



# Finding Balance at the Speed of Trust

The Story of the Sustainable Southeast Partnership

BY PETER FORBES







Photography: Bethany Goodrich, Ian Johnson, Lee House

Cover photo: Ian Johnson

Design and formatting: Aaron Ferguson





# Why this Story?

Home to old-growth forests, towering peaks, and salmon streams feeding whale-filled waterways and 32 culturally-vibrant rural communities, Southeast Alaska is unlike anywhere else.

Alaska Natives indigenous to this region have histories of resilient economies stretching back millennia. However, for decades, we've experienced protracted conflicts around resource use that have created enmity between conservation groups and industry. Local economies have declined as milling has become less viable and as extractive activities have impacted the wildlife habitat residents rely upon for subsistence harvesting. We now import most food and energy sources, and, due to issues arising from the relatively recent colonization of Alaska, we face a lack of assets and capacity to pursue more sustainable approaches to growth not dependent on boom and bust cycles.

Southeast Alaska is still home to the world's largest remaining coastal temperate rainforest; this place and the ways of life it supports are increasingly rare global treasures. To ensure this story continues for millennia more, we must find a common understanding of how economies, communities, and a healthy environment can co-exist and co-evolve.

Through deep collaboration with communities, the Sustainable Southeast Partnership is striving to answer these questions: How can we support community well-being and build projects benefiting our families and neighbors? How do we protect our rainforest home so future generations can continue to depend on its resources? How do we build a robust and diverse economy supporting more self-reliant rural communities? As with all of our work, we hope this story amplifies the voices of community members as they articulate how they wish to sustain the traits that make their hometowns unique, the starting points for thriving, resilient prosperity.

—Paul Hackenmueller, 2018  
Program Director  
Sustainable Southeast Partnership











# — A Story in Brief

## INTRODUCTION

**A single drop of water releases its hold on a spruce branch and begins its journey to the ocean.**

There beside the creek, at the foot of a giant Sitka spruce, kneels a motionless hunter watching every slight movement in this sanctuary. Further down the watershed toward the slowly rising ocean is a young Native woman in waders and a clipboard studying the water, making notes on her future. Beyond the surf of Tebenkof Bay is a Zodiac filled with white-haired men and women grateful that they have been changed by their experience of the raven and the eagle and the bear. Just emerging much farther out on the horizon out in Icy Strait is an eight-story ship filled with a thousand other people looking, wondering, yearning for what is there.

Imagine, if you can, a forest of 17 million acres, or five Connecticuts, with a watery edge of 11,000 miles that forms one geography of life—

*Outsiders call this place  
a National Forest,  
but the people call it  
homeland or Haa Aaní:  
“our land.”*

the Alexander Archipelago—that if it were on the East Coast would stretch from New York City north beyond the coast of Maine to the Bay of Fundy, or, on the West Coast, from San Francisco south to the Mexican border. Fifty-seven thousand miles of rivers, streams, and creeks that are the world’s best spawning habitat for salmon. This place provides nearly 30% of the global supply of wild salmon. It is a dynamic, inter-connected, ever rising and falling place of tides where the genetic material of salmon are found embedded in spruce trees 75 miles inland. The three largest islands—Admiralty, Baranof, and Chichagof—are home to more brown bear than almost anywhere in the world, one per square mile.

The true story-tellers of this place are the Tlingit and Haida. It is a place of abundance. From time immemorial, the humans who live here found everything they needed to make a good life. They were rich. Distinguishing themselves only as a different species of life, they call themselves “the people.” Wealth accumulated rapidly enough to be

redistributed every year in potlatch ceremonies. Their art spoke to their ancestors, and still does. Every mountain, every bay had a name they knew attached to it. Every place they gathered their food, or buried their ancestors, was the home that defined them, made them who they are. Outsiders call this place a National Forest, but the people call it homeland or Haa Aaní: “our land.” To say they love this place would be hollow; these people in this place created a culture that fiercely protected Haa Aaní and was defined by balance: ravens on one side, eagles on the other.

