# WOVEN

*Peoples & Place*

ISSUE 02 / 2025

## *Gandlee sdu t'aláng iijang*

*We Are Coming Out of the Water*

SOUTHEAST ALASKA

SUSTAINABLE SOUTHEAST PARTNERSHIP

**Cover Photo:** In coves turned vibrant turquoise by herring spawn, harvesters gather herring eggs stuck to submerged hemlock branches and kelp, continuing a tradition passed down through generations. Every spring, the return of herring invites a time of connection and harvest across Southeast Alaska. These eggs are more than nourishment – they are shared, traded, and gifted, strengthening the bonds between families, communities, and the lands and waters that sustain them. Photo: Lee House

**Side Photos:**
Top: Carving in Xunaa Shuká Hít (the Huna Tribal House). Middle: A harvester cleans a seal. Bottom: An awesome anenome. Photos: Bethany Goodrich

*"Like a braided river, we are woven. While we may flow from different sources, at our convergence, we are strongest"*

**– Marina Anderson,** Sustainable Southeast Partnership Program Director


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**Lee House** | Design, layout, content contributions

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*Gandlee sdu t'aláng iijang*
*We Are Coming Out of the Water*

All it takes is one morning walk along a salmon stream, one dance at a Culture Camp where the box drum thumps your core, one commute home as the alpenglow erupts across the mountains, to know that Southeast Alaska is spectacular.

These are the homelands of the Lingít, Haida, and Tsimshian Peoples who continue to care for, steward, and honor the lands and waters that sustain all Southeast Alaskans.

This rainforest is intact and abundant. These towering old growth forests store the carbon equivalent of six million cars a year while producing a quarter of all the salmon in the Pacific Northwest. Our communities practice a unique way-of-life that is rapidly disappearing across the globe. By caring for this region, we care for the world.

**The Sustainable Southeast Partnership is a dynamic collective uniting diverse skills and perspectives to strengthen cultural, ecological, and economic resilience across Southeast Alaska.**

**These are our stories.**

SUSTAINABLE SOUTHEAST PARTNERSHIP

Shaelene Grace Moler rises out of Sitka Sound. Photo: Bethany Goodrich

# *Stories Unite Us*

In spring 2024, I lowered my body into the cold ocean that surrounds our homes – buoyed by my growing belly and encouraged by my coworker Shaelene Grace Moler. We were dipping before our Friday meeting and discussing a watery theme for this edition of Woven. While floating in the kelp forest and rubbing the little lifeform floating inside me, I was reminded that water is a great unifier. We all begin in water. While aggravators and instigators want us to believe we are more different than alike, regardless of who we vote for, our bodies are about 60% water.

If we are careful not to overlook our shared humanity, we can find it everywhere.

In Southeast Alaska, it is especially true that water connects us. Water shapes our landscapes and defines our rainforest. We make our living on the water, play in the waves, pull fish from the falls, invest too much of our income in rain gear, and curse when we top our boots.

When an over abundance of water sends our hillsides sliding or causes our rivers to swell, we hold our neighbors tight.

Every two years, Lingít, Haida, and Tsimshian peoples paddle enormous distances across dynamic waters, to celebrate together. Southeast Alaskans truly show up for each other, rain or not.

Fast forward to spring 2025, as I read to my now baby son, I am reminded of another great unifier: our thirst for story. Stories shape our souls, and in turn, shape our societies. We share a responsibility to raise our children in an abundance of healthy, true, tender and representative stories – and we must do this across shifting mediums, algorithms, and administrations.

The stories in this Woven show our connections to water and they also show what is possible when a group of people and Partners put progress before politics or power. When people stop fighting about what divides us and start fighting for what unites us, in our case, a shared love for people and place.

Happy reading, and with special gratitude to Shaelene and Lee House, who stepped up for this Woven in particular so I could welcome baby Julian out of my water and into our shared world.

**– Bethany Sonsini Goodrich**

**Storytelling Catalyst**
Sustainable Southeast Partnership
Sitka Conservation Society

**ISSUE 2 THEME**

## *Gandlee sdu t'aláng iijang*

*Xaad Kíl for 'We Are Coming Out of the Water'*

**Translated by lilskyalas Delores Churchill and Jaasaljuus**

"We feel connection so deeply here, in this space where we do hard things together. In this space where each of us can see each other's breath, hear each other's shock, set an intention, and walk towards it."

This year's theme is best represented through this line borrowed from Kaa Yahaayí Shkalneegi Muriel Reid's beautiful piece on cold water dipping (pg. 29). There is clarity and a confident calm that comes, after the shock, when we rise up out of the cold ocean together.

As we worked to finalize this edition of Woven, we experienced a rainstorm of uncertainty. With funding freezes, the elimination of particular words and phrases from federal webpages, and an unprecedented wave of layoffs, we found ourselves rewriting, rewinding, and having a lot of tough conversations. Should we remove stories about programs that might be cut? Or redact promises made by a now severely underresourced agency?

It's true, by the time you read this, some of the people celebrated in this magazine may have lost their jobs. Some of the programs featured are being rethought. Ultimately, we decided not to redact, or rewrite. This isn't the first time these Partners have experienced a cold shock and still, walked out of turbulent waters, stronger together.

At its core SSP is about coming together to create more goodness for our communities and world. As our Program Director Marina Anderson reflected in our first edition of Woven, "our work is so important that we would never stop." Like the tides, we cycle into the cold water, and back out again – stronger than when we entered.

# CONTENTS

# The Sustainable Southeast Partnership

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.

Founded in 2012, 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.

## Our Structure

### SSP Steering Committee

With balanced representation of regional and village organizations, the SSP Steering Committee is composed of between 9-15 individuals who provide overall program oversight and help with policy development, fundraising, partner relations, and network priority setting. Quarterly meetings are open to all SSP partners and Committee Members serve 3-year terms.

### Backbone Support: Spruce Root

As the sponsor of the SSP, Spruce Root employs central support positions including the Program Director, Deputy Director, and Communications Catalyst. They manage the SSP budget and expenses, ensure compliance with laws and regulations, convene in-person and remote gatherings, and provide inspirational leadership to partners.

### Regional & Community Catalysts

Catalysts are core to the SSP, representing different communities and regional focus areas. They are hosted by organizations, Tribal governments, municipalities, or Alaska Native corporations. Catalysts gather in-person during 2+ annual gatherings and twice per month remotely, while working together to realize meaningful projects for their communities and region.

### Wider Partners & Collaboration

Beyond formal catalysts, the SSP includes federal agencies, schools, interested individuals, entrepreneurs, and countless collaborating partners. The only requirement for joining the SSP is having interest in supporting the SSP vision and mission and participating in network activities.



## Collective Impact

The Sustainable Southeast Partnership supports **8 Community Catalysts** hosted within village level organizations, Tribal governments, or Native corporations. Community catalysts work to identify and meet the needs of their hometown. The SSP supports **12 Regional Catalysts** who represent areas of expertise that are critical for building regional resiliency.

Catalysts, spread across Southeast Alaska, are ambassadors for our shared values and mission. They are thoughtful change-makers who connect resources, people, ideas, and networks to impact our communities and region.

**2024 METRICS**

**20** SSP CATALYSTS

**16** COMMUNITIES CONNECTED TO OUR WORK

**130+** COLLABORATIVE PARTNERS

**80+** REGION-WIDE PROJECTS

**128+** JOBS CATALYZED

Sheet'ká Sitka – In spring 2024, **more than 150 people representing over 70 Tribes, government agencies, non-profits, and businesses, participated in a three day spring retreat** which focused on relationship building, knowledge sharing, celebrating successes, and strategizing for upcoming projects.

# 2024 Impact by Regional Focus Area

The Sustainable Southeast Partnership's **Regional Catalysts** represent areas of expertise that are critical for building community health and sustainability throughout the region.

**WORKFORCE DEVELOPMENT** / SPRUCE ROOT

Supported career technical education intensives in Juneau and Prince of Wales Island and the 2025 Career Guide Academy in Angoon. Facilitated monthly workforce development dialogues with regional partners. **Advanced regenerative workforce training** through projects like the Sealaska Internship kick-off, Alaska Youth Stewards, and Sitka Youth Employment.

**CLIMATE ADAPTATION** / ALASKA CLIMATE ADAPTATION SCIENCE CENTER

Provided regional coordination to partner efforts in workforce development, sustainable business planning, landslide mitigation, salmon stream restoration, language revitalization, and food security. Through Spruce Root's technical assistance, helped businesses and individuals make climate-smart decisions. Supported a partnership between the Juneau Icefield Research Program, Taku River Tlingit First Nation, and Children of the Taku Society to foster cultural programming **while identifying community research priorities on the Juneau Icefield.**

**COMMUNITY FORESTRY** / THE NATURE CONSERVANCY

**Community Forests in Hoonah, Angoon, Prince of Wales, and Kake supported approximately 25 jobs in 2024, with about $1M of revenue spent on local workforce.** Restored 450 acres of forest and 1,750 feet of streams. Repaired 15 miles of roads. Catalyzed a Regional Forest Partnership Training with the support of the Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition, resulted in 32 certified Wilderness First Responders and 16 certified sawyers.

**ENERGY SECURITY** / RENEWABLE ENERGY ALASKA PROJECT

**In Angoon, supported community planning for the Thayer Creek Hydro Project to prioritize education and local career opportunities.** Supported Hoonah Indian Association while developing plans for biomass energy and lumber mill upgrades. Participated in or presented at 95 different community and regional events, including hosting education opportunities for 1065 K-12 students and 320 Adults, supporting 2 Southeast Renewable Energy Summer Camps, and supporting biomass boiler maintenance training for 27 adults, and solar training for 12 with Tlingit-Haida Regional Housing Authority.

**YOUTH STEWARDSHIP** / TLINGIT & HAIDA

Supported Alaska Youth Stewards (AYS) crews in Angoon, Prince of Wales, Kake, and Hoonah. **Invited by Yakutat Tlingit Tribe to support a Youth Stewards crew resulting in 1 week of intown projects** and 1 week shadowing the AYS crew in Hoonah. AYS crew alumni were hired to work locally as crew leaders, assistant crew leads, Sealaska Interns, Forest Partnership crew members, and USDA Forest Service employees. Nine AYS crew members participated in the annual American Indian Science and Engineering Society National Conference in San Antonio. Hosted the first all-crew training on Prince of Wales Island bringing together over 30 youth, leaders, and partners.

**RURAL ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT** / SPRUCE ROOT

Advanced regional projects in affordable housing, cultural tourism, recreation, energy, mariculture, and fisheries. Facilitated monthly economic development dialogues with regional partners to discuss infrastructure, grant funding, workforce development, and housing. Partnered with Southeast Village Fisheries Collective to complete an 8-week cooperative development course through USDA **to support fisheries access for rural and Indigenous coastal Alaskan communities.**

**STORYTELLING AND COMMUNICATIONS** / SITKA CONSERVATION SOCIETY, SPRUCE ROOT

Launched Woven, our first collective impact magazine, which showcases the interconnectedness of our efforts. Published more than 14 stories in local, regional, and national publications, featuring more than 14 communities, 14 voices and authors, and 22 partner organizations. **Hosted 2 storytelling interns, Addy Mallott and Clara Mooney, through the Sealaska internship program** and hired former intern Shaelene Grace Moler as SSP Communications Catalyst.

**FOOD SOVEREIGNTY AND SECURITY** / ECOTRUST

The Tlingit Potato Project supported community grower leads in Yakutat, Angoon, Hoonah, Klawock, Klukwan, and Kake while hosting 19 public engagement events involving 116 community members. **Collectively, 455 pounds of potatoes were grown, with 125 pounds reserved for seed.** Facilitated land and food activities with the Organized Village of Kake's Culture Camp and Domestic Violence First Responder Retreat. Takshanuk Watershed Council and SEARHC staff hosted the Chilkat Valley Local Foods Challenge, and Moby the Mobile Greenhouse continues to be used in Pelican.

**HEALING** / HAA TÓOCH LICHÉESH

Participated in Kake and Angoon bombardment apology ceremonies for historical injustices, while hosting healing workshops with schools. Supported cemetery restoration efforts in Angoon. Hosted a "Plants as Medicine" training in Juneau with 20 participants. With the Nature Conservancy, supported the Lateral KINdness Initiative to address lateral violence across our communities. Held weekly virtual Lingít language classes attended by about 45 people. Continued to raise awareness for Orange Shirt Day, honoring children taken by residential boarding school institutions.

**MARICULTURE** / ECOTRUST

Provided individuals, businesses, Tribal governments, and organizations with technical assistance while making statewide resources, such as funding for seaweed farming and processing, more accessible to rural and Indigenous communities. Showcased regional advancements at Seagriculture Conference in Ketchikan. Supported Barnacle Foods in developing a "Cost-Effective Kelp Drying Methods for Remote Alaskan Communities" report that addresses a key logistical challenge. Developed the Mariculture Revolving Loan Fund through Spruce Root.

# 2024 Impact by Community

The Sustainable Southeast Partnership works across Southeast Alaska, including in communities not listed below. The following statements of impact are representative of communities where we currently hold a **Community Catalyst** position with a host partner.

1

**JILKAAT, CHILKAT VALLEY** / JILKAAT KWAAN HERITAGE CENTER

Hosted 18 participants in Northwest Coast Arts workshops in moccasin making and drum design. Food sovereignty initiatives included the community gardens, seaweed and ooligan harvest, and the testing of 23 community pressure cooker gauges for safety. **The Community Garden had 20+ kinds of produce grown.** Potatoes served 25 people with 120 pounds harvested and 20 pounds saved for seed. Cross-cultural programming included both Chilkat Valley schools and First Nations groups from Canada.

2

**SHGAGWÉI, SKAGWAY** / SKAGWAY DEVELOPMENT CORPORATION

**Prioritized community sustainability and local business development through initiatives like the "Made in Skagway" program, the Small Business Resource Center, and general support to local entrepreneurs.** With SDC-Community Development Services, focused on broader community development by improving services and enhancing Skagway's quality of life through fiscal sponsorship and facilitation.

3

**XUNAA, HOONAH** / HOONAH INDIAN ASSOCIATION

**Created a steering committee for the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership and developed healing workshops attended by the crew and the Alaska Youth Stewards (AYS).** AYS expanded data collection to include weather in relation to landslide risk and subsistence. Conducted a feasibility study and developed a business plan for a sustainable lumber mill. Explored biomass sourcing and feasibility with land partners. Purchased an industrial kitchen and started sales of produce from community greenhouse to support youth programs and climate data collection.

4

**AANGÓON, ANGOON** / KOOTZNOOWOO INCORPORATED

Worked with Sealaska Heritage Institute to facilitate 6 classes with 6 skilled artists including vest, paddle, and tina'a, making. **Collaborated with See Stories to develop a community walking tour application with the goal of developing regenerative visitor opportunities in and around Angoon.** These opportunities would provide employment, protect natural resources, and honor community values.

5

**SHEET'KÁ, SITKA** / SITKA CONSERVATION SOCIETY

Supported Sitka's renewable energy transition by connecting households with electrification resources and by partnering with Sitka's Electric Department to pilot an internship program putting local youth on a career pathway to fill critical energy jobs. **Worked with the Pacific High School Farm to Table program to expand growing capacity and install utilities, yielding a quarter ton of produce in 2024, with 85% of school lunches featuring garden produce.** Collaborated with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska on a project exploring the history of smokehouses, fish camps, and customary food access.


6

**KÉEX', KAKE** / ORGANIZED VILLAGE OF KAKE

Four Kéex' Kwáan Community Forest Partnership crew members received comprehensive training in timber cruising with Terra Verde, including the use of a Clinometer for tree height measurement. The crew applied navigation skills acquired during spring Prince of Wales training and conducted young growth inventory plots throughout the summer. The Kake Community Catalyst participated in a panel at the Rural Voices for Conservation Coalition's 20th Annual Meeting. **All SSP Catalysts met in Kake for the fall work planning retreat.**

7

**LÁWAAK, KLAWOCK & SHÁAN SÉET, CRAIG** / KLAWOCK COOPERATIVE ASSOCIATION & SHAAN SEET INCORPORATED

Restored and enhanced salmon habitat in the Klawock Lake Watershed and beyond through restoration site monitoring, culvert assessments, and in-stream restoration planning. Supported tree thinning contracts on about 270 acres to improve passage for deer and wildlife. Landslide management and mitigation included installing weather monitoring stations and replacing culverts. Firewood and salmon were distributed to about 95 households in need. **Conducted daily creek surveys in the Klawock River estuary to monitor the subsistence harvest of sockeye salmon.** Supported the Klawock Community Greenhouse and taught youth about traditional food harvesting.

# The Seacoast Trust
## Generational Abundance

The Seacoast Trust envisions a new economic model for Southeast Alaska, one in which access to capital and a strong foundation of Indigenous values is the basis for healthy communities. Established in 2021 with an $18 million initial investment, the Seacoast Trust's mission is to support the communities of Southeast Alaska in achieving their goals for collective well-being, sustainable economic prosperity, environmental stewardship, and natural resource management over the long term.

**Spruce Root, a Native Community Development Financial Institution, provides economic, social, and ecological advancement across Southeast Alaska. Governed by the Spruce Root Board of Directors, an Indigenous led Investment Committee oversees the Seacoast Trust investment portfolio. With recommendations made by the Sustainable Southeast Partnership Steering Committee, the annual interest earned on investments can be made available for initiatives that recognize the deep connection between lands, waters, and the well-being of those who call Southeast Alaska home.**

Generations from now, we will know that the Seacoast Trust has succeeded when our forests and waterways are abundant and Indigenous peoples and cultures continue to thrive. By implementing reliable funding models, we not only strengthen our region but also create a blueprint for communities worldwide.

