in many exploratory mining projects. Federal and state governments continue to ease restrictions around land access and deregulate environmental protections. The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) is significantly altered, making regulations for remediation work after mines' exploration phase much less stringent. Budget cuts from federal agencies impact the region and oil taxes to the state continue to decline. The Alaska congressional delegation retains significant influence. This is partly due to the increased military presence in the state, particularly with the addition of an Air Force base in Yakutat. State lawmakers pass an increase to mining royalties, and the new mining revenues contribute to a stabilization of the state's fiscal outlook. Public infrastructure projects are initiated in many communities across Southeast, especially those with increased local tax revenues due to mining activity. The State continues to fund the AMHS, but service does not increase. Investments in technological advancements are centered around natural resource management to support industry, and remotely operated mining equipment reduces the demand for local labor. Industrial demand for electricity, reduced regulatory burden, and increased access to the Tongass encourage development of new hydroelectric projects in the region. New access to old-growth timber stands supports a modest timber industry, and the region adds timber jobs. Some rural communities with nearby mines see increased high-wage employment, and the number of young families in those rural communities stabilizes. Many Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) partner with mining interests to capitalize on the new projects. Environmental activists mobilize against some of the larger projects, as do most Tribal governments.

By **2035**, a change in federal administration leads to reduced federal funding for Tribal governments and health consortiums, intensifying economic complexities and weakening infrastructure in some smaller communities. Tribal governments struggle to secure discretionary funding to support programming for Tribal citizens, and tensions increase between Tribes and ANCs over mining projects in the region. Revenue sharing from these new mines boosts income for ANCs across Alaska, contributing to larger dividends for shareholders. Amidst increased industrial activity, the absence of a robust federal subsistence management policy negatively impacts the quality and availability of traditional foods. Tribes collaborate to bring legal action opposing new mining projects and receive significant financial and legal support from environmental activists from the lower 48. The increase in mining activity prompts the creation of new boroughs in the remaining unincorporated areas, allowing those areas to collect tax revenues from expanding industries. Substantial revenue increases lead the Alaska State Legislature to pass a significant increase in funding for public education. While many mining projects end soon after their exploration phase, a handful of large-scale projects move forward. Minor improvements to the ferry service to rural communities facilitate local labor recruitment and reduce the cost of travel within the region.

By **2040**, while salmon species continue to decline, commercial fishing remains a high-profile industry. However, Southeast Alaskans are increasingly priced out of participating in it. The cost of quota shares and equipment are prohibitively expensive for new fishermen, and the fleet is dominated by vessels from outside of Alaska. Tribal governments and ANCs continue to be in conflict. Tribes are positioned as protectors of the environment and ANCs as creating economic opportunity through resource development. Wildlife habitat in watersheds around mining projects deteriorates. "Man camps" near mine sites contribute to heightened concerns over rising drug use, Missing and Murdered Indigenous Peoples, and social disruptions within local communities.

Public schools are well funded in mining communities because of increased enrollment but struggle to provide a full spectrum of courses when mines close and towns depopulate. The University of Alaska Southeast (UAS) reopens the mine training program in Juneau and expands programs for mining-related applied sciences, attracting students from across the country and world. Services for the elderly and people with disabilities are strong when a mine is in production or exploration phases, but those services decrease when the mines close. The last remaining economically viable old-growth timber stands are harvested. Public services are consolidated in urban areas.

By **2045**, jet service to the region increases during the summer. Several new energy projects come online as a result of increased industrial activity and relaxed regulatory burden in the Tongass, and rural communities benefit from stable energy costs and a surplus of electricity. Improved technology slightly decreases the environmental impact of mining activities. Automation reduces mining accidents significantly, and mines employ fewer people. People continue to move to urban hubs in search of better and more reliable social services. Indigenous cultures endure in urban areas, home to a significant number of relocated Alaska Native people. Cumulative environmental impacts and habitat destruction from industrial activity, exacerbated by a rapidly changing climate, result in sharp declines in salmon species throughout Southeast Alaska. The commercial fishing industry suffers, and fishing families join Tribes and environmental groups in litigation against timber and mining operations. Subsistence and cultural harvests are scarce in rural communities near mine sites. More residents retire out of state. Economic disparities widen, and a concentration of industry employment in population centers leaves smaller communities economically marginalized. Greater automation of mining operations contributes to migration from small communities to urban centers. Population in two Southeast Indigenous communities drops below 100, leading to school closures.

By **2050**, urban communities account for 90% of Southeast Alaska's population. Accumulated impacts of resource development projects across the region degrade the water, fish, wildlife, and culture. Few abandoned and closed mines are properly reclaimed, with most left behind due to low economic viability and high environmental risk. Residents are routinely tested for contamination and poisoning from metals and rare earth minerals to measure long-term health impacts of mining in communities. Visitor industries suffer, as the landscape reflects years of industrial activity. Halibut are rare and small, and hatchery salmon dominate the commercial catch, with wild salmon now a memory. As the mining industry approaches another ebb, the real estate market declines.

In **Bull Kelp**, waves of external influence may bring certain benefits to Southeast Alaska but with risks to the region's cultural foundation and relationship with the land.