Russians pursuing fur and then Americans pursuing gold brought fatal diseases and oppression; the remaining Tlingit were removed from their traditions, forced to leave their families to attend western-style schools, unable to vote, and made to feel their culture was shameful.

In 1907, the landscape that had sustained the people was taken away by a distant American government who told the Tlingit to live in one place and that they were no longer welcome at



their summer camps, and, to make that point clear, destroyed their smokehouses and gardens. The impacts of this were long lasting and are still felt today.

Then, culturally-transforming legislation called the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA) was enacted; a law that asked Alaska Natives to swap their claim to the free naming and use of their own land for shares in for-profit corporations that would own their land for them. Overnight, individuals with more than a quarter Tlingit blood became owners of a corporation that promised them wealth. Alaska Natives became American capitalists, and the land that had sustained them for thousands of years now had to turn a profit in someone else's marketplace.

For years, the Department of Agriculture of that distant government was eager to sell valuable old growth trees from the Tongass, and the signing of ANCSA in 1971 helped them to do it. By the mid-1970s, Native corporations and federal and state governments had joined together to log these old growth forests very intensely.

This land of abundance entered a time of conflict called "The Timber Wars" or alternatively "When Times were Good" depending on one's perspective. As trees fell, money flowed into Native communities, but families, tribal governments, and their Native corporations moved in different directions over how to be in relationship with the land and with each other. Sisters were divided from brothers, as were culture bearers from Native corporations, and fishermen from loggers.

Conservationists, many of whom in Alaska were non-Native, enlisted allies in the lower 48 to stop the logging in the Tongass. It was an era of assaults and divisions that did not stop until decades later

when most of the mills had shut down. Between Native corporations and the federal government, 850,000 acres of forest, an area about the size of Rhode Island, had been clear-cut by 2005, with less than 200,000 of these acres owned by Alaska Native corporations. The landscape and the people had fallen out of balance. About this era, Wanda Culp of Hoonah said, "What have we become? People of the stumps?" (Boudart, 2014)

Now, this landscape is shaped by a new generation, children of The Timber Wars and of lost generations, yearning to create a new era of balance. As the sawdust has settled, the original tribal communities of Hoonah, Kake, Yakutat, Angoon, Craig, Klawock, Hydaburg, Sitka, and Kasaan are having a cultural renaissance even though there are few jobs, the timber money is all but gone, the forest around them is yet recovering, and the cost of living is high just as the population is low. The people still rely on the forests and the streams, and salmon is still part of their DNA. Can there be opportunity to live whole, modern lives without scarring the land?

Out of this moment was born the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, an effort to reconcile, to collaborate, to search together, Native and non-Native, and most importantly, to find balance. This is the story of the Sustainable Southeast Partnership; this project represents a pivot in the sustainability movement in Southeast Alaska from defending public lands to affirming people's relationship to place. The Sustainable Southeast Partnership affirms that we all live in this forest together and helps us answer: How can we help each other to find the land we have dreamed of?

# A Native Place





**Q**uinn Aboudara is a man of many talents which is fully manifested in the unusual decor of his office over the bingo hall and smoke shop in Klawock, Prince of Wales Island.

The small space is littered with parts: electronics, bones, fishing gear, leatherwork, water quality measuring devices, a laptop or two, and plenty of wood shavings on the floor. A former Marine squad leader, Quinn calls himself a community developer and is, in fact, a community catalyst for the Sustainable Southeast Partnership. Quinn's culture, not his job title, best describes who he is:

*It's easy when you're not from here to look out my window and see the sunshine and the mountains and not know that yesterday it was raining cats and dogs and that the road washed out. It's easy, too, to look out this window and see only adventure, fun, wildlife and places to explore. It's easy when you're not from here to look out this window and fall in love with Southeast Alaska for its beauty and not know the history that lies behind that beauty. When the rest of the United States was going through the Civil Rights era and working so hard to get closer to equality for all people, Alaska Natives were still being openly discriminated against. Even my father's generation wasn't allowed to speak their Native language. That's not the past for us, it's a fresh wound.*