### Guiding Principles

**Respect** community voices and uphold Indigenous governance and leadership

**Envision** the next 100 years by planning with the next generation

**Balance** economic, social, and environmental wellbeing

**Collaborate** with empathy, generosity, and purpose

**Value** the integrity of all knowledge systems, including those anchored in 10,000+ years of Indigenous history, traditions, and stewardship

### With Gratitude to Our Investors & Partners

The Seacoast Trust was stood up by a $10 million challenge from Sealaska, which urged funders to match its pledge. The Nature Conservancy answered with an $8 million contribution. This groundbreaking partnership between an Alaska Native corporation and the world's largest conservation nonprofit has since attracted additional support from organizations and individuals, including the Rasmuson Foundation, Edgerton Foundation, Home Planet Fund, Spruce Root, the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Wilburforce Foundation, Chorus Foundation, and numerous individual donors.

Join us, visit:
**seacoasttrust.org**



### Our Funding Goal


As of December 2024, the Seacoast Trust's market value was $27.5 million. Our immediate target is to reach $50 million, bringing us halfway toward our ultimate goal of $100 million. Achieving this will provide long-term support for the estimated $3.2 million annual budget of the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, ensuring lasting impact for all Southeast Alaska communities.

**At $100 million, a fully funded Seacoast Trust would mean:**

- **Native Forest Partnerships** that bring landowners together to create whole-system management plans and projects that elevate Indigenous knowledge
- **Healthy salmon habitat** to support food sovereignty, traditional lifeways, and robust economies
- **Indigenous Guardians programs** that center Indigenous stewardship and values and provide valuable local employment
- **Youth leadership opportunities** to empower and support future generations
- **Food sovereignty initiatives** that help people grow, harvest, hunt, fish, share, and sell more local foods
- **Strong, local, regenerative economies** through workforce development, support for small businesses, and access to capital
- **Reduced energy prices and lower carbon footprints** through renewable energy initiatives and energy independence for communities
- **Maximized climate mitigation** through the restoration of the Tongass National Forest

*"Our world needs examples of what a new reality can look like, one that isn't embedded in a consumerism mentality and short-term quarterly profits. The Seacoast Trust is demonstrating what a modern take on Indigenous wisdom and care can teach us all; How to live and thrive from a place of wooch.yax̲ — balance."*

**– Gah Kith Tin Alana Peterson**
Executive Director, Spruce Root
Steering Committee, Sustainable Southeast Partnership

# *To Live and Work in Values*

Our collective values unite us, guide our process, and mobilize us to take meaningful action for our families, communities, and region.

- **Relationships First**
- **Balance**
- **Tribal Sovereignty & Community Determination**
- **Kuxhadahaan Adaayoo.analgein, Lingít for 'Stop, observe, examine, act'**
- **Intentional Collaboration**
- **Courage & Follow Through**
- **Growth & Collective Learning**
- **Systems Thinking**
- **Justice & Healing**

Explore three partner perspectives on how these values influence their daily lives and shape their work >

## Mentorship and Values-based Storytelling

**Shaelene Grace Moler**
SSP Communications Catalyst, Spruce Root

My story is a story of mentorship. It is a story of what it means to **"Grow and Learn Collectively"** in this network — of how values in action can foster opportunity. My story demonstrates how personal growth intertwines with community development when guided by strong organizational values. The values that stand as the foundation for the collective work of the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP), are the same values that raised me — inspired by the lands, waters and Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Alaska. I grew up in the community of Kéex' (Kake). I learned about the **"Balance"** and interconnectedness across species and generations, and that true power was something you earn by giving, not by taking — showing up at an Elder's door or a community potluck with traditional foods.

The SSP committed to centering storytelling when I was first learning to tell stories in grade school. Through the deliberate practice of narrative-sharing, and over the years narrative-shifting, SSP demonstrates how choosing to highlight healthy and inspiring stories can move a community's psyche away from scarcity toward pride and the belief that we have the power to change our communities and world. I witnessed this over the last decade in Kake. Watching the kids I grew up knowing, find meaningful careers at home– people finding security and inspiration working on our lands with our community. I knew that I wanted to be part of this movement. After interning and working as a fellow with Sitka Conservation Society and Spruce Root for two years, I became the Communications Catalyst in 2024. Now, I see how those values that shaped this network and my upbringing, also shape our storytelling strategy.

The value of **"Kuxhadahaan Adaayoo.analgein"** (stop, observe, examine, act) is evident in our thoughtful approach to storytelling. From my mentors in the SSP, I learned when to step up and to step back, and how to be reciprocal when telling people's stories. The root of our work is in **"Relationships First."** Over the years, I have come to understand storytelling as putting yourself in a position to be mentored and be a mentor. You have to **stop** (form a relationship), **observe** (listen), **examine** (write and follow-up), and **act** (share meaningfully, together).

Our commitment to **"Systems Thinking"** also appears in stories, addressing root causes rather than symptoms, exploring complex interconnections. Stories become tools for disrupting tired systems while supporting our communities — stories are part of **"Justice & Healing,"** and have always been. They help build a more just future by ensuring that many perspectives and experiences are heard, preserved and celebrated — creating opportunities for knowledge exchange across generations and communities.

Our values create not just better projects or programs, but stronger, more connected communities prepared to face the future while honoring their past together and the **"Balance"** they must hold across sectors. Like SSP itself, my story isn't just about professional advancement — it's about building relationships, fostering understanding, and contributing heartfully to the broader tapestry of Southeast Alaska: home.

## Living with the Land and Building Community

**Andrew Thoms**
Executive Director, Sitka Conservation Society

Southeast Alaskan communities live in close relationship with the lands and waters and understand that it takes diligence to ensure that the resources they provide continue to do so year-after-year and generation after generation. This is why fishermen are involved in local Advisory Councils and Board of Fish processes, and make sure institutions have the necessary resources to research and manage our fisheries. The core value of **"Balance"** that is prevalent in Lingít and Haida teachings is based on generations of learning how to live and be successful in this place. For example, caring for and closely monitoring salmon runs to ensure healthy returns year after year.

Building community is so intricately tied to being part of this landscape and our ability to thrive. It takes effort and investment by everyone to make our communities successful. The Lingít way that Aunties and Uncles mentor their nieces and nephews is part of deepening community. The way we come together to talk through issues, find common ground, and build solutions through **"Intentional Collaboration"** is another. This is captured in the Lingít word wooch.éen (working together). It is how we support neighbors in times of need, celebrate each other's accomplishments, volunteer, give to nonprofits, and invest in local businesses. It is how we serve on local boards and commissions, when we do little things to brighten up someone's day in the dark of winter, or share our catch when the salmon start running. It is having the **"Courage & Follow Through"** to be there for one another no matter what.

I also value leaving a place better than you found it. For the most part, Southeast Alaska isn't like the rest of the country, where I grew up. Here, we don't have endless sprawl of strip malls and have intact ecosystems with all the species and components intact. Our lands were not privatized and subdivided on the scale of the lower 48 so we can still use and depend on the same landscape and resources that the Lingít knew since time immemorial without encountering no-trespassing signs. The landscape and the resources are still healthy because people before us took care of them. Even in places where logging was done badly or the military left toxic pollution, we are stepping up and restoring those lands for future generations.

Finally, the humility inherent in the practice of **"Kuxhadahaan Adaayoo.analgein"** (stop, observe, examine, act) is increasingly critical. We need humility to **"Learn & Grow Collectively"** and understand that no one has all the answers. Anyone who offers simple solutions to the complex problems we face, does not carry that humility or value **"Systems Thinking"** and will lead us into failure. We must look to the traditional values that guided those who came before us through uncertain times, and combine those with new knowledge and technology in ways that lead to sustainability.



## Don't Be an Island, Be Amongst the People

**ʹLáaganaay Tsiits Gitʹanee (formerly Liz Medicine Crow)**
Spruce Root Board and SSP Steering Committee

About ten years ago, when I was working at First Alaskans Institute as the President/CEO, we were hosting difficult dialogues around relations between Native and non-Native people. I first partnered with Spruce Root when invited to lead discussions in Kéex' (Kake) for the SSP. What interested me was SSP's fundamental goal of fostering connections between people from diverse sectors, communities, and cultures to strengthen and put **"Relationships First"** and drive transformation in Southeast Alaska. You can't do that without having difficult conversations, that's how you fertilize the ground and create the foundation for that transformation. Difficult conversations are where bonds begin. It's putting the work in a hope that is ever-evolving, embracing diversity, and recognizing the inherent value in each individual. This is how we create a stronger, more connected community.

There are many values I was raised with and if you don't pay attention, you might miss how they guide you. These values that led our people for thousands of years, continue to influence every moment of my life. When harvesting, we are taught through doing rather than being 'taught to.' The younger kids went further out, leaving the more accessible harvesting spots for Elders. For example, you don't take all of your berries from one location, leaving some for others, and for those plants themselves because they have a job to do besides feeding us. Operationalizing that may look like honoring the value of **"Balance"** and **"Kuxhadahaan Adaayoo.analgein"** (Stop, observe, examine, act)," pausing, caring for, and learning from your environment and community.

"Don't be an island, go out and be amongst the people. Let them see your face." That's what grandpa Tommy always encouraged — showing up for your community and being present. The wisdom in that value is lifting people up, just by being there, regardless of your role. It's having **"Courage & Follow Through"** as a good community member. You can't always be on your own agenda, you sometimes must let the community lead and just be present and bear witness. We have SSP catalysts that are embedded in our Tribes or organizations who continue to show up for our communities at our culture camps, times of mourning, and potlatches — who harvest for and with us.

I appreciate how SSP is really trying to walk the talk. Hosting convenings that bring people together to grow their relationships and understanding of one another is really important in addition to the work that is actually being done on the ground. SSP is about people coming together to support our Tribes and other community entities, uplifting **"Tribal Sovereignty & Community Determination."** SSP is not driving the agenda, it is listening, supporting, and nurturing opportunities that our Tribes and community organizations want, or are leading. Likewise, those Partners are participating in SSP — it is reciprocal.

## *"As Abundance Flows"*

Colored Pencil, mixed media.

**ILLUSTRATION BY CLARA MOONEY**

In perpetual gratuity for the gifts of knowledge and abundance that pour from the shores of Prince of Wales. This land is enthralled in ancestral magic, lessons of reciprocity, and of endless displays of Haa Shukà – our commitment to our ancestors, ancestral lands, and the futurity of those living traditions. Inspired by the constant cycles of life and death, birth and rebirth. Of the first fawn of the season, the first ripe salmon berries in early summer, life cycles of salmon and the birth that comes from their end. Abundance flows from the intricately laid webs of reciprocity, nestled by moss covered trees and lulled by the soft sound of a streaming river. Háw'aa for these gifts, both seen and unseen, for I have felt abundance and now carry it with me.

To learn more about Storytelling & Engagement Interns Clara Mooney and Addy Mallott's trip touring the people, projects, lands and waters of Prince of Wales, turn to page 35.

# A Promise to the Future

**STORY & PHOTOS BY LEE HOUSE**

Regional partners reflect on the USDA's local collaboration on land management and rural economic development in Southeast Alaska and the benefits it brings.

Photo: An aerial view of L'áan Yík (Channel inside or Port Camden) with cars and people gathered on the bridge over Yéil Héeni (Raven's Creek) during a May 2024 convening on Kuiu Island. Partners that comprise the Kéex' Kwáan Community Forest Partnership and staff from the Tongass National Forest met to discuss priorities for land use, stream restoration, and existing infrastructure on the Kuiu Island road system. Photo: Lee House



SSP Program Director Marina Anderson teaches the Prince of Wales Alaska Youth Stewards crew how to slice salmon they caught the day prior. Salmon were later shared through community distribution. Photo: Lee House

A new story is unfolding for the Tongass National Forest where federal public land management and rural economic development is being co-created by the people of Southeast Alaska for the people of Southeast Alaska.

The communities of the Tongass National Forest have embraced an approach where differences can be set aside and Alaskans can work together to achieve the best outcomes for the forest and communities. The region has come a long way from the boom of industrial-scale old-growth and clearcut logging that defined the last decades of Tongass management, leaving gouges on the landscape, a legacy of conflict in our communities, and national level decision-making detached from local-level priorities.

"As we reflect on the past years, our approach in Southeast Alaska stands as a testament to what is possible when partnership, respect, and shared vision guide our work," said Chad VanOrmer, regional forester for the U.S. Forest Service's Alaska Region. "By walking alongside Tribes and community partners in ways we never have before, we unlocked new paths toward sustainability — culturally, economically and ecologically. This approach is more than a strategy; it is a promise for the future. Together, we have shown that stewardship is strongest when it is shared, and the roots we have planted this year will grow for generations to come."

In 2019, individuals and entities including Tribal governments, conservation organizations, tourism operations, local businesses, forestry and timber interests, economic development groups, and more shared diverse input to help inform a new vision for the region. The vision, compiled into the Tongass Blueprint, acknowledged the need for stable economic diversification, true and rightful consultation and collaboration with Tribes, centering of community priorities, and continued stewardship of the lands and waters of this region.

The Forest Service has joined regional leadership including Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit & Haida), Spruce Root, Southeast Conference, the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, Sealaska, and more by setting a course for the collaborative and community-driven way of working in Southeast Alaska. This shift in approach came hand-in-hand with the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) and $25 million in locally driven invest-ments, signaling a new way of doing business on the Tongass — putting local communities first.

According to an economic impact report on SASS, with just $6 million of that initial $25 million investment spent in 2022 and 2023, the initiative has already "catalyzed $8.8 million in economic activity, created 114 jobs (after converting all full-, part-time, and temporary positions into year-round equivalents), and paid $3.6 million in local wages to Southeast residents." The impact of this relatively small investment goes to show how a little support can go a long way when leveraged and put to work by local partners and rural communities.

Turning the page to the next chapter in Southeast Alaska, we reflect with voices from the region who have worked alongside each other to carry this transition forward on the Tongass and ensure that it lasts.

Ralph Góos'k' Wolfe, Director of Indigenous Stewardship Programs, Central Council Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska speaks during a 2023 visioning session convened by the USDA Forest Service Alaska Region. Photo: Lee House

Gah Kith Tin Alana Peterson, left, of Spruce Root, Sara Doyle of National Park Service, Glacier Bay National Park, and Ann Fischer of U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service brainstorm in a breakout group during the 2023 visioning session. Photo: Lee House

## "Our collective responsibility to future generations"

"These lands are the traditional territory of our people. As a federally recognized tribe, it's our responsibility to steward these lands on behalf of our people," said Richard Chalyee Éesh Peterson, president of Tlingit & Haida.

In the last years, the Forest Service and Tlingit & Haida have focused collaboration to support the growth and expansion of the Tribe's stewardship programs, including the Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network (SIGN) and Alaska Youth Stewards, while formalizing a new agreement to co-steward the Mendenhall Glacier Recreation Area (MGRA) in 2023.

As part of the first year of the MGRA co-stewardship agreement, Tlingit & Haida rolled out the Cultural Ambassador Program to provide Indigenous-led education to visitors at the Mendenhall Glacier Visitor Center. Tlingit & Haida's SIGN program has also made headway, signing 10 partnership agreements with Tribal governments in the region, and working to catalyze beach debris cleanups, facilitate culture classes with local youth camps and conferences, and participate in resource management councils.

"Tlingit & Haida welcomes this profound shift that acknowledges and respects Indigenous knowledge and stewardship," Peterson said. "I want to thank the U.S. Department of Agriculture and our regional partners for their leadership. The traditional homelands of Southeast Alaska are not just resources; they are the foundation of Tlingit and Haida identity and our collective responsibility to future generations. This effort is a model of co-management and ensures the land remains a source of life and culture for everyone. There is still much to do, and Tlingit & Haida is committed to the power of this partnership to preserve the ecological and cultural integrity of our shared lands."

## "Grounded in local values and priorities"

Spruce Root promotes economic development and job creation in Southeast Alaska by supporting entrepreneurs across the region, empowering business owners through increased self-sufficiency, and serving as the administrative support organization for the SSP.

"In our current financial system, often the people and projects at the ground level have limited access to the financial resources needed to make critical progress and decisions that are best for the people and environment in that place," said Spruce Root Executive Director Gah Kith Tin Alana Peterson. "It's been refreshing to have a federal agency willing to explore a new way of deploying financial resources that utilize local financing hubs (like Spruce Root) to support a more effective deployment of that capital. We are excited to continue this momentum and center community based needs with other federal agencies as well as the private and philanthropic sectors."

In addition to providing access to loans, business coaching and financial literacy, Spruce Root's community development expertise also lies in facilitation and finding meaningful ways to engage with Southeast Alaskans. In 2024, Spruce Root partnered with the Forest Service to design and implement community engagement for the Tongass National Forest Plan Revision, a land management plan that will guide the next 15-20 years for the Tongass.

"Forest health is foundational to our way of life," reads the top line of "Voices for the Future", the recent findings document on the 2024 public engagement published by the Forest Service. We created an online survey form for public feedback, designed the community meetings, and



From left to right: Heath Whitacre (Forest Service), Jason Gubatayao (Sealaska), Khaaxwáan Dawn Jackson (Organized Village of Kake), and others on the bridge over Yeíl Héeni (Raven's Creek) discussing points on a map of north Kuiu Island.

trained Forest Service staff to lead over 25 in-person workshops. Our Community Planner, Val Massie, also led a workshop with Forest Service staff and professionals to support the plan revision engagement process. Spruce Root and the Forest Service have built effective regional engagement, marking a meaningful shift toward forest planning grounded in local values and priorities."