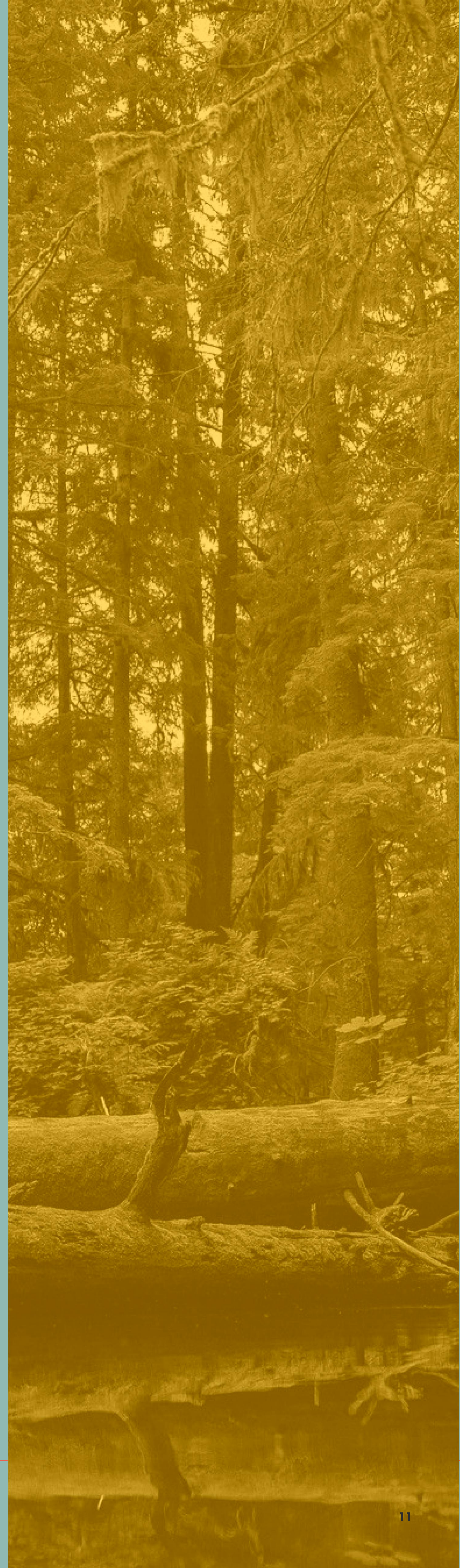





## Spruce shéiyi

In **Spruce**, natural resource development is severely restricted on federal land in the region over time. Two significant mine contamination accidents in Alaska and Canada affect king salmon and other fish populations, leading to widespread habitat protections across the Tongass. This sets the stage for a significant shift toward tourism as an economic replacement, reshaping the region's trajectory in the years to come. External influences, primarily the cruise industry, exert significant power over the region's dynamics. The year-round population steadily declines. Residents advocate for increased taxes on the tourism industry to help sustain critical social and physical infrastructure as more of it caters predominantly to seasonal needs, while funding for schools and healthcare remains weak. The Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) is shuttered. Cruise tourism hits a saturation point, and cruise visitor numbers begin to stabilize. The independent tourism economy begins to offer other products and experiences in smaller communities. As part of the economic diversification drive, mariculture operations expand throughout the region. Overall, a summer camp atmosphere prevails, transforming Southeast Alaska into a curated tourist destination by **2050**. Alaska Native cultures are tokenized and commodified by the large-scale tourism industry, but are perpetuated by Native people living in the region. In **Spruce**, the region's reliance on a cyclical, external industry offers benefits and challenges over time.

By the end of **2025**, the closure of a major mine following a substantial contamination event on the Stikine River leads to the declaration of king salmon as an endangered species, sending shockwaves through Southeast Alaskan communities. Local governments, anxious to replace the economic activity of the fishing industry, look for ways to expand tourism, prompting an all-hands-on-deck approach to cater to the needs of summer visitors. Communities approve developments and enact policies that enable expansion of the tourism industry. Wild salmon returns are low due to habitat contamination and climate impacts in the ocean. The state funds new hatcheries to provide sport fishing opportunities, and subsistence access for sockeye salmon is restricted to a few geographic areas in the region.





Charter salmon harvest is prohibited, charter fishing of other species is highly restricted, and a temporary moratorium on all commercial salmon fishing is instituted by regulators. Tribes engage in a lengthy court battle over subsistence rights. Many young people who used to crew on fishing boats migrate toward tourist hotspots to find summer work, increasing pressure on housing costs in communities with cruise ship traffic. Some commercial fishermen establish small mariculture operations and begin farming oysters and kelp. Shore excursions begin to encroach into areas normally only used by locals.

In **2030**, the President names a new National Monument that encompasses nearly all of the Tongass National Forest, and many of the waterways in Southeast are classified as marine sanctuaries. There is an increase in government jobs geared toward land and water protection. With limited access for commercial fisheries and mines closing due to increased cost of environmental compliance, communities turn heavily to the tourism industry to stabilize the regional economy. The marine sanctuaries prompt an influx of ecotourism operators attempting to capitalize on the newly protected wildlife habitat. The state removes the ban on finfish aquaculture in an effort to maintain the economic viability of fish processing plants, which no longer have the ability to purchase commercially harvested salmon. The seasonal workforce grows, and cruise companies begin to buy housing to accommodate their employment needs. Many young people search for jobs in the Lower 48. Young families and white-collar workers begin to move out of the region as childcare, housing, and education options dwindle. Most new infrastructure development is geared toward seasonal needs of a rapidly expanding tourism industry. Despite repeated protests by locals, the ferry system closes indefinitely after struggling for many years. Tribes are rarely consulted by industry and local government amid the rapid expansion of tourism operations and infrastructure, and many develop cultural tourism. Most Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) pivot toward the tourism industry, and in some communities there is misalignment between Tribes and ANCs over tourism strategies. Some cultural tours create friction within communities, and some Alaska Native people oppose profiting off their culture. Tribes issue a call to action around the need for healing and building relationships between communities. Tribal governments mobilize to develop data monitoring programs for soil, waterways, and airways.