## "More aligned than ever"

Southeast Conference (SEC) is a state and federally designated regional economic development organization for Southeast Alaska. SEC undertakes and supports activities that promote strong economies, sustainable communities, and a healthy environment in Southeast Alaska.

"Southeast Conference is incredibly grateful to be working with the USDA and our fellow regional strengthening partners, Tlingit & Haida and Spruce Root, on our shared mission to undertake and support activities that promote strong economies, sustainable communities, and a healthy environment in Southeast Alaska," Executive Director Robert Venables said.

"SASS investments are building on the foundation of our collaborative regional economic development strategy, building capacity and empowering local projects that strengthen the local communities and the regional economy.

We are excited to be a part of this game-changing shift and its innovative, flexible approach to sustainable economic development and building community capacity. Together we are seizing the moment when priorities are more aligned than ever to create a model that we hope becomes the 'new norm' and overcomes longstanding management issues."

## "Address everything holistically"

The Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) is a network of local and regional entities that work collectively to strengthen cultural, ecological, and economic resilience across Southeast Alaska. The network envisions self-determined and connected communities where Southeast Indigenous values continue to inspire society, shape relationships, and ensure that each generation can live on healthy lands and waters.

"Never in my wildest dreams would I have thought, when I was in high school, that there was any path towards regaining our stewardship and the management of our lands, I didn't think that there was any workforce development or career development to build my skills locally and be part of this industry — but times have changed," SSP Program Director Marina Anderson said.

"We know that the way we're working in Southeast Alaska is a way that works. We've been working in this collaborative way for a decade now through the SSP, supporting priority projects defined by our local partners. This new partnership with the USDA is going to take some time. We're in the baby step phases and as we continue to gain trust and make these small shifts in the way that we work, we'll be able to address everything holistically.

Because when we're thinking about the future of the forest and of this place, we're also thinking about the future of our people and creating local workforce development opportunities, we're thinking about regenerative economies, sustainable food systems, and the uncertainties that we navigate through climate adaptation work. We tie it all together by looking at how in each area we also need healing in our communities to truly thrive."

These photos show the understory of a dense young growth forest before and after thinning for riparian and wildlife benefits. The Angoon stewardship crew, hosted by Kootznoowoo Inc. alongside SAWC and the Forest Service, kicked off work on the Cube Cove restoration project on Admiralty Island in 2024.

## "Local stewardship crews a win, win, win"

The Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition (SAWC) partners with local groups to supply resources, share capacity, and provide in-field support to collaboratively restore and steward watersheds across Southeast Alaska. SAWC is an essential player in providing support for communities to launch their own local forestry and stewardship crews. SAWC has supported the work of the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership, Kéex' Kwáan Community Forest Partnership, Klawock Indigenous Stewards Forest Partnership, Ketchikan Indian Community Stewardship Crew, Yakutat Salmon Partners, and most recently catalyzed Angoon's Kootznoowoo Crew.

"Across the Tongass, we've found that when you start working together to manage the land, it grows to become so much bigger," SAWC Executive Director Rob Cadmus said. "It becomes about taking care of the land as a whole, ways of life, future generations, workforce development, and a whole host of important things that you can't do on your own — it's done through partnerships."

"Most recently, we've supported the community of Angoon, the Tribe, and the Alaska Native corporation to launch a crew to restore the Cube Cove area, a previously clearcut piece of their traditional homelands [*see community voice on opposite page*]. This project is really exemplary because it is a win, win, win. We're restoring fish and deer habitat, bettering the environment of this place in a direct and meaningful way, we're hiring locals and giving them jobs and opportunities, and third, we're creating a partnership — we have the Forest Service out here, we have folks from Angoon out here, we have SAWC, and we're working together hand-in-hand to steward and take care of this place.

I really think that is the future of what the Tongass National Forest is. We have a lot of small, Alaska Native communities who have always been a part of this land, and building those communities into the way that the Tongass is managed is the future here."

## "Working with Tribes, supporting local voices and decisions"

The Organized Village of Kake (OVK) is a federally recognized Tribal Government serving Kéex' Kwáan (Kake). OVK's mission includes a core purpose of strengthening Tribal community and culture with the core values of respect, collaboration, endurance, safety, and security.

"I'm thankful that the Forest Service is making this shift," said Khaaxwáan Dawn Jackson, OVK's executive director. "That they are having these discussions and having people in our corner, taking our comments, getting our perspective on what's best for our land. I know that their heart's in the right place when they want to see things happen together. When they need to work with Tribes, supporting local voices, and supporting local decisions."

"On Kuiu Island for example, it's seen its heyday in logging, so now we are working together to shift on what is feasible for the Forest Service in regards to budgets and activities for roads, infrastructure, use, and maintenance. I want our tribe to take on those programs so that it's locally administered and sustainable."

A lot of our families have a lot of history in those bays. It's their homelands, and I want to get to a place as we shift what that land over there is meant to do, healing it, making it an every season destination for our people here in the community, harvesting, and getting that food that is part of their DNA back in their body. Those are the things that tie people to place. I'm very proud of our people having the mindset of "we gotta heal it" because we're still here, and we're never going to leave."

Now more than ever, the Forest Service is working closely together with Tribal governments, Alaska Native corporations, agencies, and regional networks — building trust through real relationships, and striving for highly collaborative partnerships and interdisciplinary work. In contrast to the past of litigation and turmoil that has defined the last decades of this region, the USDA is stepping up to the call to ensure that the management of the country's largest national forest benefits the ecosystem, bolsters the region's rural economies, and puts local hands to work on their local lands.



Above photos: Lee House

COMMUNITY VOICE

**JAMIE DANIELS**

**TAAT XA NII**
**(THE NIGHT MADNESS)**

Angoon Stewardship Crew Leader
Kootznoowoo Inc.

# Rewilding Cube Cove: the Kootz Crew

The Cube Cove Restoration project is led by the Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition (SAWC), Kootznoowoo Inc., and the USDA Forest Service - Tongass National Forest, with additional support from the National Forest Foundation. The work is taking place in a 23,000 acre area on Admiralty Island to restore fish habitat in multiple watersheds that have been degraded due to historic logging practices.

"We're going in to do thinning around streams and lakes, take out culverts and bridges, and restore the area for fish and deer habitat. With our crew, I've tried to instill pride in our work, explaining to them the type of restoration work we're doing and why we are doing it. That it is literally our very own homelands, we want to do a good job, and we want to represent Angoon.

It was a couple generations ago [1960s–1970s] that our people had actually advocated and went to Congress and spoke with the President to protect our land. It's like it has come full circle now, we get to come back and fix the one area that they were not able to protect. It means a lot because this land is where I come from — it's my home.

To have a job in Angoon that pays competitive wages and helps out your family is a big deal. There are so many people over the years that I've watched have to leave Angoon because there are no opportunities. SAWC has been doing a lot of work to make this project happen and to support us. Gunalchéesh from the Kootz Crew — we really appreciate our work, and being able to work in our own territory is a true blessing."

# *Relationship to Water*

# *is Relationship to Each Other*

Whether making a living on, seeking respite in, or building community across, Southeast Alaskans are all connected physically and symbolically by the ocean. Read four reflections from our community.

Sitka Conservation Society Deputy Director Katie Riley and Sustainable Southeast Partnership Program Director Marina Anderson share an ocean dip.Photo: Bethany Goodrich

Above photos: Shaelene Grace Moler

**Moananuiākea: 'Voyage for Oceans, a Voyage for Earth'**

In 2023, Southeast Alaskans enjoyed connecting with relatives from the south as they began an impressive circumnavigation of the Pacific Ocean. Moananuiākea is "connecting Pacific communities for collective action around common challenges and a shared sustainable destiny."

Sustainable Southeast Partnership Director Marina Anderson was invited to join Hōkūle'a:

*"It was an honor to join the Hōkūle'a crew as they traveled through Southeast Alaska. In Xootsnoowoo, we shared in the launch of the first canoe carved there in over 100 years — a canoe that local youth worked on, took care of, and named. To be with relatives from across the Pacific as we bore witness to this intergenerational event was powerful and something we will continue to cherish.*

*I was invited to share local knowledge about the waterways, land, and culture and believed this would be a life-changing experience. However, after further reflection I realized it was a reaffirming experience — an experience that reminded me that our community is larger than one village or region. Our community has always included our relatives from around the Pacific Ocean and the eternal thread that continues to connect us is our ways of life and how we operate from a place of humility and respect across waters.*

*Two years after my time with Hōkūle'a in Alaska, I again had the great honor to bare witness to her power at the 50th anniversary of her birth at Hakipu'u on O'ahu. This celebration gave me a glimpse of what small collective efforts can actuate over the course of time: the resurgence of culture and active traditional knowledge bridging the gaps in social, ecological, and political matters.*

*The Sustainable Southeast Partnership was born to catalyze local priorities and empower communities. Like Hōkūle'a, we journey together, weathering challenges and celebrating our Indigenous values and knowledge."*

**Celebration by Canoe**

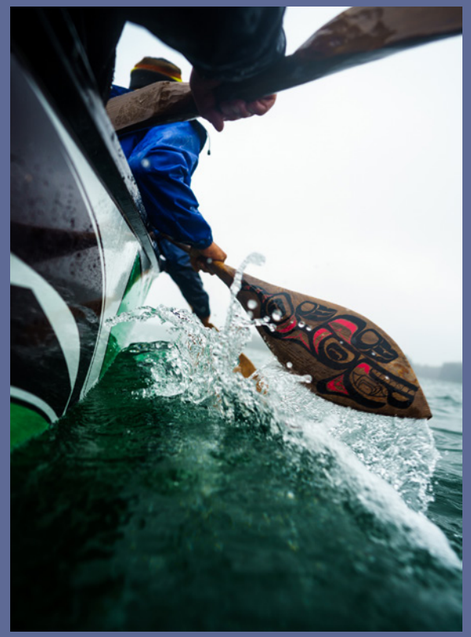
Hosted by Sealaska Heritage Institute, Celebration is a bi-annual festival held in Juneau and the largest gathering of Lingít, Haida, and Tsimshian people. In 2024, canoes from across the region and parts of Canada, some carrying 16–20 people, including many of our Catalysts and Partners, journeyed to Aak'w Kwáan (Juneau) to connect with family, culture, and community during the event.

Wooshkeeká Brooke Leslie, Rural Economic Development Catalyst at Spruce Root, paddled from Shx'at Kwáan (Wrangell).

*"Out in the canoe, you're working with the elements, other people, physical discomforts, cold, and hunger. If you don't take time to be reflective and mindful, you can miss the connectedness. Each person on this 150-nautical mile journey had their own personal intention for participating. While some of us may not have realized it at the start, this was a healing journey — individually and collectively.*

*While camping on Harbor Island for two nights on a beautiful white beach, we had time to reflect. There's something profound about coming together in that sacred place, singing songs that have endured for thousands of years, on waters that have long been silent. Magical moments arise where everything is in tune, and harmonies of our ancestral past are woven together with our present stories. It's something that can't be described in English. The journey allowed us to be fully integrated humans and connect with ourselves, each other, the waters, and our ancestry. When all those come together, time slows down.*

*As the Rural Economic Development Catalyst for the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, my work is rooted in trust, cultivated and sustained through respectful, reciprocal, and enduring relationship. The canoe journey, Celebration, relationships made, and healing that I am still unpacking, renewed my gratitude for these people, this place, and the work I am fortunate enough to participate in."*





Photos – Top: Jonas Crabtree, Middle: Bethany Goodrich, Bottom: SEARHC

Partners enjoy a morning dip during the 2024 Sustainable Southeast Partnership Spring Reteat. Photo: Bethany Goodrich

**Cold Water Dipping**

Cold water dipping has been practiced on Southeast shores since time immemorial. The act, especially when carried out together, builds fortitude and camaraderie. For the past three years, the Sustainable Southeast Partnership has incorporated cold water dipping into gatherings as an optional activity with the intention of fostering a stronger sense of community while providing a grounding to the lands and waters that sustain us.

Kaa Yahaayí Shkalneegi Muriel Reid is Haa Tóoch Lichéesh Coalition's Storyteller. He is an avid cold water 'dipper'.

*"In the beginning of fall, I dipped with a friend on the shores of Ketchikan. They went into the water backwards.*

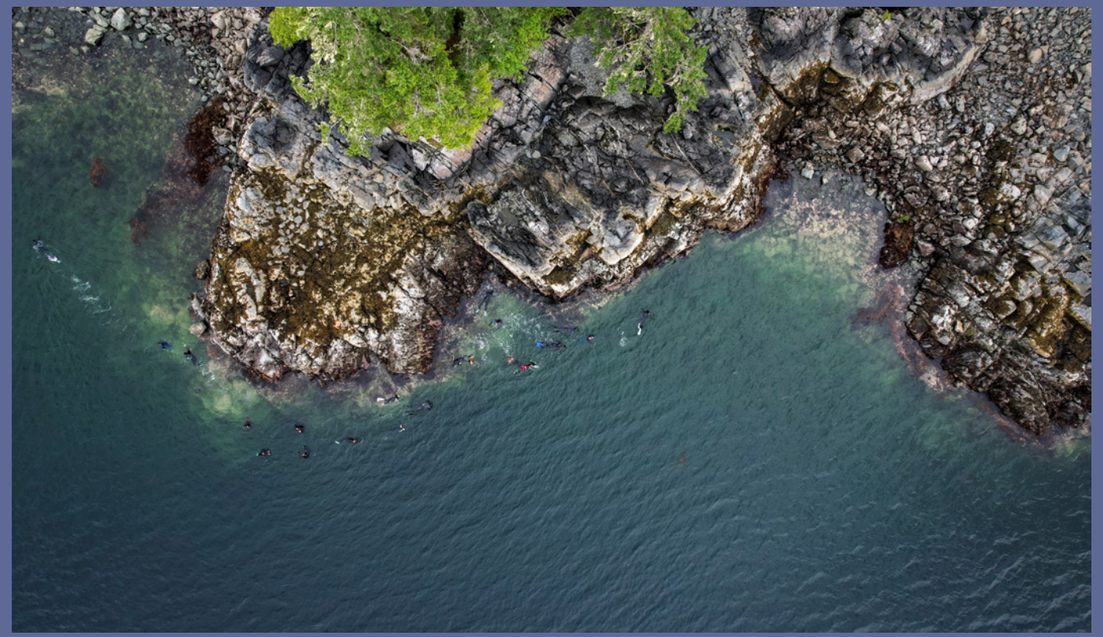
*It seems every day I am shown this beautiful truth that humans hold such care. We go into the water backwards like a clan house*. We dance to live music. We smile, and gossip, and pet the dogs we come across with as much energy as we have to give. We smudge trees and thank the ocean, and I am not lying when I say that everyone I know loves the moon.*

*Dipping, for me, is another way to rejoice in our shared humanity, rejoice in the ocean, rejoice in the fact that our feet get cold, our hearts grow quicker, and our friends feel closer.*

*We feel connection so deeply here, in this space where we do hard things together. In this space where each of us can see each other's breath, hear each other's shock, set an intention and walk towards it.*

*Each day I return from these waters, I am glad I took those steps in. I am glad I saw myself through to the end. And I am grateful, for my friend Éil."*

*When entering a traditional clan house, it is customary to enter backwards out of respect, to display harmless and positive intentions, and to represent entering another world that is not your own.



**Sheet'ká Splash Mountain Camp**

For two weeks in summer 2024, a group of 17 Sitka youth participated in the Sheet'ká Splash Mountain Camp to learn water safety, preparedness, survival skills, and respect for the ocean. The camp was an opportunity for youth to experience important lessons and develop skills for safe outings to harvest and recreate on the waters of Lingít Aaní. Hosted in partnership by the Sitka Native Education Program, Sitka Trail Works, Sitka Conservation Society, Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Youth Advocates of Sitka, and the Sitka School District.

Charlie Skultka Jr., is a camp co-leader and cultural educator for the Sitka School District and Sitka Native Education Program:

*"Water is a way of life around here. You cannot survive here without spending time on the water — and this has gone on since time immemorial. When we do go to harvest, we find ourselves having to go by boat. We go in groups, we work together, we take what we need, we come in, and we share specifically with elders first who cannot make it out, and that's just how we grew up here.*

*We started to recognize that as more and more kids get in the water, and become more active, there was a need for water safety courses. Everybody knows what to do when everything is going right, but how you react and what you do when things go wrong could mean the difference between life and death. And I think that's important for every kid in Southeast to know.*

*This camp was all about giving kids respect for the water while being safe and having fun, and judging from the outcome, and the smiles on their faces, I think we did that — I know we did that. These are lessons that are going to stick with them for a lifetime."*

Above photos: Lee House



Above photos: Bethany Goodrich

COMMUNITY VOICE

**JADEN COSTELO**

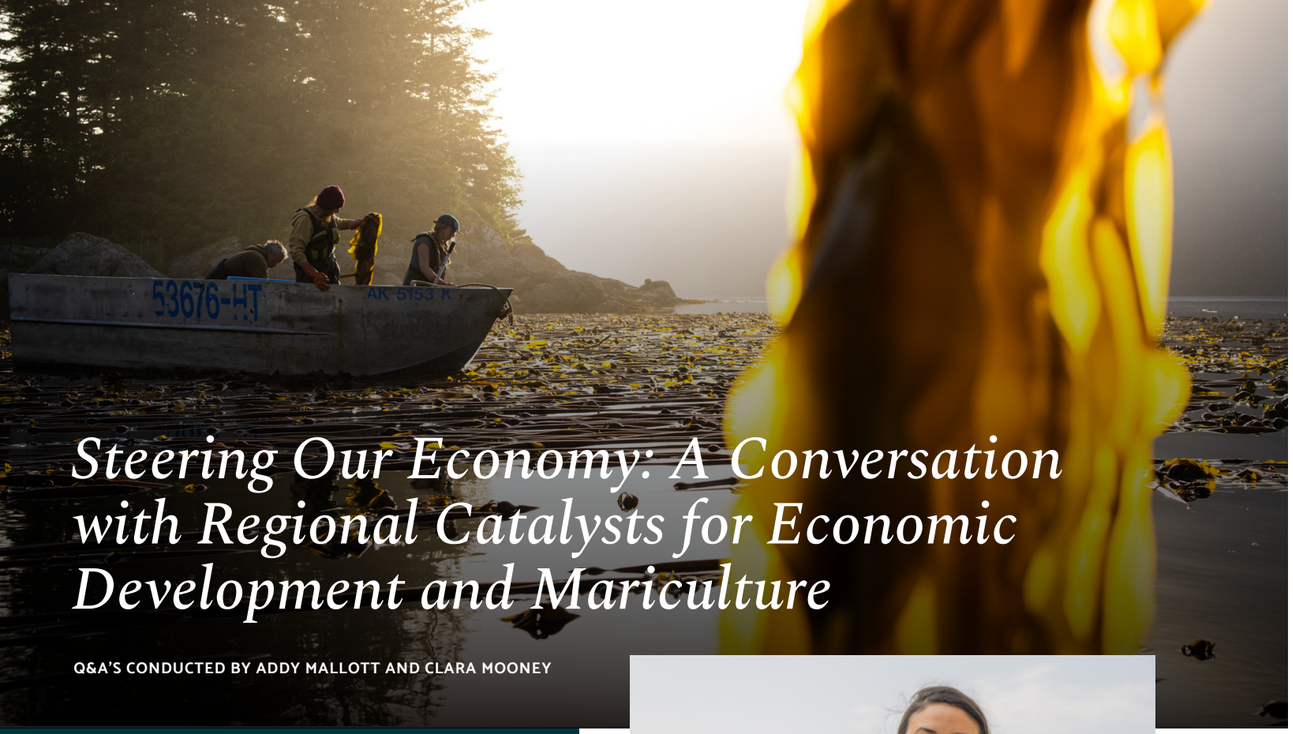
Sitka High School Graduate

## Learning by Doing

"I associate my relationship to water with my grandfather. At minus tides we would go clamming, cruise the beaches looking for jumpers to fish, or comb the shore looking for snagged up lures. But as I grew up, he started getting too old to go out and in middle school, the ocean became a place where I found a lot of independence and calm and could be totally 'present'. As I grew older in highschool I started finding new things to do in the water and stumbled upon surfing through an end of year celebration in my Marine Biology class to Sandy Beach where the Sitka Sound Science Center (SSSC) brought paddle boards to try.

As a senior I was able to work with Mr. Charlie Skultka Jr. in shop class to build a surfboard out of local red and yellow cedar provided through a collaboration with the Sitka Conservation Society. Mr. Charlie is a local legend for being one of Sitka's first surfers and an incredible teacher and mentor who through the process of building this board, became a friend. Whenever I made a mistake, he helped me see solutions and built my confidence while building a board out of local wood, that is surfed by a local, on local waves. The whole process feels really meaningful, and connects me to the forest, ocean, and my community of mentors in a way that just makes my soul feel good.

In another class, I was able to learn about kelp farming through a partnership with the SSSC and the University — everything from seeding lines to pulling grown kelp. School experiences like these have helped me deepen my love and respect for the ocean and see the true extent of benefits it provides from mental and physical health all the way to economic and creative opportunities."



# *Steering Our Economy: A Conversation with Regional Catalysts for Economic Development and Mariculture*

Q&A'S CONDUCTED BY ADDY MALLOTT AND CLARA MOONEY

A growing contingent of Southeast Alaskans are driving local economic diversification toward sustainability and Indigenous leadership. However, addressing challenges like housing shortages, childcare scarcity, high shipping and energy costs, and balancing economic growth with community needs, remain prevalent.

For over a decade, the Sustainable Southeast Partnership has played a critical role in fostering this evolution. Rural Economic Development Catalyst, Brooke Leslie of Shx'at Kwáan (Wrangell) hosted at Spruce Root focuses on holistic systems change. Outgoing Mariculture Catalyst Keolani Booth of Maxłaxaała (Metlakatla) hosted by Ecotrust, advocates for sustainability and local decision making in the growing kelp, seaweed, and shellfish sector.

Together, their work underscores the interconnectedness of Southeast Alaska's economic and cultural ecosystems, ensuring that development is guided by collaboration, stewardship and respect for community and Indigenous values.

## *Holism and Systems Change with Brooke Leslie*

"Sustainability means looking at things as a connected ecosystem, rather than individual issues, acknowledging how beautifully complex the interconnected nature of the work is. To me, that's what sustainability is, it's stewarding our ecosystem," Brooke Leslie says.

Brooke carries the name Wooshkeeká. She is Haida, Yakjaanas, double fin killer whale, a grandchild of the L'uknax.adí, and from the Scottish clan Leslie. She was raised in Wrangell and went to the University of Idaho for music and business accounting. She grew up in a small family business that transitioned from logging to tourism, while harvesting traditional foods as a way of life. Today, she is raising her daughter Lola with cultural practices, values and traditional foods.

**What does the 'Rural Economic Development Catalyst' role look like on the ground?**

The way this role looks in practice is dynamic and responsive to the needs of our communities and region.

Some projects I helped support over this past year include affordable housing, cultural tourism, recreation on the Tongass, commercial fishing access, and policies that helped create a lending product based upon Indigenous values. I'm currently administering a heat pump grant that will install hundreds of heat pumps in Tribally owned homes on Prince of Wales and continuing to support sustainable commercial fisheries work in 2025 through the Southeast Village Fisheries Collective.

Ultimately, my role is all about community — uplifting Indigenous values and practices, and building healthy collaborative relationships. It's about supporting industries that matter to our communities while maintaining a sense of place and culture.

**What are some personal values that guide what you do in your role with SSP?**

In 2018, I felt like a tangled-up fishing line. I was juggling too many roles functioning as the executive director of a tour company. Over time, I realized I was living a life far outside my values. I stepped back, reevaluated, and began to understand the way modern society and the Western world works isn't healthy for anyone — we've set ourselves up for burnout. I saw the need for balance and values-alignment in our workplaces.

Spruce Root and SSP lead by example, putting people and values first to create strong company culture. Like securing your own oxygen mask before helping others, we empower our team first then extend that help through the work we do. This foundation strengthens all our work — from relationships, to lending, to development. Now I help spread these human-centered, sustainable business practices to other industries and entrepreneurs.

**How do you envision the future of SSP?**

Collective impact networks are vital in an increasingly polarized world and SSP's model in particular inspires others in Alaska and beyond. By telling our story and sharing what we've accomplished, we can foster innovative, cross-agency solutions.

Sustainability is key. We need to redefine economic success beyond gross domestic product and profit, measuring how it benefits people, place, and industry while honoring cultural values. Everything interconnects: fishing affects housing, affects childcare. Past boom-and-bust cycles show how mismanagement creates ripple effects. Moving forward, we need to focus on long-term solutions that honor interconnection while leveraging funding and partnerships to reduce redundant and often competing efforts and rather complement each other's work.

We are also doing great work with the Seacoast Trust, envisioning a new economic model where access to capital and a strong foundation of Indigenous values is the basis for healthy communities. Less reliance on directly grant tied funding allows for more autonomy in building a future that honors our future generations, heritage and ancestors.


## *Responsibly Growing the Blue Economy with Keolani Booth*

Over the last decade, interest in Southeast Alaska's coastline for seaweed, shellfish, and kelp farming — called mariculture — has grown considerably, backed by over $54 million dollars in state and federal investments. This raises questions about the impact of the "Blue Economy" on traditional, ecological and economic livelihoods.

"We're bringing our culture to the forefront. Not just a footnote, but the whole story," Keolani Booth says.

Growing up in Maxłaxaała (Metlakatla), Booth's connection to the ocean has always been a guiding force in his career. Having been a councilman, fisherman, commercial diver, and subsistence harvester, Booth brought a multifaceted perspective to mariculture — one that integrates traditional values and practices — that he will continue in a new capacity.

**What does your work look like on the ground?**

Right now, I'm focused on getting information, training and resources to interested communities and Tribal leaders.

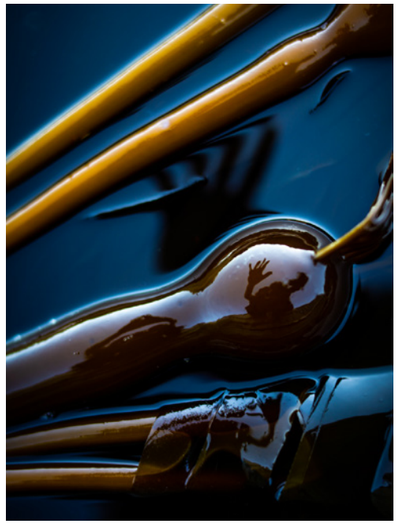
There's a big race to get folks out on local waters because a small percentage of each bay can be used. Eventually, those permits will run out. We don't want a repeat of what we've seen with commercial fishing in rural Alaska where quota and permits leave Indigenous and rural hands.

So, we need to set these communities up so they have control and that foundation needs to be built right now.

**What are some of the entry barriers for Indigenous and rural community members? What's at stake and how are you addressing it?**

There's a lot of curiosity but lease fees alone for a 10-year permit can be $15,000. It can be very difficult for locals to compete with the large companies pursuing permits from all over the world.

The governor's new bill extends leases to 20 years, with an option for another 20 — that's 40 years! That means that

Left: Celebration arrival in Aak'w Kwáan Juneau. Photo: Jonas Crabtree. Right: Harvesting bull kelp off the outer coast. Photo: Bethany Goodrich

for the rest of my life, someone could have a permit for a very large swath of water in my backyard, and if we don't get involved that someone could have very little familiarity with, or connection to, the lands, waters and values of Southeast Alaska.

To address this, Alaska Mariculture Cluster and Spruce Root developed a revolving loan fund to help locals get started. This is just scratching the surface, without support, creativity and policy, large companies from around the world will dominate this industry that has very real implications to rural and Indigenous people who depend on the ocean.

But, I'm not the type of person who sees a wall — I see an obstacle to get around. I'm excited to collaborate with like-minded people in the SSP who lead with values and are ready to get work done in everything from agroforestry to children's education. It's all connected and we can source so much more inspiration, motivation and resources working together and addressing needs holistically.

**How do you envision mariculture supporting local economies and Indigenous communities?**

Indigenous communities have carefully harvested, observed, traded and depended on resources from the water forever. To many, the prospect of outsiders with less knowledge or connection to this place coming in and exploiting our waters is scary.

I believe mariculture can, however, complement our way of life through job creation, diversifying local economies, and sustainable food production. It can also be complementary to community harvest. Black seaweed, for example, is hugely important to our people. It needs to stay wild and plentiful. With increased investments in mariculture, we have more data, more tools and more access to scientific support to ensure black seaweed continues to thrive. The trick is ensuring mariculture development is done responsibly.

**What does responsible mariculture look like?**

It begins with truly engaging with our Indigenous communities. Before even thinking about profit, outside companies need to recognize community concerns, needs, and understand that working *in* a community means being *part* of that community.

We also need to see Indigenous and community leadership as the business owners and entrepreneurs themselves. That's where the revolving loan fund, workshops, trainings and other resource sharing comes in.

I feel a responsibility as both a husband and father to protect our oceans and pass down traditions of sustainability. Indigenous people have stewarded these lands and waters for millennia so people today can have these opportunities. Our values need to be seen in regulation and in policy — not just this situation of talking to us and then choosing to do whatever you want — we need to be included to ensure ocean health for generations.

**What is new and exciting on the horizon?**

Partners at Barnacle Foods, a local kelp company, finalized a report that helps break down barriers for rural and Indigenous communities who are interested in growing, selling and drying kelp. Recognizing the high energy costs of kelp drying  and limited labor capacity in rural Southeast, this report helps provide insights and next steps. The final report was released in early 2025 and we look forward to helping share it across communities.



# *Húus dáng hl kíngsaang* *(I'll see you again)*

## Reflections from Prince of Wales "Back to the Lands Week"

WRITTEN BY CLARA MOONEY & ADDY MALLOTT
FILM PHOTOS BY ADDY MALLOTT

In summer 2024, Clara Mooney and Addy Mallott joined the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) as Storytelling and Engagement interns hosted with the Sitka Conservation Society through the Sealaska Internship Program.

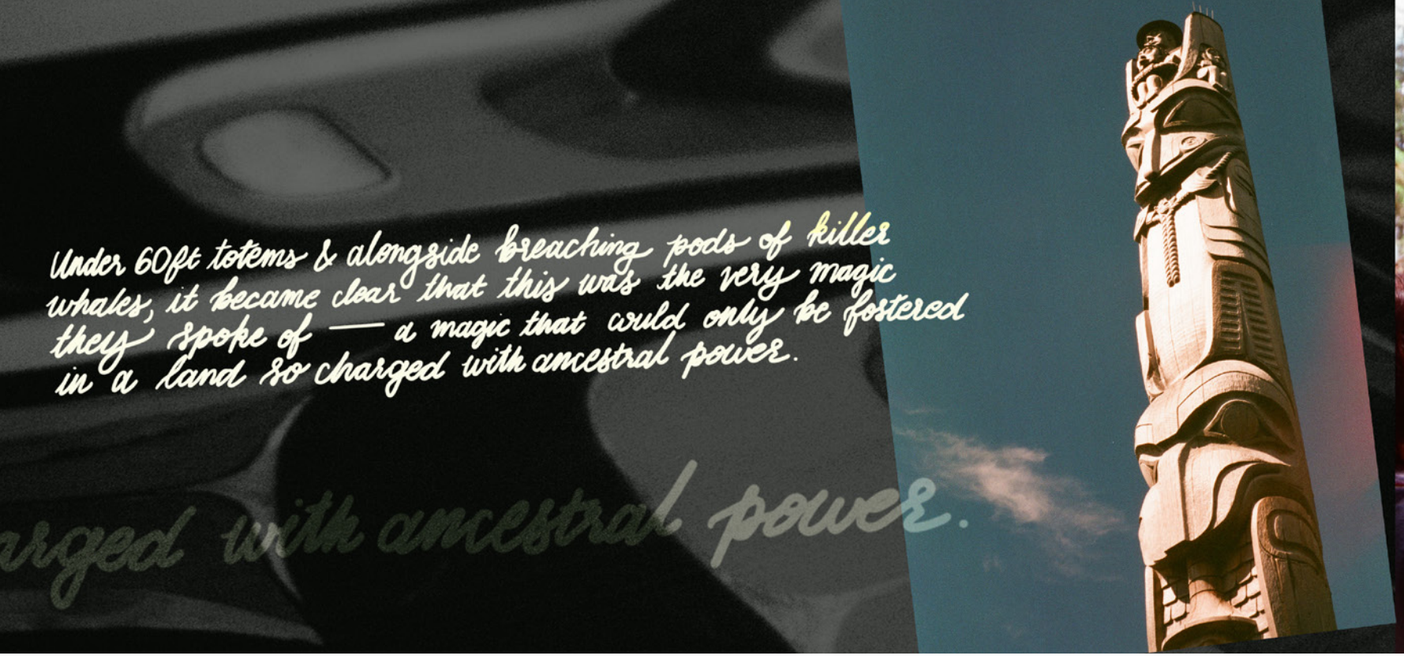
Started in the '80s, the Sealaska Internship Program exists to uplift shareholders and shareholder descendents pursuing post-secondary education by providing access to meaningful career experiences, supporting their goals and vision, and fostering community among peers. Since its start, nearly 400 individuals have moved through the program with many landing careers at Sustainable Southeast Partnership partners including Sealaska, Tlingit & Haida, Spruce Root and more.

In 2024, more than seven partners of the SSP hosted internship experiences performing a wide breadth of work in everything from accounting and composting, to political research and salmon stream surveying!

Mooney is Eagle Beaver, Haida and Blackfoot from Seattle, Washington. She is currently a senior at Stanford University where she is studying Environmental Science and Native Studies. Mallott is Kwaashk'i Kwáan from the Fort House of Yakutat and lives in Juneau. Both joined a group of fellows, interns and Sealaska staff on Prince of Wales Island for "Back to Lands Week" — a field trip to help participants gain a deeper understanding of the regional Native corporation's commitment to traditional lands and the work of its partners. For Mallott, who grew up in Juneau, this opportunity was a rich beginning to an exploration of other communities in Southeast through film photography, a method that allows a slower, more intentional look at the world. For Mooney, who grew up in Seattle but who has family ties to Hydaburg, this trip was an opportunity to deepen her relationship to land, culture, and ancestors.

With an analog camera and journals in tow, the two journeyed to Kasaan, Klawock, Craig, and Hydaburg.

These are reflections of the people they met and the experiences they had along the way.