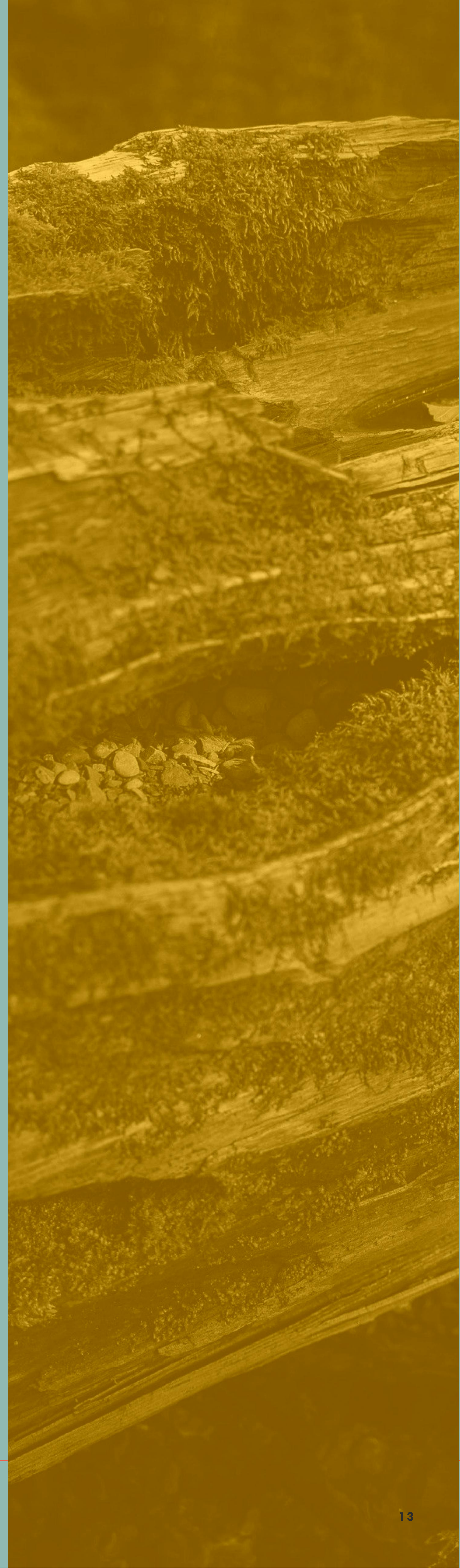
By **2035**, tour companies find it increasingly difficult to hire enough employees, and the quality of the visitor experience degrades. Some forested lands deteriorate, as increased foot traffic on popular recreation sites spreads aquatic and terrestrial pests. Local residents avoid popular visitor sites due to visitor numbers. The Mendenhall Glacier is no longer visible from the Visitor Center, and the number of flightseeing tours to the icefield triples. Surveys of visitors to the region indicate they are disappointed with crowds and the lack of authenticity in their experience. Melting glaciers reduce the appeal of Alaska overall. Cruise tourism flattens. Indigenous activists challenge the caricatured representation of Indigenous culture that dominates the visitor experience. In response to widespread appropriation of Alaska Native culture in the industry, Tribes and ANCs work together to publish an Indigenous Tourism handbook and announce new partnerships centering Indigenous cultures and communities in the visitor experience. ANCs that have invested in tourism emerge as leading voices in directing the industry to a more sustainable future. The region develops a comprehensive tourism development strategy. Communities impose taxes on short-term and seasonal housing, forcing the industry to invest in community infrastructure and freeing up housing stock for year-round residents. The modest mariculture operations that started after the decline in the fishing industry begin to see positive returns on investment, and two early industry entrants expand to new communities across Southeast.

By **2040**, investment in recreational infrastructure is developed in alignment with the regional strategy. A triple bottom line approach to the visitor industry is widely embraced by communities across the region, though the multinational tour companies serving the region do not materially change their practices. Alternative fuels are used aboard most ships transporting goods and services to the region, reducing emissions and creating jobs to support the emerging clean energy sector. Tribal governments and ANCs continue to make meaningful investments in tourism and maintain substantial influence in decision-making. Many young adults who worked summers in cruise ports turn those experiences into careers in the industry, staying in their home communities. Communities have programs for elders and youth to work part-time in the summer as guides and interpreters in co-managed areas. Young people not interested in working in tourism leave the state for different opportunities. High-end cultural tours offer authentic experiences showcasing Indigenous values, culture, and art. The mariculture industry continues to grow, and many farmers partner with the tour companies to offer mariculture-based excursions. Year-round employment opportunities increase, and local government revenues stabilize. Services for the elderly and people with disabilities are primarily funded through tourism taxes, but struggle with staffing and many folks leave Southeast for long-term care. Most communities have zoning regulations preserving access to affordable housing for year-round residents. Sitka becomes reclassified as an urban community and no longer has rural preference status for subsistence harvests.

By **2045**, Tribal governments and ANCs increase ownership of visitor services, and drive significant transformations in the industry, ensuring adequate resources to support local infrastructure and social services. More people have access to healthcare, but remote services and advancements in artificial intelligence (AI) limit the number of new jobs in the healthcare sector. The economy is still centered around tourism. Some communities embrace this economy, while others pull away. Those which do not develop tourism opportunities have little opportunity for economic growth outside of a modest mariculture industry and rely on outside funding and subsidies to support basic needs. Salmon populations begin to rebound, though not enough to support a robust commercial industry. The increased salmon returns lead to relaxation of restrictions on subsistence regulations, and communities benefit from strong salmon harvests.