## Kasaan's Carving House

Everyone we discussed our visit to Kasaan with had the same thing to say, "That place is special." Under 60-foot totems and alongside breaching pods of killer whales, it became clear that this was the very magic they spoke of — a magic that could only be fostered in a land so charged with ancestral power. Our arrival to Kasaan's carving house was met with greetings from a totem representing our cyclical connection to our past, present, and future. Nang K'adangáas Eric Hamar, a Haida carver who was one of the totem's creators, taught us the importance of our totems and the land that shares their roots. "A totem isn't finished until it is standing up," highlighted by the Haida translation of totem, gyáa' aang being "*standing up.*"

In learning that a key part of a totem's life and birth centered around it standing, what could it mean for a totem to lay dormant? Beside the Kasaan totem pole, lay a totem that had previously been stolen and only recently returned. Finally in its rightful home, moss creeped into the seeps and cracks of this elder tree. No longer standing, with a young tree sprouting from a bear's ear, this piece is being actively reclaimed by the land. And thus is the life cycle of a totem: from the land we raise them and to the land they return — sprouting the next generation of totem from its core.

Around the region, and with a particular focus on Prince of Wales Island, partners within the Sustainable Southeast Partnership are working to ensure the longevity of totem pole carving through arts programming and land management strategies that inventory, understand, and seek to protect the long-term health of old growth red and yellow cedar trees.

## Salmon Restoration in Klawock

Led by Tlingit & Haida, Alaska Youth Stewards (AYS) is a partner-rich regional program that uses an experiential learning approach to provide hands-on natural resource job, community service, and cultural stewardship experiences. The Prince of Wales AYS crew passes buckets of sediment from the forest to the bank at a salmon stream restoration project. Leading the crew this day, the coordinator of the Klawock Indigenous Stewards Forest Project and SSP Community Catalyst with Shaan Seet Inc., Quinn Aboudara teaches the AYS crew proper techniques for improving salmon habitat.

Crews have added logs to a salmon stream outside Klawock, providing shade and pools for salmon to rest and hide in. In a new growth forest, more logs are needed to achieve the same effect that old growth tree falls have in healthy salmon stream ecosystems. As our changing climate causes weather and water to warm, shade will become even more important for salmon who are impacted by increasing water temperature.

Healthy salmon streams and healthy forests cannot exist without one another. As streams wind and bend, the bank erodes, recruiting trees and debris that fall into the water, adding more features that benefit fish. In return, the bodies of the salmon who travel up the streams to spawn fertilize the trees. Rich with nutrients accumulated at sea, salmon sustain the bears, birds, fungi, and trees of a healthy forest ecosystem. Our seas, streams, and lands are in a deep reciprocal relationship of nourishing one another.

When this forest was logged, old growth trees were cut down, leaving the stream with limited shade and with few large trees to recruit for fish habitat. Fish returns and escapement plummeted. The new growth forest that has grown back in the ~40 years since the area was logged, contains very little undergrowth. The S'áxt'(devils club) and other shrubs that normally provide shade to fish cannot grow or find light amongst the tight knit canopy of densely growing second growth forest.

Sometimes in the dark of the new growth forests, it was easy to let the gravity of colonial pressures and histories weigh upon you. It's hard to escape the pit that forms upon seeing the ancestral remains of giant trees that used to dominate the Island. Now, their stumps provide the foundation for new generations of spruce and alders. Yet, medicine and healing also grows in these forests in insurmountable abundance. From the repopulating devils club, to the increasing rates of salmon return, to the laughter and joy from the Alaska Youth Stewards crew, our peers, and USDA Forest Service leaders, one can understand how to hold these emotions in tandem. Balance. Putting hope and action together. Trusting that rebirth and regrowth, is not only possible but necessary.

## The Shores of Howkan

The shores of Howkan were lined with towering red trees, creating a wall of browns and greens to juxtapose the soft waves crashing against the rocky shoreline. K'uyáang Ben Young, Raven of the Yahgw'láanaas Clan and Xaad Kíl language speaker and teacher, led us into the treeline, the wall of trees opening like a portal into lush understories and embracing cedars. The air was electric with intention and history, retired totems almost completely consumed by moss and dew, by life and growth. We introduced ourselves to the land and to the spirits who had been on this land before us.

Over a century ago, the villages of Howkan, Sukkwan, and Klinkwan, dissolved in order to form a school in the new village of Hydaburg. Today, the villages hold gentle reminders of the lives our grandparents, great-grandparents, and great-great-grandparents lived. Beyond seaweed forests, we gathered on the barnacle covered coastline, singing Haida songs to greet our ancestors. With music in our ears and the drum beat in our hearts, there was no denying we were surrounded by family.

When the three Haida villages consolidated and relocated to Hydaburg, families left parts of their lives on the islands. Walking the shore of Howkan, glimpses at life here are hidden amongst rocks on the beach. Trade beads, buttons, and shards of pottery are still abundant reminders of how our ancestors remain embedded in this landscape.

Participants prepare to offload in Howkan. More than one hundred years ago, the villages of Howkan, Sukkwan, and Klinkwan, dissolved in order to form a school in the new village of Hydaburg.


### I'll See You Again

On the roads that wove throughout the island, we covered so much ground. Each bend of road brought the deep ties between the fish, trees, people and stories of this place into clarity. Each SSP partner, AYS youth and community member we met was so connected and dedicated to each other, to cultural strength, and to this place.

Our people have forever known this interconnectedness between us and our world as the most basic of truths. We've known how to care for this oneness and even when colonialities try to tear apart and disentangle, and make us forget, we are so good at noticing the reminders around us.

From the way an adze fit so well in our hands, the eagerness of the youth stewards to learn and mend the forests, the wisdom Delores Churchill radiated and the strong prideful voice Ben's son used as he sang in Xaad Kíl to his ancestors at Howkan, it was abundantly clear that we never forgot and these ties never left.

Our days had been fast, quick like the whitewater that foamed in the boat's wake. It wasn't until our last morning that a quiet had washed over the group, overwhelmed with reflections that hadn't had a moment to register. One by one the Sealaska interns in our group boarded seaplanes that would take them on their next adventure; to some the trip was a mere hop to Juneau, for others a series of several layovers on their way to Iceland or the UK. Goodbye's were hard, so we didn't say goodbye. Instead, to the land and the people we whispered a "Húus dáng hl kíngsaang," *I'll see you again.*

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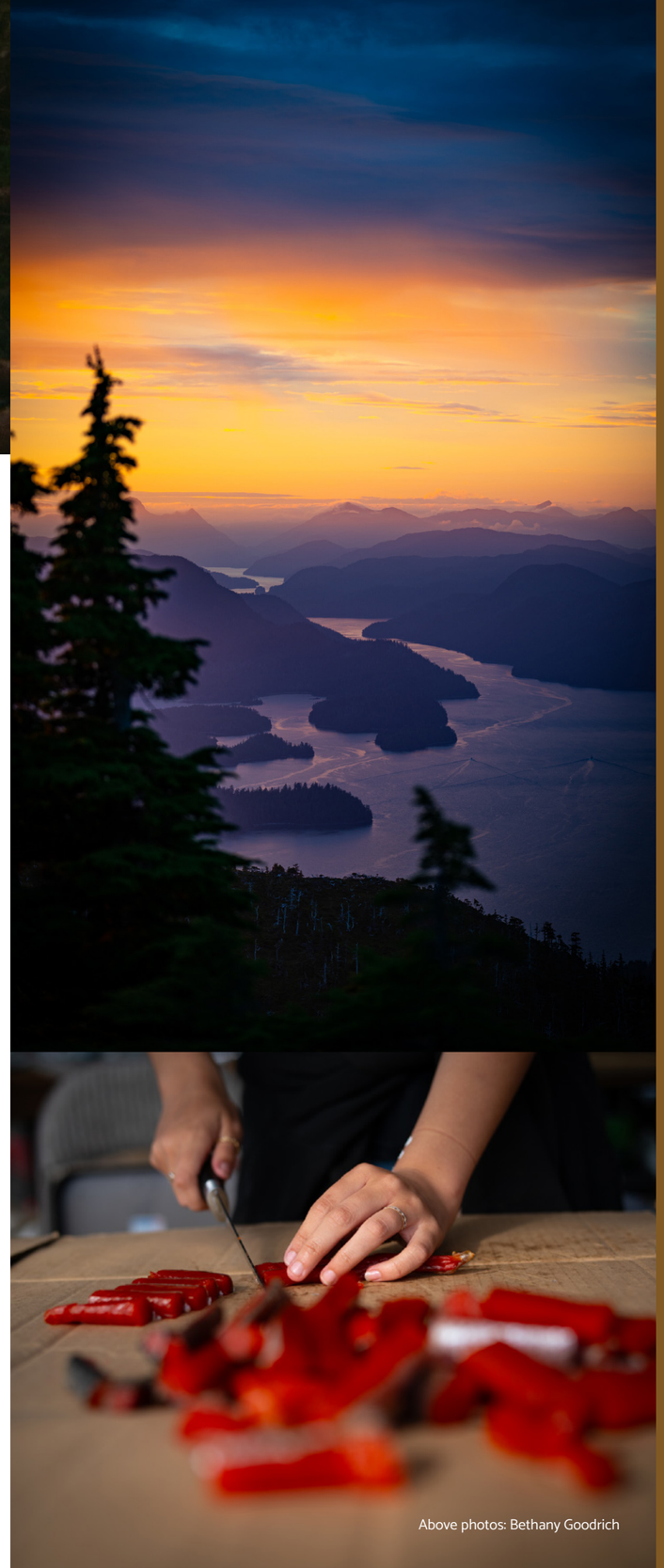
*The Sealaska Internship Program exists to uplift shareholders and shareholder descendents pursuing post-secondary education by providing access to meaningful career experiences, supporting their goals and vision, and fostering community among peers. To learn more about the program: visit* ***sealaska.com/careers***

Top: Bob Girt, Clara Mooney and Sheridan Cook take a break from stream restoration work near Klawock Bottom: Howkan – Trade beads, buttons, and shards of pottery are still abundant reminders of how ancestors remain embedded in this landscape.



Above photos: Bethany Goodrich



COMMUNITY VOICE

**KALILA ARREOLA**

Policy Intern

Sitka Conservation Society / Sealaska Internship Program

## A Chance to Support Values, Traditions, & Livelihoods

"For those of us who live in Southeast Alaska, we know the Tongass National Forest is more than just a vast expanse of trees; it is the heart of our communities, cultures, and livelihoods, and has been for generations.

My life has been shaped by moments spent fishing with my parent, hiking with my dog, picking berries with aunties and cousins, harvesting plants with classmates, and exploring the beach with friends. These are memories that I share with those closest to me, and I know I'm not alone. Southeast Alaskans have a unique bond with the land we live on.

Right now, I — and those who also want to see the Tongass continue to be enjoyed by generations beyond ours — have the chance to be part of the process that shapes how the Tongass is managed.

The USDA Forest Service is revising the Tongass Land Management Plan. This is the first time in 27 years that the whole plan is being overhauled. It will serve as a blueprint for how our land is managed, ensuring it continues to support the values, traditions, and livelihoods that define our communities.

Under the previous plan, Indigenous communities, climate change, and cultural uses of the land were largely overlooked. This is our chance to correct that and make sure these vital lifeways and modes of balance are incorporated into the next generation of stewardship. This revision is about more than just land management — it's about creating a relationship with the land that will allow both our communities and environment to thrive together.

This is an exciting opportunity for those living in Southeast to make their voices heard and be a part of the revision that will shape each of our futures."

# Adaptation

## WHAT ARE YOU DOING TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE?

*"This is a common question to the Sustainable Southeast Partnership from funders, mobilized youth, and concerned community members. For good reason. Every year, the Southeast experiences impacts on essential wild food systems as temperatures rise and weather patterns shift, more loss of life and homes destroyed by landslides and floods, and new challenges like summer drought and smoke from Interior wildfires.*

*When we think about climate change globally, there are large structural changes that require immense political and societal will. But when it comes to the manifestations of climate change, those impacts are happening on a local scale and they look different in each place. We need strong national and global transformations, but we also need to support healthy regional networks and collaborations.*

*All of our programs, at their core, are about connectivity. Connectivity to each other, to the lands and waters, across communities, across disciplines, across generations, and more. Our relationships are foundational to our ability to adapt and build resilience to climate change.*

*Our partners, ranging from Tribal governments and municipalities, to nonprofits, research institutions, Alaska Native corporations, and land managers, are addressing environmental change in myriad ways including carbon credit strategies, landslide and snowpack monitoring and community alert systems, salmon habitat mapping and restoration, sustainable business coaching, renewable energy and food security initiatives, and the overall localization and connectivity of rural communities. Partners not only focus on identifying and taking actions toward solutions, but also on building processes that center youth, generate rural jobs, and catalyze career pathways for the next generation of climate leaders.*

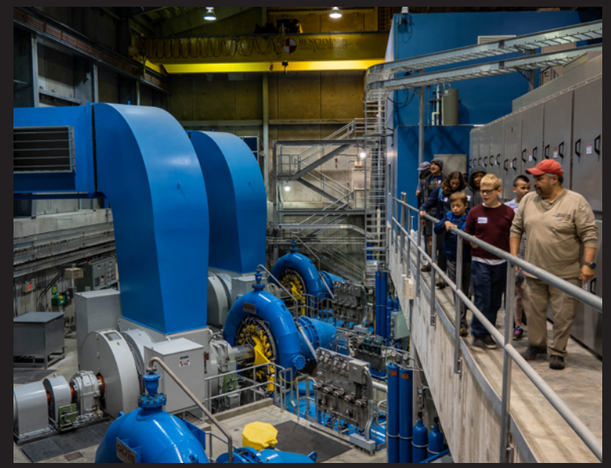
*As a Partnership, and as people, we need to face the hard questions and the hard work. We have to be willing to imagine what our future could look like. This means being courageous as well as being creative in what we build. We can choose to put on band-aid repairs or we can build and restructure our communities in ways that not only better prepare us for change, but that bring new economic opportunities and better balance to our day to day lives."*

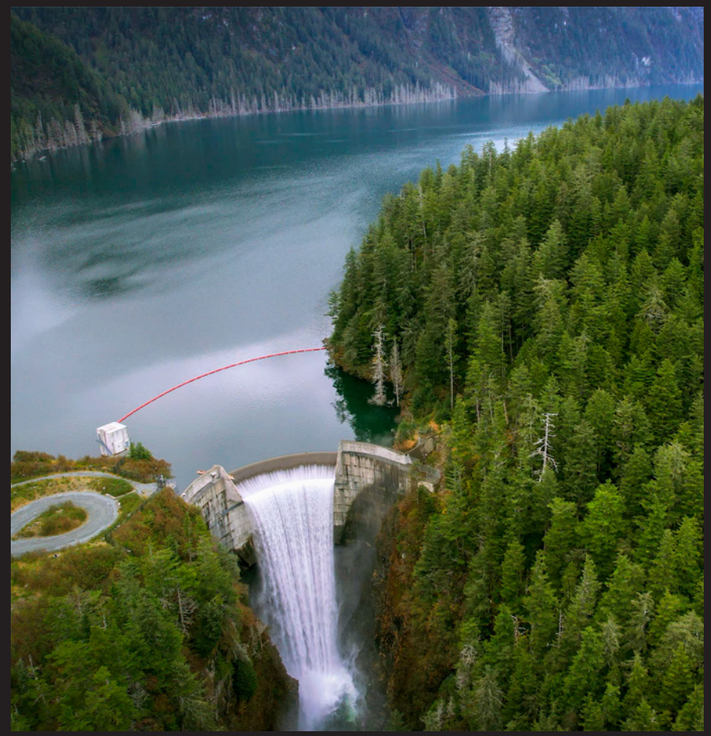
– **Annika Ord,** SSP Climate Adaptation Catalyst, hosted by the Alaska Climate Adaptation Science Center, University of Alaska Fairbanks

SSP Climate Adaptation Catalyst Annika Ord stands on the shores of Daxanáak Berners Bay after traversing and paddling down from the Juneau Icefield. Photo: Lee House



**Learn more about some of the work and programs our partners are championing:**





**Generating Energy Independence and a Rural Workforce**

Sitka youth tour the Blue Lake hydroelectric powerhouse and build an energy efficient model home during two years of the Southeast Renewable Energy Camp – a week-long exploration of Sitka's past, present and future energy resources. Community partners, including City Parks & Recreation, Renewable Energy Alaska Project and Sitka Conservation Society (SCS) are working to engage youth early, introducing careers in renewable energy. This year, SCS and the City of Sitka are starting an internship program to expand those opportunities for high school and post-secondary aged youth.

Photos – above: Ryan Morse, left: Lee House

**Climate Adaptation Begins with Understanding**

For over nine years, the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership (HNFP), led by the Hoonah Indian Association, has worked to enhance, understand, restore, and care for watersheds near Xunaa in ways that prioritize local employment and local priorities. Their work is informed by a watershed management plan and a Climate Adaptation Plan collaboratively developed in 2022 that explores how climate change may impact critical cultural and community resources.

Pictured, the HNFP crew map previously unrecorded anadromous salmon streams while Addy Mallott, SSP Storytelling Intern, helps document. Understanding salmon distribution and health across different microclimates on the Tongass is critical for informing land management decisions. Storytelling helps inspire, spread good ideas, and facilitate connections across the region.