By **2050**, Southeast Alaska is a diverse tourist destination, with some regenerative offerings, but mostly offering classic “Alaska Frontier” staged experiences like fishing and hiking to attract visitors. Communities that host visitors experience friction from visitor numbers, but their economies do well. Communities that don’t host visitors remain quiet with young people leaving for cruise port communities in the summer, or to the Lower 48 for different opportunities. Southeast locals maintain some areas for better hunting and fishing, which leads to efforts to close certain areas to urban hunters. The region’s infrastructure is largely reshaped to fit the desires of tourists.

In **Spruce**, the region’s economy and culture are heavily dependent on — and shaped by — the seasonal tourism industry, which, much like the spruce tree, has a distinct cycle of growth, dormancy, and renewal.





## Blueberries

### kanat'á

In **Blueberries**, increasing frequency of extreme heat events and wildfires across the contiguous western states leads to an increase in climate migration, with some people choosing to settle in Southeast Alaska. Measures are taken to improve social and physical infrastructure. The influx of new residents spurs development of housing, transportation, energy, water, wastewater, and food production. The initial tranche of newcomers have the ability to work remotely in lucrative positions in technology, healthcare, and finance, while others recognize new business opportunities by adapting their skills to their new environment, most notably leading to diversification and growth in value-added mariculture and seafood products. Other climate migrants who arrive via refugee resettlement programs face challenges with their transition to the region. The Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) is transferred to a state corporation and managed by an independent board. The growth in population begins to improve the economics of shipping and increases ferry ridership. The ferry service is restructured and offers regular service to small communities. Increasing infrastructure needs make blue-collar jobs plentiful for those living in the region. Some Indigenous people feel pushed out by the influx of new residents, leading to tension in the fastest-growing communities. In **2050**, Southeast Alaska is home to 150,000 people. In **Blueberries**, the influx of climate migrants brings new ideas, cultures, and economic opportunities to the region.

In **2025**, in recognition of the increasing frequency of extreme climate events in the Lower 48, Tribal and local governments in Southeast Alaska collaborate to create a regional strategy to bring skilled workers to Southeast Alaska in anticipation of an increase in climate migration. Tribal governments and Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) commit to increasing local investment, initially via a shared regional high speed internet infrastructure project. They secure permitting for scaling mariculture and leveraging managed forests for non-timber resources to develop sustainable, value-added economic streams as part of a comprehensive economic development strategy.







California and Colorado experience the worst wildfire seasons in history, with a record number of homes and forested acres lost to fire. Many families who lose homes in the fires decide to move out of state, with New England and the Upper Midwest becoming the leading destinations for this first wave of climate migrants. Alaska sees a 4% increase in new families moving to the state.

By **2030**, advances in electrification technology make renewable energy sources economically viable, and adoption increases. This shift speeds development of new renewable energy sources and increases the region's appeal to remote workers seeking a sustainable environment. The Alaska Marine Highway System is transferred to a state corporation and maintains regular service to small communities. Advances in technology and changing workplace dynamics enable a tech-forward workforce that increases opportunities for remote work, and Southeast Alaska's abundant precipitation makes it an attractive destination for those seeking to escape an increasingly hot and dry Lower 48. With increased demand for plant-based fiber and other products creating a pulp market, federal investment in the timber industry increases, accelerating young growth utilization and investment in small mills. Small Business Administration government contracting ends, and many village corporations face financial hardship. An amendment to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) allows regional corporations to have first pick of buying land from village corporations, which consolidates land and resources. The climate migrants from the western United States are not familiar with Alaska Native cultures or governance structures, and engaging with Tribal governments or understanding cultural values is not prioritized by the majority of new residents. Herring returns to Sitka Sound decline rapidly as a result of climate change, impacting the Southeast-wide salmon run and subsistence lifestyle, and the herring fishery is closed.

By **2035**, frequent wildfires in western states continue to displace large numbers of people, and Southeast's mild climate draws some of those people to the region. The sudden population increase drives housing prices up, and compounds pre-existing energy and transportation challenges. Many communities adopt zoning laws to allow for affordable multi-generational high-density housing. A real estate company develops a large contract for a 3-D-printed apartment complex. The state institutes a sales tax to help meet growing public and social infrastructure needs. Increased population leads to investments in local food production businesses, including greenhouses to grow vegetables, small-scale poultry and goat operations, and processing and distribution hubs that connect smaller communities with nearby larger communities. The region has better transportation to the Lower 48. Jet services become regular and two airlines fly to Juneau year-round. A small local airline adds Ketchikan, Anchorage and Seattle flights. ANCs prosper as they shift their land management operations to real estate development. Tribes build more charter schools so they can charter their own values and have opportunities for Tribal, and other youth, to grow up with a deeper understanding of their roots. The increase in population has a positive impact on school funding, resulting in more classroom teachers and a lower student-to-teacher ratio. Federal subsidies incentivize new construction projects to use locally sourced young-growth timber, and the number of small-scale mills in the region doubles. There is no herring spawn in Sitka Sound.

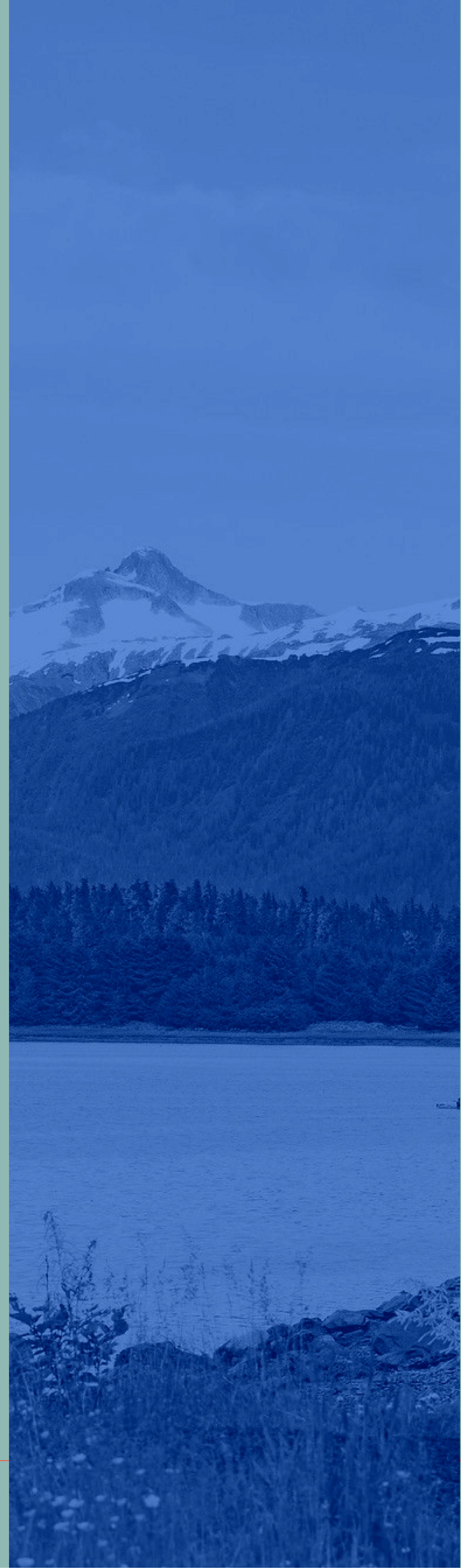
By **2040**, thirty-five percent of Southeast Alaska's workforce is employed via remote work arrangements, and ocean economy jobs make up eighteen percent of new jobs in the region. Private investment in mariculture industry leads Southeast to become a hub for "blue tech," drawing more tech and finance professionals to the region. The University of Alaska Southeast's

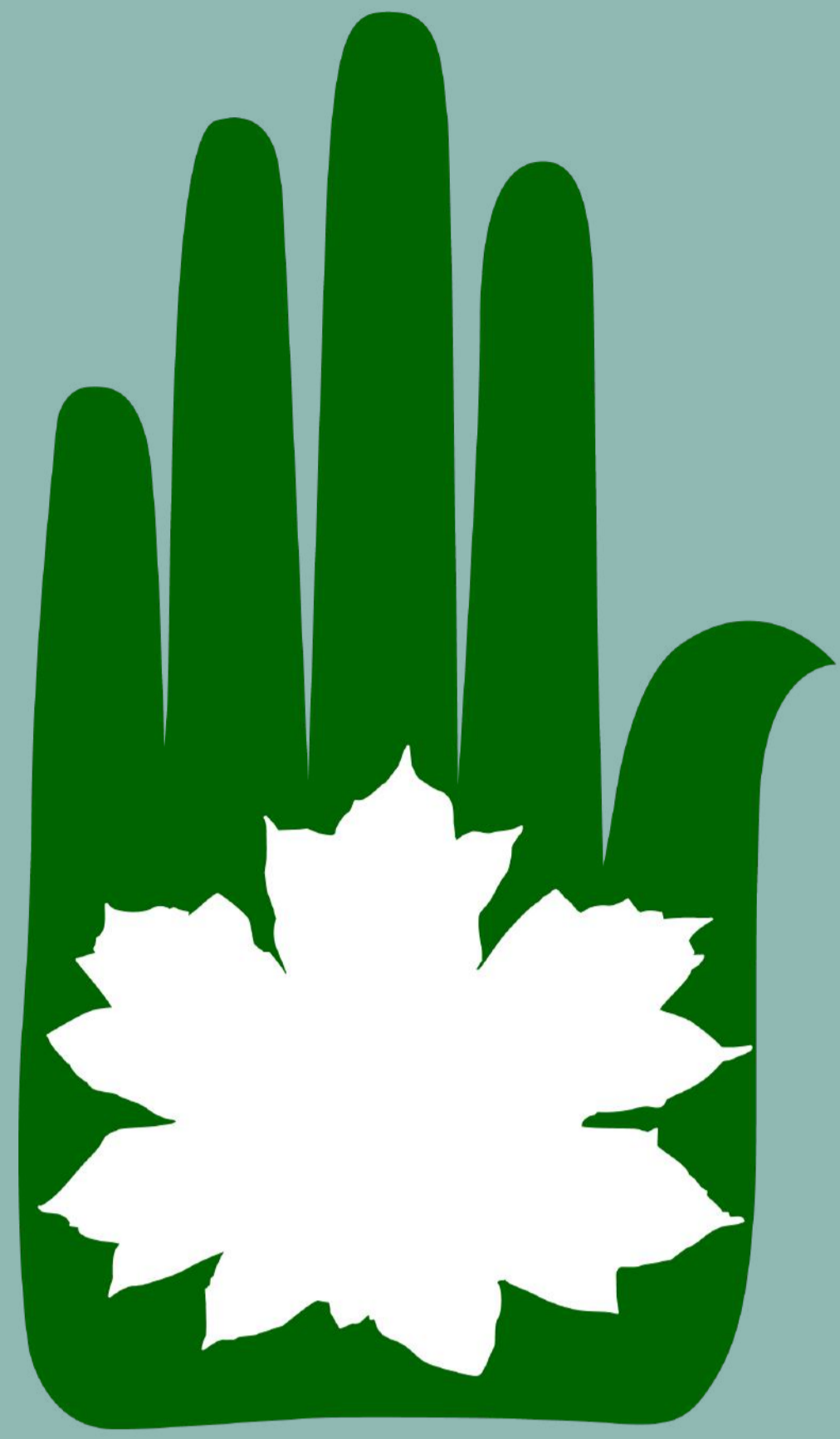
environmental science programs attract more out-of-state and international students and professors to the region, and two private universities open satellite campuses to house marine and environmental management programs. A non-profit quota bank established by ANCs purchases fishing quota and subsidizes fisheries access to shareholders residing in the region. The number of limited entry permits held by fishermen in rural communities reaches a 35-year high. Some new residents file lawsuits against perceived “Native preference” in the fisheries access programs. Global climate catastrophes lead to the expansion of federal refugee resettlement programs, and the U.S. sees a mass influx of climate refugees, including to Southeast Alaska. This surge prompts a comprehensive assessment of the migrating population’s needs. In response, governments open up land for essential infrastructure — housing, hospitals, schools, and public roads, including on some parcels of the Tongass National Forest near growing communities. Tribal governments and ANCs benefit from the increased economic activity accompanying the population increase but are often at odds with municipalities as communities advance development projects. Prince of Wales Island is the focal point of this new expansion in the region, given its existing road system. A law is passed to incentivize food production in all new housing projects, and the region’s first large-scale food processing facility receives permits. New migrants bring with them their own cultures, creating vibrant arts and social activities in communities. Some conflicts between newcomers, locals, and Indigenous residents arise, primarily over access to hunting and fishing grounds and sacred sites. Through the refugee resettlement, Southeast Alaska looks like a proverbial melting pot, and Alaska Native cultures are among many cultures visible throughout the region.