Photos: Lee House

**Revising Tongass Land Management Plan to Integrate Changing Environment**

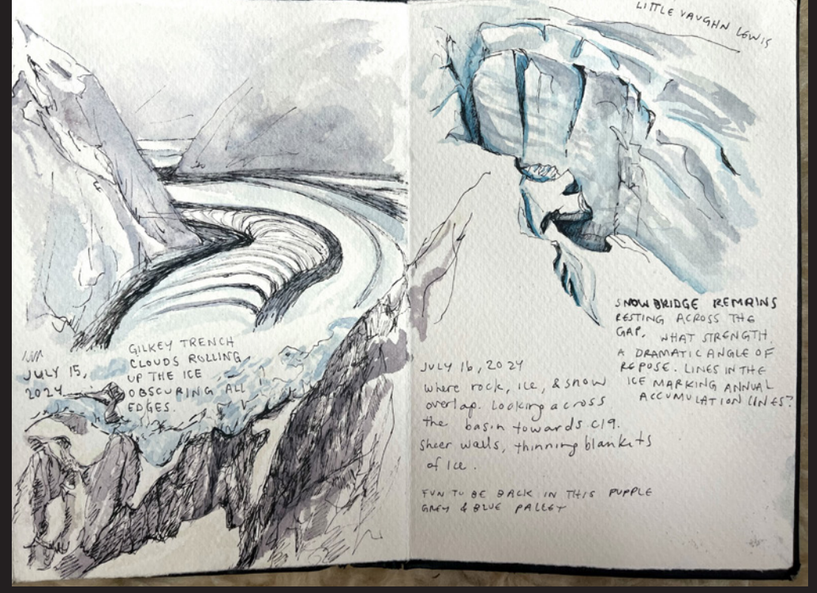
Southeast Alaskans rely on the lands and waters of the Tongass National Forest for food, jobs, drinking water, hydropower, and more. The USDA Forest Service is updating the Tongass Land Management Plan – a foundational document that dictates management. This iteration is particularly important because it replaces the 1997 plan which does not recognize climate change impacts. SSP partners are working to ensure the plan reflects community priorities while protecting the resources we use and care about.

Photos – top: Lee House, bottom: Bethany Goodrich

**Building Connection to Place**

Stories and art inspire. They teach us of the past, can help reveal new futures, and remind us of our connections to the land and to each other. Strengthening and celebrating this is an essential piece of supporting resilience. Projects like the Selkie Zine, a small publication that collects and shares stories about our relationships to climate change and home, provide a space to share these stories and build community.

Sketch by Annika Ord of Juneau Ice Field




**Making Clean Energy more Accessible and Affordable**

Because Southeast enjoys abundant hydro resources, much of our electricity is clean, abundant and available to displace imported fuels for heating. Spruce Root is partnering with Alaska Power & Telephone Company to help decarbonize Prince of Wales Island – with a target of 240 Tribally-owned heat pumps. This project includes training local technicians, and building a rural workforce to meet the rising demand for installation.

Southeast Conference (SEC) and Alaska Heat Smart are partnering to help homeowners replace traditional heating systems with heat pumps through income-dependent financial incentives.

In 2024, the Renewable Energy Alaska Project also helped support a clean energy workforce by hosting training opportunities with Tlingit-Haida Regional Housing Authority for solar installation and SEC for biomass boiler maintenance.

Photos: Bethany Goodrich



Photo: Lione Clare

# *Kutí Project Expands Across Southeast Alaska:* *Community-driven Geohazard Monitoring*

BY LISA TEAS CONAWAY, COMMUNICATION COORDINATOR &
SARAH TOBEY, SCIENCE EDUCATOR AND COMMUNITY COORDINATOR

Over the last ice age, glaciers sculpted Southeast Alaska into the dynamic and awe-inspiring landscape we see today. Dramatic fjords and steep hillsides jut up from the ocean with towering forests growing on a shallow layer of topsoil over bedrock. Embedded in the landscape, a vibrant and complex culture of people thrive. The Lingít, Haida, and Tsimshian people have tended to Southeast Alaska since time immemorial, shaping the land as it shapes them.

As an abundant temperate rainforest, heavy precipitation is central to the land and livelihoods of the people. However, the increasingly warm climate is causing more rain, with several long-standing rainfall records being broken in recent years. This increase in rain is felt even more when it comes as an atmospheric river, a long narrow band of moisture carried from the tropics to the poles. In recent years, atmospheric rivers have been increasing in both frequency and severity. When heavy rainstorms saturate the topsoil it can become unstable.

The end of summer 2015 saw a large storm that triggered more than 40 landslides across Baranof and Chichagof Island, one of which resulted in the loss of three lives. This tragic event served as a catalyst for the creation of the Sitka Geo Task Force.

The Sitka Geo Task Force brought together Tribal leaders and landslide experts to create a landslide risk dashboard specifically for the community. The dashboard was the culmination of three years of hard work and provided an opportunity for the community to have input in a system that is meaningful to the people it serves. Data is collected by the National Weather Service weather station at Rocky Gutierrez Airport in Sitka and a frequentist logistic regression model is used to estimate the probability of a landslide event based on the amount of rainfall that occurs in a three-hour window. Real time risk levels are shown along with recommended actions and information on emergency preparedness.

A Prince of Wales Alaska Youth Stewards crew member adjusts tipping bucket and rain gauge on Port Saint Nicholas Road. This device measures rainfall. Photo: Zofia Danielson

This landslide dashboard system is the first of its kind in Southeast Alaska and serves as a testament to what is possible when scientists work together with local Tribes and communities. Sitkalandslide.org was launched in 2022 and was accomplished through strong partnerships between Sitka Tribe of Alaska, Sitka Sound Science Center (SSSC), Tlingit & Haida, Weather-Ready Nation, among others, and funded by the National Science Foundation.

Since the 2015 fatal landslide in Sitka, three tragic slides have claimed nine more lives across Southeast Alaska.

*"Southeast Alaskans are interested in a whole community approach to landslide risk reduction, information dissemination, and landslide response. We understand firsthand that resilience is a community effort"*

**– Ella Naumann,** SSSC Research Data Manager.

View of Hoonah from a nearby ridge. Photo: Lee House

The rate of landslides and their resulting fatalities are increasing not only in our region but also worldwide. September 2024 saw the largest number of fatal landslides globally on record according to Dr. Petley, Vice-Chancellor of the University of Hull in the United Kingdom, published in The Landslide Blog, October 9, 2024.

With support from the National Science Foundation, landslide research and hazard mitigation has continued and expanded from the Sitka landslide research team into the region-wide Kutí project. Kutí (Lingít for weather) aims to address community concerns about geohazard safety across the region.

In partnership with the regional Tribal government Tlingit & Haida and Tribal governments in six additional Southeast communities, this collaborative team is developing natural hazard alert systems and other risk reduction tools specific to each community. Concerns include rockfalls in Skagway, slides and erosion in Klukwan, slides and road system viability in Hoonah, coastal erosion in Yakutat, slides across road systems in Kasaan, and slides threatening homes in Craig.

Community involvement is key in producing both deeper understanding of geohazards and more inclusive and useful outcomes. Kutí is following the co-production of knowledge framework, originally developed in Arctic Alaska by Indigenous experts, to intertwine Indigenous knowledge systems with Western science to co-produce locally tailored research and solutions. Using the co-production of knowledge framework, communities are able to take ownership and direct the research needed to answer their questions.

This exchange of knowledge happens in many settings from more formal community meetings to inclusive potlucks where community leaders share a meal with visiting scientists. All community members are involved, including students through educational workshops and inclusive research opportunities where job skills are developed and practiced.

The Kutí project is actively engaging not only community perspectives, but also reaching across generations in Hoonah and this year expanding to Craig and Kasaan. Zofia Danielson, SSSC Research Coordinator, and Sarah Tobey, SSSC Science Educator and Community Coordinator, partnered with the Alaska Youth Stewards program to install environmental monitoring equipment and to investigate landslides in Hoonah and Craig.

The Alaska Youth Stewards (AYS), a Tlingit & Haida led program, uses an experiential learning approach to provide hands-on natural resource job training, community service, and cultural stewardship experiences driven by community-identified priorities. In collaboration with Julian Narvaez and Bob Girt, the AYS program leads in Hoonah and Craig, our Kutí team met with the youth crew and got to work. Joined by Chet Udell, professor at Oregon State University, and Adelaide Johnson, hydrologist, the AYS crews headed to the streams and the hillsides.

In Hoonah, the crew installed four sensors along streams and one in a muskeg to monitor rainfall and streamflow. On Prince of Wales, the eight members of the AYS crew investigated the mechanics of landslides and measured the amount of groundwater in the soil on various hillslopes. Both groups spent time reflecting on their community's relationship to landslides and rainfall, sharing stories of geohazard impacts and the parts of this project that mean the most to them. The crew also practiced using data collected from the field to visualize how rainfall levels change with weather conditions. A highlight for the students throughout the trip was pulling on waders and practicing their river walking. Through installing sensors, taking measurements, and observing the impacts of geohazards up close, the Alaska Youth Stewards are well-positioned as the next generation of leaders in their communities.

Environmental monitoring devices installed during the youth training are currently aiding in data collection for Craig and Kasaan. Both neighboring communities are in the beginning stages of their Kutí research. These initial activities will illuminate local concerns and specific geo-risks, which will allow Kutí partners to develop a plan that best addresses community needs. Each community is unique in both its people and land and a one-size-fits-all model will not work. Solutions to the growing occurrence of geohazards in the region must be specific to the people and place.

Kutí is still in its infancy but growing rapidly in response to the region's pressing need. The more involved Tribes and communities become, the more informed research will happen, directing Indigenous and rural community-centered solutions. Even at this early stage, Kutí has stood out as one of the leading landslide risk reduction groups within the United States. The USGS Landslide Preparedness Act established the National Landslide Hazard Risk Reduction group in late 2024, and representatives from the Kutí project were invited to help shape its future through participation in monthly meetings. Climate change is altering the planet dramatically, forcing all to change and adapt. This shifting new world presents an opportunity to embrace a long-overdue transformation in how people can work together through co-production of knowledge to face challenges now and on the horizon.

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*The Kutí project is a partnership including the communities and Tribal representatives from Sitka, Yakutat, Klukwan, Craig, Skagway, Hoonah, and Kasaan; Tlingit & Haida; RAND Corporation; University of Oregon; Oregon State University; Scripps Institution of Oceanography; Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA); USDA Forest Service; National Weather Service (NWS;) Alaska Division of Geology and Geophysical Services (DGGS); and U.S Geologic Survey (USGS). The project is funded by the National Science Foundation.*

Hoonah Alaska Youth Stewards crew members plug sensors into WeatherChime environmental monitoring devices. Photo: Zofia Danielson

COMMUNITY VOICE

**RAYMOND PADDOCK**

Environmental Program Director

Tlingit & Haida

## Collaboration for Regional Resiliency

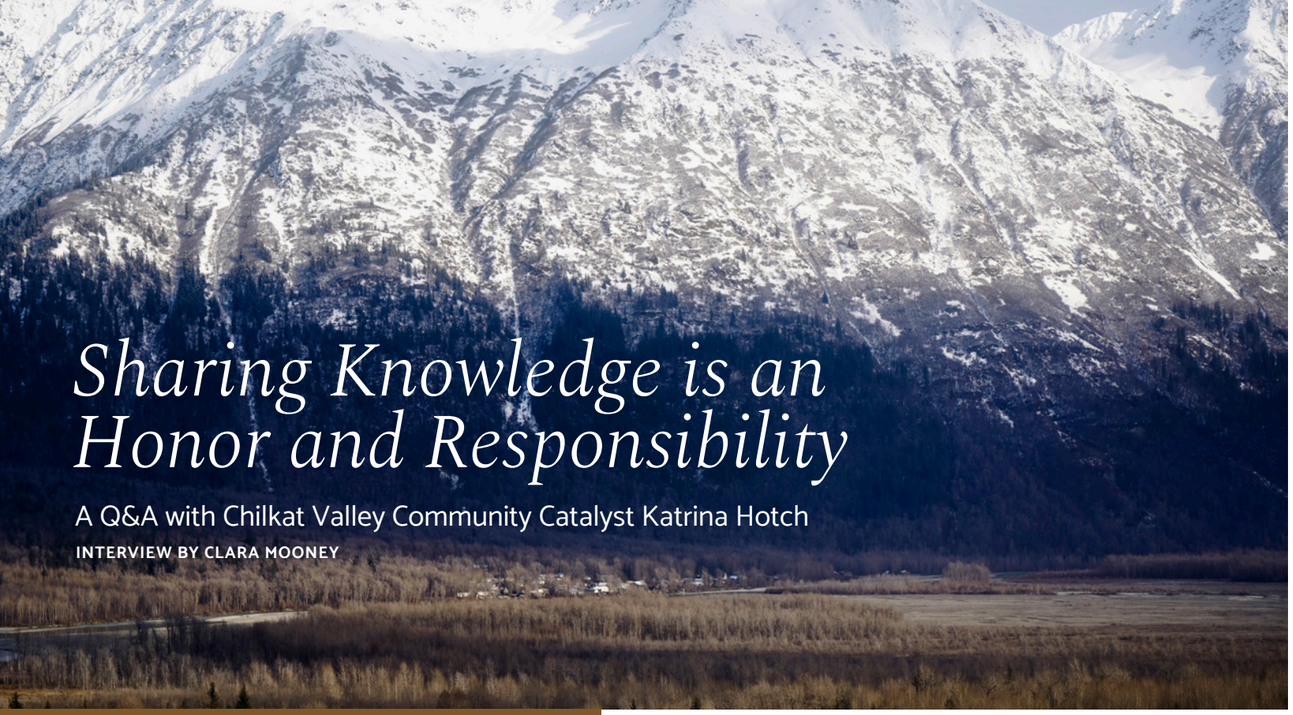
"As the regional Tribal government, part of Tlingit & Haida's role is to be supportive of local Tribes, build connections, reduce friction by adding resources and reducing costs, and strengthen regional capacity and infrastructure.

It's also about upholding communities and Tribes to make informed decisions. In 2020, we released a Climate Adaptation Plan focusing on concerns like fish, forest products, gathering, and more. This was shared as a tool with local Tribes to adapt based on what their communities found most important. That plan also helps identify priorities like addressing landslides which led to our collaboration with the Sitka Sound Science Center and the involvement with our youth crews on climate monitoring (*pictured left*).

We are working to grow our capacity to monitor changes to critical fresh water systems. How does high runoff impact turbidity of drinking water? Does increasing temperature and acidification impact invertebrate and salmon health? Sending water samples to Anchorage is spendy at $3,000 to $4,000 per sample so we are also seeing what it would take to build a lab in Juneau that could help Tribes cut costs, integrate Traditional and Western science techniques, and build capacity too.

Simultaneously, we are working with the City and Borough of Juneau to see how we can change our waste system. Right now, 34% of our trash is actually compostable. So there's a real opportunity to practice co-management between the Tribal and municipal government and collaborate with rural communities, while re-imagining our waste stream to reduce carbon emissions.

In the Southeast, we're too isolated and too limited in resources to be competing. I think the most beautiful part of our work today is that we are collaborating, empowering each other, and holding each other up more than ever. It's exciting."



# *Sharing Knowledge is an Honor and Responsibility*

## A Q&A with Chilkat Valley Community Catalyst Katrina Hotch

INTERVIEW BY CLARA MOONEY

Nestled in the Lynn Canal along the Chilkat River lies the ancestral village of Tlákw Aan (Klukwan), where Chilkat Valley Community Catalyst, Katrina Hotch, grew up. Hotch's deep connection to her community shapes every action she makes.

After years in Áak'w Kwáan (Juneau), supporting language revitalization and traditional arts at Sealaska Heritage Institute, she returned in 2021, eventually serving as a Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) Community Catalyst hosted with the Jilkaat Kwaan Heritage Center in 2023.

Hotch's role involves organizing cultural workshops, dances and events at the Klukwan Heritage Center — a space adorned with bold formline art and rich in cultural artifacts and history. She also supports local food sovereignty initiatives, from the community garden to leading seaweed harvesting. Her dedication to cultural preservation and knowledge-sharing reflects her values of honoring ancestors and preparing future generations.

We had the pleasure of touring Klukwan with Hotch who gave us insight into her role as a Community Catalyst, as well as her activities as a dedicated community and Tribal member.

Photo: Kaa Yahaayí Shkalneegi Muriel Reid

**What drew you to becoming a Community Catalyst? What does your day-to-day look like?**

This position allows me the freedom and flexibility in developing programming that serves my community.

On subsistence camp days, I start early. Gathering red ribbon seaweed for example, all depends on the tides and it can be a really early start. But, harvesting together as a community is fun and meaningful — sharing seaweed with people who maybe weren't able to go out and harvest on their own.

Other days, I'm caring for the community garden and weighing produce harvested there to measure our impact on local food security. Today, I'm planning a meeting for *Culture Days* — a celebration of culture with a variety of cultural specialists sharing and teaching over two days. We have a small staff, so there is quite a lot of behind the scenes work– advertising, gathering supplies, setup, and more.

*"We have to consider Haa Shuká, honoring our ancestors and future generations, recognizing that sharing knowledge is a gift and responsibility. For Lingít, Haida, and Tsimshian people, making that recovery from those years of suppression, to share the strength and wealth of knowledge within our culture — celebrate it, tap into it, and live it — is powerful."*

**Can you share a bit more about *Culture Days*?**

Bringing Culture Days back after, after COVID has been important. It restarted last year, and it was pretty small, but people were just happy that it was happening again. Sharing the things that we were taught by our Elders is such a gift.

It's an important way that we meet the community wherever they are at in their personal journey of cultural revitalization. In one formline class, a 3-year-old girl came with her mother and was captivated by the class. She followed along with the other students as they drew an eagle. Later on, remembering the formline lesson, the girl used the shape of her palm flat against a whiteboard to draw the curves of an ovoid — inventing her own way to create art that was accessible for her.