By **2045**, the population steadily increases. The global climate crisis is so severe that governments at all scales are forced to contend with a rapidly changing climate. Renewable energy, localization, and carbon mitigation programs are essential components of industry, policy, and economic decisions. Southeast Alaska’s climate is significantly warmer than historical norms, but the region remains wet and mild relative to the Lower 48. A warm-weather fungus spreads through the region, decimating the region’s remaining cedar trees. Federal funding supports revitalization of food systems, education, and university systems, fostering workforce innovation. Artificial intelligence (AI) streamlines local greenhouse and indoor food production and packaging and is the primary source of non-emergent health care. As glaciers retreat, the State of Alaska and the U.S. Department of Transportation build a road up the Taku River, connecting Juneau to the highways in British Columbia. Critical salmon habitat is damaged during construction. Three airlines offer regular service to Juneau year-round. Demand for recreational opportunities — fish and game, blueberry harvesting, and better trails — increases.

By **2050**, Southeast Alaska is home to 150,000 people. Trade, sustainable resource use, and higher education drive economic and social revitalization. The region’s workforce significantly increases with population growth, infrastructure development, and local food production. Challenges persist, and the region navigates a delicate balance between growth and preservation. Population growth contributes to conflict over limited resources. Access to transportation, food, technology and social services is within reach of most people living in the region.

In **Blueberries**, Southeast Alaska adapts and evolves as it absorbs an infusion of new people and perspectives.



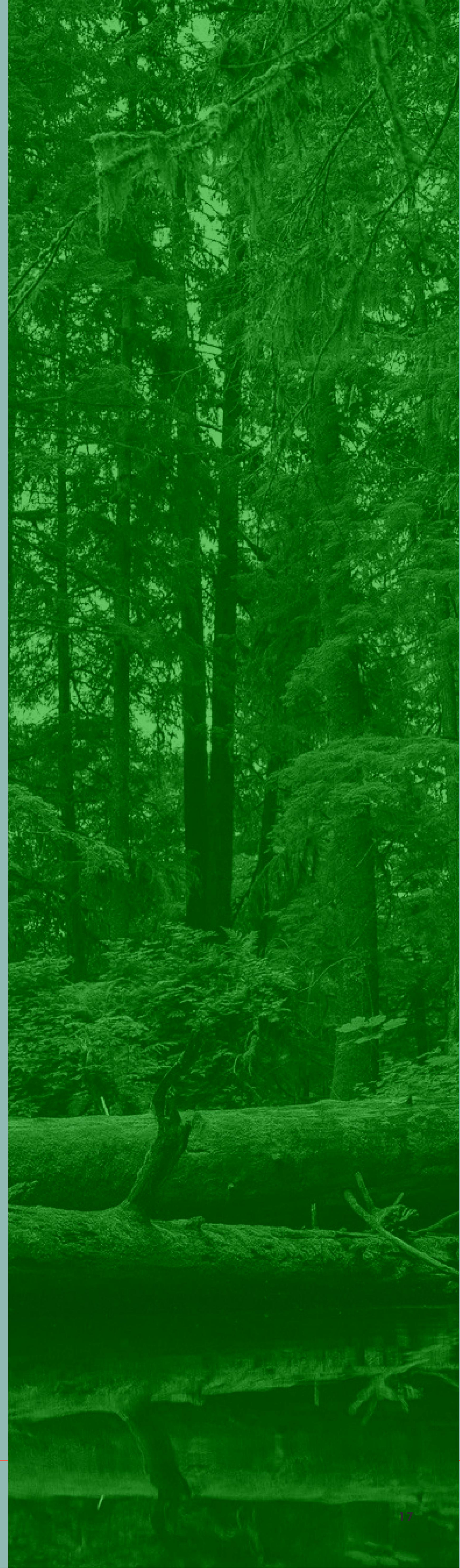


## Devil's Club

S'áxt'

In **Devil's Club**, the Land Back movement, advocating for the re-establishment of Indigenous sovereignty over ancestral lands, gains momentum globally and contributes to a significant shift in Southeast Alaska's governing structures. Tribal communities gain influence over land management decisions and frequently collaborate with state and federal governments. Climate change impacts the landscape and communities across the region, and Tribal entities emerge as leading providers of climate mitigation services and climate adaptation projects. Many Southeast communities place limits on cruise passenger numbers, and head tax revenues drop as visitor numbers drop. Rural and Indigenous youth often return from college and find work in their home communities. Tribal businesses and new mariculture co-ops secure permits across the region. Bartering, subsistence farming, and small-scale value-added production of goods and services reduce demand for imported goods. The state capital moves from Juneau to Anchorage, and Juneau's population declines. An amendment to the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) allows Tribal governments and Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) to merge. There is significant tension between non-Native and Native organizations as it relates to Land Back processes, and the focus of the movement in the region pivots toward an embrace of co-management of the Tongass National Forest. As the region's population shrinks as a result of the capital move, economic output does as well. In **Devil's Club**, self-determination for Native communities is centered, and also meets resistance from some non-Native interests.

In **2025**, the federal government grants land to five landless Tribal communities that were left out of the ANCSA — Haines, Ketchikan, Petersburg, Tenakee and Wrangell — through newly established village corporations. Citing the risk to the land posed by resource extraction, lands selected by these communities prioritize culturally significant sites and urban development opportunities. A statewide initiative to acknowledge the history and traumas inflicted by boarding schools is embraced by Alaska Native entities across the state, including in Southeast, and the State issues a formal acknowledgement of and apology for historical traumas.





There are more Alaska Native legislators in the State House and Senate than at any time in the state's history. Legislation to move the state capital from Juneau to Anchorage fails, but three state departments announce a shift of their headquarters to Anchorage. The State of Alaska, under pressure from local, national, and global Land Back organizations, commits to participate in a series of regional and community health summits to promote intra- and inter-community healing.

By **2030**, the Land Back movement has gained prominence globally, including through resolutions at the United Nations building upon the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous People (UNDRIP). Land Back initiatives in Southeast Alaska stall, with the federally managed Tongass National Forest comprising the majority of the land base. ANCs and Tribal governments file lawsuits seeking to reclaim ancestral lands from the federal government but are unsuccessful. However, the Tongass National Forest Plan formalizes co-management authority over the National Forest with Tribal governments and ANCs. Reliable high speed internet access increases investment in workforce development, particularly in tech, education, health care, and other potentially village-based career paths. Collaborative agreements between Tribal and state governance bodies facilitate subsistence resource management and infrastructure development. Public facilities in the region receive funding to make use of renewable, locally generated energy. Voter initiatives lead to significant restrictions on cruise tourism in Southeast. Declining visitor numbers decrease municipal resources for public services. Eaglecrest Ski Area closes. Legislation to integrate Alaska Native cultures and languages into public school systems is passed, and schools statewide incorporate local Alaska Native cultures into the curriculum. In Southeast, students learn about haa *kusteeyí*, which incubates a shared value system. Some non-Native families are unhappy with the inclusion of traditional values in public education. The rate of white-collar workers leaving Juneau for Lower 48 or Anchorage accelerates.

By **2035**, as tourism and natural resource development are restricted by local communities, federal and state funding is curtailed. Funding cuts threaten to halt strides made in the region's cross-cutting efforts toward climate adaptation strategies and sustainable development. Rural economies struggle. Legislation is passed moving the state capital from Juneau to Anchorage. To mitigate the economic impacts of the capital move, the state increases investment in local economic development initiatives in the region, targeting small-scale value-added manufacturing and Alaska Native arts. At the same time, the state struggles to fund the education system. Intramural and other extracurricular activities are drastically reduced. Pursuit of meaningful Land Back initiatives on federal land are abandoned due to persistent challenges related to transferring ownership of National Forest lands. Meanwhile, federal legislation is passed that outlines sweeping changes in how land can be used in the region. The Tongass begins transitioning to a full co-management regime with Tribal governments. An amendment to ANCSA allows Tribal governments and ANCs to merge into a single entity under a Tribal-Corporate Compact. Three village Tribes and corporations choose to merge under the new rule, while most communities elect not to pursue the new unified structure.

By **2040**, the transition to a single governing structure is not smooth, with legacy tensions between Tribal and corporate leadership creating barriers to creating the new Tribal-Corporate Compact entities. Only one of the initial three mergers is successful, with the other two abandoning the effort. The one successful Tribal-Corporate merger, however, was led by organizations with relatively young leadership, with many elected officers having been raised during the years of cultural healing programs. Traditional governing structures are integrated into the Tribal-Corporate bylaws.

With a single Tribal entity in the village, competition for resources and influence between organizations is reduced, and the community feels a sense of cohesion, inspiring other Tribes and ANCs to merge. Juneau's population shrinks, as state and federal agencies relocate to Anchorage. Small-scale value-added industries and Native arts businesses, especially in rural villages, suffer from cutbacks in funding from both the state and ANCs. Jet service to Juneau, Ketchikan, and Sitka declines. It is increasingly accepted that healing culture and people contributes to healthy lands and communities.