**What are some values that guide you in your work and how are they exemplified in your work as a Community Catalyst?**

We have to consider Haa Shuká, honoring our ancestors and future generations, recognizing that sharing knowledge is a gift and responsibility. For Lingít, Haida, and Tsimshian people, making that recovery from those years of suppression, to share the strength and wealth of knowledge within our culture — celebrate it, tap into it, and live it — is powerful.

That is one of the things that drives a lot of what I do.

Our Elders set extremely high standards of excellence. When I was a kid first learning to sew, one of my teachers looked at the back of my button robe and noticed my stitches weren't even. "If anybody looks at this robe, they're going to ask you who taught you and you're going to say it was me. So, take it all out and redo it," she said. Keeping those standards in my mind, I try to teach and share in a way that if my Elders were still here they would be proud!

**How does cultural revitalization play into your work and aspirations?**

I'm excited about my new leadership role in our dance group, which gave me a fresh perspective. Before, I was just a dancer and singer. But now, I set practice schedules, goals, and focus on meaningful aspects like pronunciation and cultural significance. I aim to create an environment where everyone can share what they've been taught, recognizing that knowledge comes from different perspectives and that multiple truths can coexist. Also acknowledging that everybody is doing the best with what they were taught and that there are so many facets to our culture and nuances within.

This role has also deepened my understanding of how our dance group, representing multiple clans, reflects the diversity of our community. The notion of having a group consisting of multiple clans, is still new for our people. So, I'm also trying to be more cognizant about that, explaining that our dance group is representative of this whole area, and there are many different clans that come from this area.

**What are some goals you have for your community moving forward?**

One goal is supporting Indigenous plant populations by countering invasive species and creating spaces for people to learn about them and what they mean to us. Larger projects include bringing our traditional knowledge camp back. Also, continuing our efforts with the community garden to build our food sovereignty and security. Getting produce is really expensive here and it's not high quality.

Above: Totem Pole at the past salmon camp location near the Jilkaat Kwaan Heritage Center. Opposite banner photo: Klukwan from the air. Photos: Shaelene Grace Moler

# Drying Red Ribbon Seaweed

Recipe shared by Chilkat Valley Community Catalyst Katrina Hotch

When picking seaweed, pick the relatively new growth and watch for white spots or browning spots that indicate aging. Rinse it in fresh or saltwater. Use saltwater for a saltier taste.

If it is sunny and calm the seaweed can be dried outside on bed sheets. Make sure they are clean, dry, and avoid using perfumed laundry soap when washing. If it is raining and windy you may need to dry the seaweed indoors using sheets, screens or an oven set to a low temp. It can take one to two days to fully dry the seaweed depending on the sun and heat. Each day when the sun is starting to go down, you can use the bedsheets to carry the seaweed back in your home by folding the edges over. If you are lucky, you'll be able to jar the salt that falls off the seaweed as it dries.

The main factor in successful drying is the weather. Should the weather not be dry enough, you can finish by roasting the seaweed in your oven by bringing it to a crisp.

Sharing seaweed with elders and community members is a great final step in harvesting.


Photo: Bethany Goodrich

Photo: Lee House



## KHAASDA TLÁA EDITH JOHNSON

Ludvig's Bistro,
Our Town Catering

Chef, Spruce Root Loan Client, and Resilience Circles Participant

## Fusing Tradition and Innovation

From high-profile kitchens to owning two Sitka businesses, chef Edith Johnson's inspirational story is a testament to her commitment to her community.

"Using local ingredients makes me feel connected. It's not just about the persona; it's about using the people who can harvest them for me and showcasing their talents. I feel deeply connected when I serve food that has been foraged from my hometown. It brings me a lot of joy to serve these foods to people who may have never tried them before.

I credit my staff for the success of both of my businesses. I think the integrity that I've held as a high value has attracted the right type of employees for me. I couldn't do it without the team that I have. I have a soft spot for people who need second chances. I struggled a lot out of high school and had people in my corner who believed in me, and because of that support, I am where I am today. It's rewarding to help people who want to do better for themselves. It's not even about the employment at that point; it's about the person.

Spruce Root helped me a lot, especially with learning financial responsibility. As a chef, you're not really taught the back end of the business side; it's something you have to learn, and it is one of the more difficult parts of being a chef. This was my first time ever getting a business loan. It was stressful at times, but Michael (Ching) from Spruce Root was unbelievable at guiding me through the entire process. Having a team in your corner like Spruce Root, I just can't even fathom doing it any other way."

# *Seals, Science, and Sustenance*

## A Xunaa (Hoonah) Necropsy Involves Hunters and Students

WRITTEN & ILLUSTRATED BY STEPHANIE HAROLD

Photo: Bethany Goodrich

Under low clouds and light sprinkles, 15 high schoolers, quiet with morning grogginess, arrive on the docks. On a bright blue tarp spread over the dock's slick planks lie two gutted Tsaa, Harbor Seals (Phoca vitulina) – belly up, their rib cages, fat layers, and sock-like skin visible.

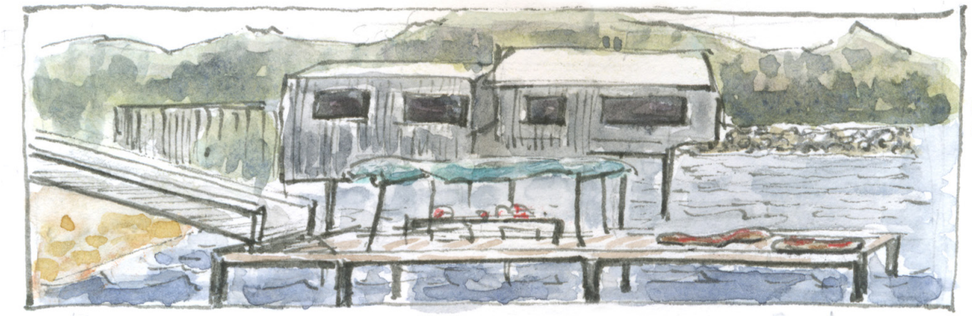
The science teacher reminds the students to stand an "arm-swing" apart because of knives and sharp objects. A researcher explains the personal protective equipment: "Even though there's nothing inherently dangerous, we want to avoid contact with seal blood and mitigate exposure to zoonotic diseases." He offers blue surgical booties to those without rubber boots as well as latex gloves and full-coverage aprons.

The necropsy is sponsored by the Sealaska Heritage Institute (SHI) with funding from NOAA via the Indigenous Peoples Council for Marine Mammals. Hoonah City Schools students participate in both scientific and traditional Lingít seal processing methods. Using a dual-instructor model with cultural specialists (the seal hunters) and researchers (some from University of Alaska Fairbanks) as co-teachers, the necropsy demonstrates how traditional sustenance harvesters can contribute to the ecological data used by government resource managers. As an art educator at the school, I'm here to sketch, modeling an aesthetic approach to documentation. Intriguingly, I'm sketching the scientific process of my father, Franklin M. Harold, an internationally known biochemist, in the context of the Indigenous values of my adopted home.

Over the next two hours, researchers and the less squeamish volunteers gather data: check for damage, measure the size, take skin and whisker samples. The skin's genetic information will connect an individual seal to a lineage. The whisker, a movement-sensing organ which detects prey, will yield life history and dietary information because it grows continuously throughout life.

I delight in such factoids. It's the only piece of my father's devotion to basic research that I adopted. He was committed, above all, to investigations undertaken for no specific purpose — knowledge gathered for knowledge's sake.







Elder Sinak Owen James, soft-voiced and infinitely generous with sustenance knowledge and cultural history, demonstrates calling a seal. A croak slides from his throat, no visible movement from his mouth. Of course, a few kids try to imitate him. It reminds me of a hot August day with him 20 years ago.

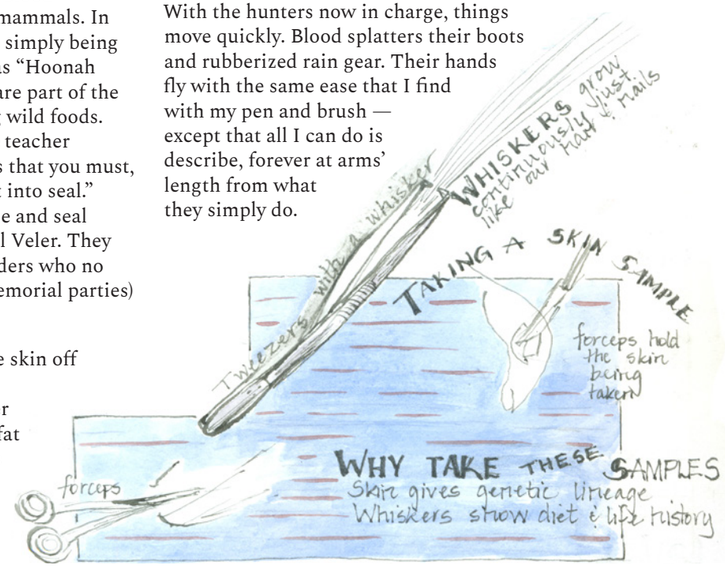
That day, I had accompanied Owen to net sockeye salmon. On the way home, skiff already heavy with 100 red-tinged fish, he suddenly slowed. Fifty yards ahead, a shiny black head bobbed at the waterline, revealing only eyes and nose. "Seal oil sure tastes good with boiled fish," he said.

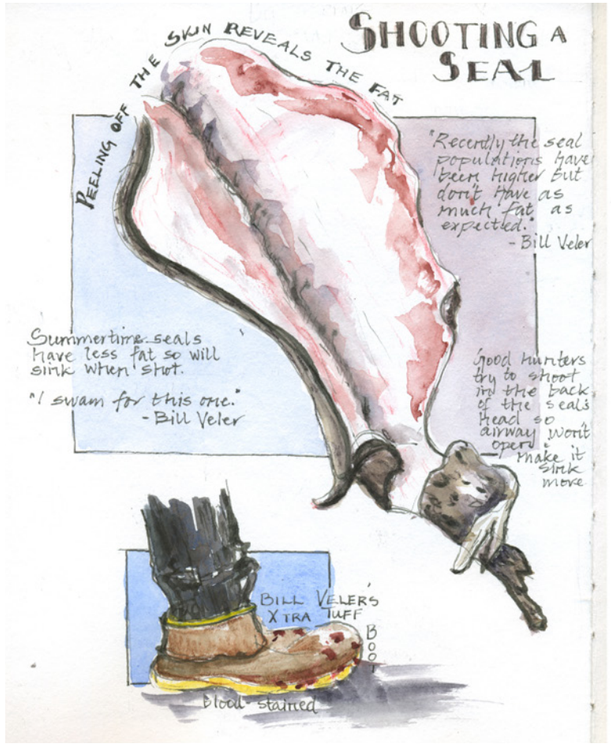
He made an unidentifiable, disembodied sound. The bewhiskered head peered at us. He repeated the sound. Now the head was closer. He lifted his rifle, relaxed. Fired. Soon we were back on shore, not far from where we had cleaned the fish. His hands blended into beach gravel, disappearing in a fan of blood.

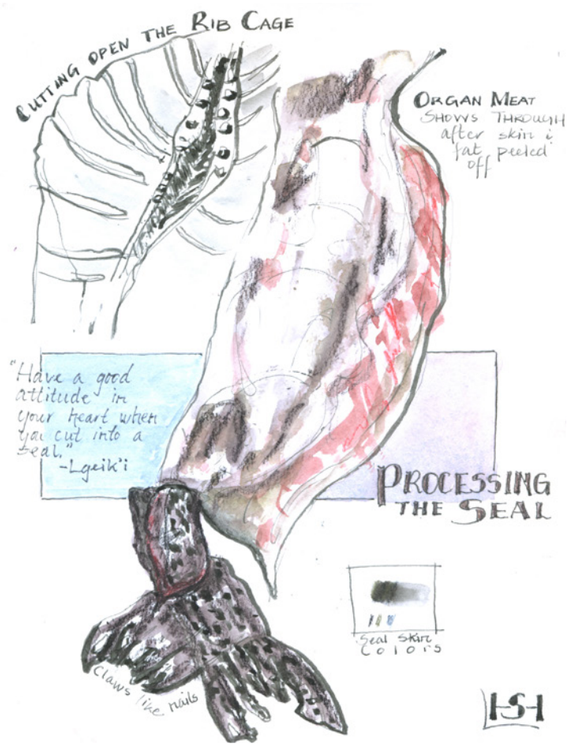
Now the hunters take over. Under the federal Marine Mammal Protection Act, only coastal Indigenous people meeting blood-quantum requirements may harvest marine mammals. In the hunters' hands, the seals transition from simply being research subjects, labeled and documented as "Hoonah Small" and "Hoonah Large," to Beings who are part of the sustenance tradition of gathering and eating wild foods. That's why the Lingít Language and Culture teacher Lgeik'i Heather Powell reminds the students that you must, "have a good attitude in your heart as you cut into seal." Tomorrow, the students will make seal grease and seal cracklings with one of the hunters, Guk'l Bill Veler. They will distribute the foods to their families, Elders who no longer harvest, and hosts of local Ku.éex' (memorial parties) to be gifted to guests.

With fluid knife strokes, the hunters peel the skin off the fat layer — just like removing adhesive backing from a mailing label. Guk'l Bill Veler explains that in the summer, seals have less fat and tend to sink when shot. "I swam for this one," he jokes.

With the hunters now in charge, things move quickly. Blood splatters their boots and rubberized rain gear. Their hands fly with the same ease that I find with my pen and brush — except that all I can do is describe, forever at arms' length from what they simply do.






Hunter Sheens Levi Mills says that, recently seal populations have been higher, but they don't have as much fat as expected. I add this as notes beside the sketch. I assume the researchers do the same. But does that information — from a lifetime of seal hunting — count as data for the researchers? Acquired over eons and passed down through generations, Traditional Ecological Knowledge refers to the Indigenous information, traditions, and beliefs about the interconnections between all beings within an ecosystem.

The students' attention wanders: they chit-chat and cell phones emerge. But everyone perks up for an organ tour. I'm still trying to document the varied red hues in the bloody pile when the researchers whisk the parts into waiting coolers for future lab analysis.

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It's been a year since the necropsy, and two months since my father died at age 95. His friends send me consolation emails, full of praise for his devotion to scientific thinking. His work strived to publish results, to get information out there where the like-minded can access it. His goal was facilitating a larger dialogue, building on concepts to further understanding.

I find the necropsy sketchbook in a pile on my art table. Turns out, I hadn't finished the spread. Perhaps I hoped to hear what exactly the researchers found out. Or had "Hoonah Small" and "Hoonah Large" simply dissolved into the larger data pool?

My concern highlights an essential difference between knowledge types and access to information. Indigenous knowledge is shared according to community tradition and grounded in an understanding of the ecosystem, including the human relationships within. The science of my father is a quest for reproducibility, often detached from the specific location. Moreover, you normally need an admission ticket of education and academic connections to access his understandings.

Thinking about this, I realized that there are two conceptual receptacles the seals were distributed in: cultural food and scientific data. I know exactly where the food bucket went. The oil extracted from layers of blubber became a golden, sour syrup. Like the cracklings, crunchy insoluble material leftover after rendering, it carried far more significance than practical nutrition. It's about the feeling on the tongue, the filling up of the stomach with the flavors and strength of the ancestors. The processing embedded the participants in the routines of ancestors, binding generations by sharing the practices. When this oil was then distributed at the first fall Ku.éex' of the year, the whole community became part of the process.

But too often, the location of the University science bucket is unclear. In the quest for universal rules that apply everywhere, in the painstaking process of duplicating the research, verifying the conclusions, and refining the thinking by building on ideas — "Hoonah Small" and "Hoonah Large" could have simply become part of a wider data set, thereby erasing their individual stories. I suspect that's what my father would have expected.

But how about a public accounting of how the specific observations by the hunters and the students meshed or didn't mesh with the information later tallied in a lab? 'Hoonah Large' and 'Hoonah Small' were our neighbors. Surely, the humans they shared these waters with should know of their contribution. Kind of a Celebration of Life, like I'm currently planning for my father.

That's where those students come in. The seal samples are stored for safekeeping in a repository at the Museum of the North on the University of Alaska Fairbanks campus. "Research as education is my passion," says Arielle Halpern, Senior Program Manager for Indigenous Science and Research at SHI and Affiliate Professor of Environmental Science at University of Alaska Southeast. She looks forward to future opportunities to work with students to analyze the samples. She knows that in order to have a more cohesive understanding of the world we share and stronger, more powerful partnerships between community members and Western-style experts, information from multiple systems of knowledge needs to be better fused. She also wants sustenance harvesters to understand how they can contribute to the process.

Eventually, all that information also needs to be available to the people of the place where it originated: even if just highlighted dots on a scatter plot, which specific ones were "Hoonah Large" and "Hoonah Small"? Perhaps one of those students on that slippery dock will even be inspired to pursue a degree, pull out those samples, and someday bring that information home.