By **2045**, after a slow start, co-management of the Tongass National Forest is deemed a success. Most villages now have merged Tribal-Corporate entities, which streamlines the co-management process. Tribal-Corporate entities evolve their governing structures to more closely adhere to traditional practice, and the Forest Service's mandate is designed to be flexible enough to work with shifting priorities and structures at the local level. Dance groups grow in number and size and culture classes are offered widely throughout the region. Alaska Native language classes are taught in public schools. The Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) fleet is updated to feature a greater number of short-crossing vessels, and service to rural communities is reliable. The cap on cruise ship passengers has reduced the strain of large-scale tourism on communities, and the restructured ferry system supports a modest increase in independent travelers. With the transition of the capital to Anchorage completed, Juneau's population continues to decline, and more longtime residents of the community retire out of state. Juneau's outmigration contributes to an overall decrease in the region's population, but most villages see populations grow. Advances in satellite broadband access, remote education and healthcare create opportunities in Indigenous communities that allow people to work remotely while living on their ancestral lands. In general, those who choose to stay in the region embrace this lifestyle, and there is a noticeable shift in the overall value system, emphasizing having 'enough' over increased consumption.

By **2050**, Southeast Alaska is home to 60,000 people, and the manner in which land is managed fundamentally shifts. The region is heralded as a model for co-management and Indigenous-settler healing, drawing global recognition for the shifts in sovereignty. Culturally relevant local foods are accessible, supporting both health and cultural transmission. Public school curriculum contains a mandatory land-based education component, and the school calendar is designed to accommodate subsistence harvest seasons. The Tongass National Forest remains federal land, but Indigenous leadership and collaboration with Tribal entities are core to how lands are managed. While some non-Indigenous residents resent the transfer of authority to Tribal entities and feel that non-Indigenous organizations are not afforded the same influence in management decisions, the majority of residents find value in the management structures. Collaboration across the region is key to working through the tensions inherent in this change as the region grapples with the economic impacts of significant population decline, particularly in Juneau. Haa *k̄usteeyí* is lived by more Native people in the region and the sharing of cultures is welcomed by many, but not all.

In **Devil's Club**, Indigenous sovereignty, values, and self-determination become increasingly central to how the land and resources of Southeast Alaska are managed and used.

# Glossary

These terms appear in the scenarios and may not be familiar to all readers, so we're defining them here:

**Alaska Marine Highway System:** The Alaska Marine Highway or the Alaska Marine Highway System (AMHS) is a ferry service operated by the U.S. state of Alaska. It has its headquarters in Ketchikan, Alaska. AMHS has been a marine highway connecting coastal Alaskan communities for passenger, and freight travel, an essential service for most of Southeast Alaska. AMHS service has been on the decline in recent years.

**ANCs:** Alaska Native Corporations (ANCs) are for-profit corporations owned by Alaska Native shareholders. ANCs are corporations that were created in the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act in 1971. Village ANCs have surface rights to their land while Regional ANCs hold subsurface rights to all ANC land in their region.

**ANCSA:** The Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was created to settle Alaska Native land claims in 1971. A result of ANCSA was the incorporation of 12 regional and over 200 village Alaska Native Corporations across the state. ANCSA directed the Bureau of Land Management to convey 45 million acres (~10% of Alaska's landbase) of land to the Alaska Native Corporations in turn for the extinguishment of their aboriginal rights.

**Haa kusteeyí** is a Lingít term often translated as "our way of life." It signifies not only one's actions in life, but also the intention behind those actions. It refers to the way one relates to the world, encompassing cultural practices, knowledge systems, relationships with other-than-human kin, history, and language. This concept recognizes that our actions have ripple effects in our natural world and insists on the importance of respectful relationships. As such, Indigenous values cannot be separated from the other aspects of our way of life. They must be enacted and practiced in order to be understood and held. These commitments require tending and care, hence, they are always in a state of becoming through their enactment. Haa kusteeyí is not just about what you do, it is about how you do it.

**Kaagwa:** Kaagwa is the Haida word translating to "to talk, to speak."

**Malshg:** Malshg is the Tsimshian word translating to "story, tale; to narrate, tell."

**Southeast Alaska:** Southeast Alaska is the south eastern panhandle in the U.S. state of Alaska. It is an archipelago located north of Canada's British Columbia and is home to the Tongass National Forest, one of the largest temperate old growth forests in the world spanning 35,138 square miles. This region is the ancestral home of the Tlingít, Haida, and Tsimshian people, and encompasses 23 communities across a series of disconnected islands where roughly 70,000 people reside.

**Tribal Governments:** Tribal Governments are sovereign nations within a nation. Tribal governments in Alaska have jurisdiction over their citizens, but do not have jurisdiction over their traditional territories. More than 180,000 Tribal citizens make up the 228 federally recognized Tribes in Alaska. Each Tribal government has its own unique constitution and inherent authority to govern their citizens with a judiciary responsibility to provide social services for them. Though there is crossover in many cases, not all Tribal citizens are shareholders of Alaska Native Corporations and vice versa.

**Wooch.éen:** Wooch.éen is a Tlingít phrase/concept meaning to pull together.

## Contributors

The Scenario Team is made up of people who are representative (but not representatives) of a broad cross section of Southeast Alaska. Individually, they are respected leaders of their own sectors; as a team, they have a range of backgrounds and perspectives (sectoral, ideological, professional, geographical) that enable them together to grasp the emerging system as a whole. Groups represented in the project include Alaska Native people; nonprofits, community organizers, and representatives; and system leaders from business, education, tourism, philanthropy, and others.

Because these scenarios represent four different pathways forward, almost every scenario team member disagrees with elements in at least one of the scenarios. As a consequence, this list represents not a consensus on policy recommendations but the people themselves— a group of diverse, committed, and caring professionals who worked together in the hope that these scenarios might encourage a dialogue that will help the region be economically, socially, and environmentally sustainable in the years to come.





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