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*Stephanie Harold is an art educator and Alaskan sketch artist working in wild places to create evocative visual stories about nature, science, and culture. She has lived in Xunaa Hoonah for over 30 years.*


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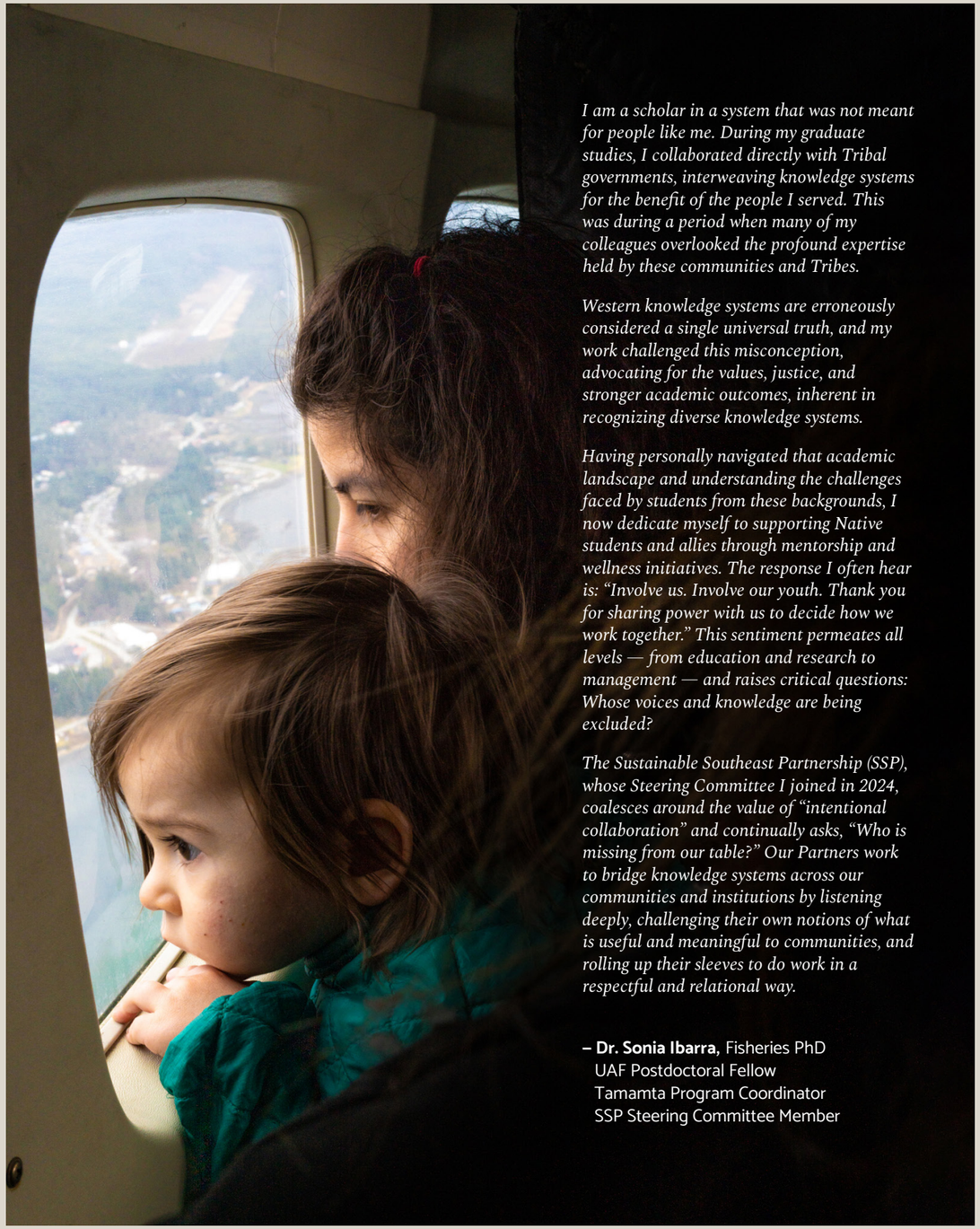
# *Bridging Knowledge Systems, Intentional Collaboration*

Across Southeast Alaska, Partners are advancing the co-production of knowledge – rolling up their sleeves to do work in a respectful and relational way.

Jesse Pilcher harvests cockles and clams, which are an important food source in Keex̲ Kwáan (Kake). The Organized Village of Kake is working to revive an Indigenous marine resource management system known as clam gardens. Photo: K̲aa Yahaayi Shkalneegi Muriel Reid





*I am a scholar in a system that was not meant for people like me. During my graduate studies, I collaborated directly with Tribal governments, interweaving knowledge systems for the benefit of the people I served. This was during a period when many of my colleagues overlooked the profound expertise held by these communities and Tribes.*

*Western knowledge systems are erroneously considered a single universal truth, and my work challenged this misconception, advocating for the values, justice, and stronger academic outcomes, inherent in recognizing diverse knowledge systems.*

*Having personally navigated that academic landscape and understanding the challenges faced by students from these backgrounds, I now dedicate myself to supporting Native students and allies through mentorship and wellness initiatives. The response I often hear is: "Involve us. Involve our youth. Thank you for sharing power with us to decide how we work together." This sentiment permeates all levels — from education and research to management — and raises critical questions: Whose voices and knowledge are being excluded?*

*The Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP), whose Steering Committee I joined in 2024, coalesces around the value of "intentional collaboration" and continually asks, "Who is missing from our table?" Our Partners work to bridge knowledge systems across our communities and institutions by listening deeply, challenging their own notions of what is useful and meaningful to communities, and rolling up their sleeves to do work in a respectful and relational way.*

– **Dr. Sonia Ibarra,** Fisheries PhD
UAF Postdoctoral Fellow
Tamamta Program Coordinator
SSP Steering Committee Member

Above: Sonia Ibarra and her son look out over the community of Keex̲ Kwáan where she has built friendships over 12 years of research and work. Her work underscores the significance of continuing to show up in, and for, rural communities. Photo: Bethany Goodrich

Learn about ways our Partners are advancing the co-production of knowledge, including through Tamamta, a graduate training program Sonia Ibarra helps to coordinate ▸

**Tamamta: Uplifting "All of Us"**

The Tamamta program, named after a Yup'ik and Sugpiaq word meaning "all of us," is a graduate training program funded by the National Science Foundation, focused on merging Indigenous and Western sciences to advance graduate education and research in fisheries and marine sciences.

The program was established to address the persistent inequities within education and resource management systems across the state, including fisheries management practices that prioritize fish as a commodity and disregard their significance as relatives. It also recognizes the challenges faced by Indigenous students in academia who seek to conduct place-based research with their Tribal communities.

Tamamta provides mental, physical, and spiritual wellness support for scholars throughout their academic journey, acknowledging the difficulties of being among the few who are trying to reform the system.

Currently, the program has 18 scholars across the state pursuing masters and PhDs. In Southeast Alaska, scholars are based in Sitka and Metlakatla, with another working alongside Tribes in Haines.

Photo: Tazia Wagner

Photo: Courtney Carothers

Photo: Jeff Richardson

Photo: Bethany Goodrich

**Studying the Savior Fish: Saak (Hooligan)**

Eugene Peltola II is studying saak (hooligan) alongside the Chilkoot Indian Association (CIA) in the Tamamta program at the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF). His study is focused on reproduction patterns.

The small, silvery fish known as saak, ooligan, or hooligan migrate from the Pacific Ocean to freshwater each spring to spawn. Celebrated by coastal Tribes, they are called "savior" or "salvation fish" due to their role as the first harvest after a long winter. These fish belong to the smelt family and measure 4 to 8 inches in length.

While they once thrived from northern California to southwest Alaska, southern populations have significantly declined, with some becoming extinct. However, the river systems of upper Lynn Canal, including the Chilkoot River, still support subsistence fishing due to strong saak runs.

For over 13 years, the Chilkoot Indian Association (CIA) has monitored saak populations in the Chilkoot River and expanded its efforts to include other rivers flowing into Lynn Canal. This program is rich in partnerships and integrates both Indigenous and Western science.

Following traditional practices, researchers avoid disturbing the first "scouts" that arrive and wait 24 hours after observing fish before beginning the mark-recapture portion of the study. Their environmental DNA research has also enabled them to detect and monitor the early winter run of saak, which has been documented in traditional knowledge. This collaboration at the Chilkoot Indian Association aims to understand saak abundance and guide their protection.

Through Eugene's work, CIA will also incorporate traditional knowledge about changes in the male-to-female ratio during the run to explore whether saak may spawn more than once.

Left: Shaelene Grace Moler
Bottom left: Julie Ellison

Photo below: Kaa Yahaayí Shkalneegi Muriel Reid

Photos this page: Scott Burton

**Reviving Clam Gardens in Keex̱ Kwáan**

In August 2023, Kake completed the foundation of the state's first contemporary clam garden, a historic achievement in revitalizing Indigenous marine resource management. Clam gardens, once integral to the diets and economies of coastal Tribes such as the Lingít, Haida, and Tsimshian, enhance shellfish productivity by creating rock-walled terraces that support local ecosystems. Colonization disrupted these food systems, but efforts led by the Organized Village of Kake (OVK) are reclaiming this knowledge, with Ethan Kadake as the Clam Gardens Coordinator.

Ethan's journey began with the Alaska Youth Stewards (AYS), a Tlingit & Haida program fostering Indigenous youth in environmental stewardship. The Kake clam garden started as a food security project during the pandemic and evolved into a broader food sovereignty initiative, integrating traditional ecological knowledge with Western science by reviving a traditional resource management method and enhancing productivity and monitoring methods with modern technology. Beyond enhancing a vital food source, the garden strengthens community bonds, offers educational opportunities and career pathways for local youth, and serves as a replicable model for other communities.

**Resilience Circles**

Seeking an opportunity to scale Native business and well-being in Alaska, Spruce Root and Jump/Scale launched Alaska Native Resilience Circles, a year-long cohort based program to support Indigenous entrepreneurs.

This initiative strengthens the capacities of Alaska Native enterprises for ecosystem guardianship, long-term economic resilience, comprehensive well-being, and community mental health.

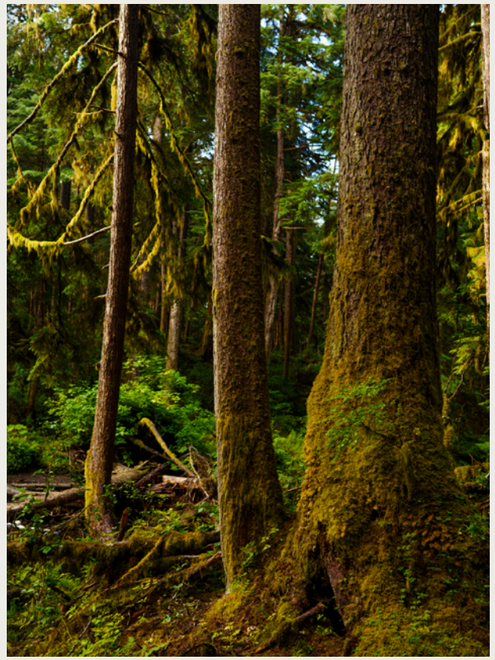
Resilience Circles takes a holistic approach to entrepreneurship, recognizing that healthy communities rely on strong local businesses, and business success is deeply connected to personal and cultural well-being.

Participants engage in a series of in-person and virtual workshops that cover a wide range of topics: personal and business financial planning, marketing and branding, physical health and nutrition, mental health, and Indigenous culture and values.

By integrating financial knowledge with cultural grounding and wellness practices, the program fosters sustainable growth for both individuals and their businesses.

By the end of the year, Resilience Circles participants emerge with enhanced business skills and a stronger support network of fellow Indigenous entrepreneurs. This program is more than business training – it is a movement to reclaim and sustain Indigenous knowledge, wellness and economic sovereignty across Alaska.

Spruce Root and Jump/Scale are honored to cultivate this space, empowering Native entrepreneurs to thrive in a way that reflects their values, strengthens their communities and ensures long-term resilience.

Top & bottom photos courtesy SIGN. Middle photo: Bethany Goodrich

**Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network**

Tlingit & Haida's Seacoast Indigenous Guardians Network (SIGN) is a collaborative partnership of Tribal governments, Federal government agencies, Alaska Native corporations, and environmental non-government organizations created to empower every Southeast Alaska Tribe and community with the tools and resources they need to steward and restore balance to their traditional homelands and waters. SIGN works to strengthen Southeast Alaska communities through job creation, professional training opportunities, youth programs, outreach, and collaborative stewardship of traditional homelands and waters.

SIGN was established through an agreement between the USDA and the Central Council of the Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (Tlingit & Haida) – launching publicly in 2023. The partnership identifies strategic priorities that meet the needs of Indigenous communities who depend on marine and terrestrial resources for food security, health and sustainable economies.

The Indigenous Peoples of Southeast Alaska have long served as stewards and guardians of their homelands and waters. Through the preservation and continuation of profound knowledge systems and sustainable practices, Alaska Native communities have worked for over 10 thousand years to ensure traditional lands and waters thrive and continue to maintain the well-being of their people. SIGN was developed to support and strengthen the self-determination of Alaska Native communities with its primary mission being the incorporation of Indigenous place-based knowledge into the monitoring, protection, restoration, and management of cherished territories.

In 2024, SIGN expanded to include seven communities with three additional communities in the preparation phase. They also partnered with all four Alaska Youth Stewards crews (a Tlingit & Haida youth stewardship program) and the Ocean Conservancy to remove about 4,000 pounds of ocean debris during cleanups.



Above photos: Ryan Morse

COMMUNITY VOICE


**NAOMI JONES**

Federal Subsistence Board Class Participant

Mount Edgecumbe High School Senior

Tyonek, Alaska

## Subsistence is Our Way of Life

"I have been subsistence harvesting since I was born. Whether by the fish cutting table or helping package moose for the freezer, I've always been right there helping. Living in a rural village is hard, especially when you have to order your groceries and have them sent down by plane. This is when having foods, like moose and salmon, is especially important.

Being so intertwined with our ways of life pushed me to take the Federal Subsistence Board Policy and Procedures class at the University of Alaska Southeast Sitka Campus — a dual enrollment class offered in partnership with Sitka Conservation Society and the U.S. Forest Service. Taking the class showed me how much our Regional Advisory Councils (RAC) listen to community voices, bringing their concerns up the ladder to the Federal Subsistence Board where measures are taken for our ways of life.

Being involved can mean a variety of different things. It can mean going to a meeting, submitting a proposal, testifying about your concerns, or applying for a seat on your local RAC. Doing this shows that rural Alaskans care about our resources. I am hoping to apply to the SouthCentral RAC to represent myself, my family, and most importantly, my community.

Without subsistence, life is quiet. Without subsistence, I'm not close with my family. Without subsistence, we are not a community. Without subsistence, there is starvation in rural areas. Without subsistence, I see a decay in Alaskan Native traditions. Without subsistence, I see more substance abuse. Without subsistence, there are no funny stories. Without subsistence, I see Elders not sharing traditions. Without subsistence, there is no me.

Subsistence creates life. Subsistence creates memories. Subsistence is about love. Subsistence is special. Subsistence is our way of life. Chiqnik. Thank you."

# *In the years ahead...*

We look forward to continuing to work as a network of Southeast Alaskans who celebrate over a decade of experience building collective capacity, and working in a solutions-based way.

As I write this, the Seacoast Trust has reached $27.5M toward our ultimate vision of $100M. Guided by Alaska Native values, the principal is invested for future generations while accrued interest is available for use by the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) in times of need. This past year, marked a milestone, the first approved distribution of the Seacoast Trust. Funds distributed in 2025 will be used to support SSP staff, projects and programs. Our long-term pursuit of financial autonomy is demonstrating that conservation and community development can thrive independent of unpredictable federal funding.

Growth for us includes deepening our roots while refining our approach. Excitingly, we continue to expand our capacity by working with new Partners to hire Catalysts in more communities and in areas of expertise that are critically important to our region. It brings us utmost joy to witness the people we have worked with as youth transition into local leadership positions— many working with our growing network.

The SSP is effective, because our partners are engaged. During our annual spring retreat in 2024, more than 150 people representing over 70 Tribal governments, non-profits, government agencies, and businesses came together from all over the state and country to build relationships, share knowledge, celebrate successes, and accelerate projects. That's impressive. Our partners are willing to invest time and resources to be together every year, because they believe in the power of collective impact. By meeting in person and nurturing those relationships regularly using digital means, our community is continuously strengthening and deepening our impact in the region.

**I am grateful for our partners who continue to lean into our values and pull the canoe forward together. Collectively, if we know which direction our course is and our paddles are in sync, we are able to glide smoothly through any waters, whether they be calm or rough.**

With great respect for your partnership and support.

– **Marina Anderson**, Program Director
Sustainable Southeast Partnership, Spruce Root



## In gratitude to the following SSP Catalysts and their partner organizations:

**Sgaahl Siid Xyáahl Jaad Marina Anderson**
SSP Program Director
Spruce Root

**Shannon Stevens**
SSP Deputy Director
Spruce Root

**Wooshkeeká Brooke Leslie**
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Spruce Root

**Michael Mausbach**
Regional Workforce Development Catalyst
Spruce Root

**Shaelene Grace Moler**
Regional Communications Catalyst
Spruce Root

**Annika Ord**
Regional Climate Adaptation Catalyst
University of Alaska Fairbanks

**Adriana Northcutt**
Regional Energy Catalyst
Renewable Energy Alaska Project

***Hiring***
Regional Tourism Catalyst
Allen Marine

**Jennifer Nu**
Regional Food Sustainability Catalyst
Ecotrust

**S'eiltín Jamiann Hasselquist**
Regional Healing Catalyst
Haa Tóoch Lichéesh Coalition

***Hiring***
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Ecotrust

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Klawock Cooperative Association

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Sitka Conservation Society

**Alanna Bagdon**
Skagway Community Catalyst
Skagway Development Corporation

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The Sustainable Southeast Partnership is a network of partners including Tribal governments, Alaska Native corporations, non-profits, economic development organizations, federal agencies, local businesses, and individuals that unite diverse skills and perspectives to strengthen Southeast Alaska culturally, ecologically, and economically.

These are our stories.

SUSTAINABLE SOUTHEAST PARTNERSHIP

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