*Our history and how we see the land gives us a very different view from this window. I see beauty, but I also see my supermarket. What I see from this window is intimate to me, something you can't get from hiking or recreating or having a lifestyle. It's a*

*deeper relationship about feeding ourselves, purposefully sustaining a way of life connected to that beauty and knowing that my ancestors lived with the same beauty. It's also the story of these things taken away from us, and now a new story about intentionally restoring the balance.*

Anthony Mallot's office is 200 miles north by seaplane and a very different place by culture. I'm led down a carpeted hall with dozens of people working at computers and on telephones to a corner office with floor-to-ceiling windows and a jaw-dropping view of a 250-foot-tall cruise ship docked across the street in Juneau's harbor. Anthony shakes my hand and signals me to sit across from him even as he stays focused on a phone call. He's the President and CEO of Sealaska Corporation, a Juneau-based Alaska Native corporation owned by 22,000 Tlingit, Haida, and Tsimshian shareholders. He's also a graduate of Stanford University, a former vice president within Bank of America's capital markets, the son of Byron Mallot, the Lieutenant Governor of Alaska, and has a humility about him that gives his power a comfortable grace. I see underneath Anthony's crisp blue shirt the next generation of Alaska leadership. He is Tlingit, Eagle, Tsaagweidí (Killer whale) Clan, as well as Koyukon Athabascan, Caribou Clan. His Tlingit name is Gunnuk. He grew up in the era of The Timber Wars, and knows where he came from.

*We call the Tongass a Native place. Most of the conservation community still doesn't respect the Native reality of living here for 10,000 years. They don't respect our history and how we think about and interact with the environment. To the point where they'll call the Tongass a salmon forest or they try*

*to dehumanize it, make it more of a natural system without people.*

*Whenever I dive into nature, I know I'm stepping into places where my ancestors stepped, where they camped, hunted, and picked berries. We have an oral history that goes back 1,000 years. My clan can recite the names of the two old ladies that came under the other side of the glacier. They know the names of the scouts who came around the glacier to make sure that the old women came out the other side. My people still sing the migration song when the killer whales split, when our clans went separate directions. To have thousands years of oral history in this place and then 9,000 additional years of use where you knew every beach, every forest, that every place imaginable has been walked.*

*The drastic changes that came for us are recent history, not like in the lower 48 where Tribes have endured a longer period of degradation and disrespect. My people can recite what happened because their grandmas told them about it. The Park Service destroyed our summer camps because now they owned our land. White trappers and miners were able to stay on our land as inholdings in the federal conservation land, while we were forced out. The US Forest Service burned our smoke houses in the 1960s. Even as I sit here in this office at this desk, I can tell you that the land claims settlement doesn't make up for that history.*

Salmon are fixed in the trees. They're also embedded in the Tlingit people, and one must ask why our conservation movement across the United States has respected the salmon and the trees but not always the people. Southeast Alaska is where

competing definitions of conservation become unbearably visible. It wasn't illegal. Most were following our nation's laws; it was the culture of conservation at the time that made it OK to forcibly remove Alaska Native fish camps and smokehouses between the 1930s and the 1960s. The non-Native writer and homesteader from Glacier Bay, Hank Lentfer, put it succinctly: "Whites slapped Natives in some very serious ways, and I guess you could say they slapped back a generation later with clear-cuts. How might we move forward differently? What does it mean for us both to love this place? Is there a way to do this together?" One answer has to be this: living in the present with an understanding of the past. In 2008, The US Forest Service (USFS) took a step in this direction when the former USFS Regional Forester, Dennis E. Bschor, formally acknowledged the wrongs in a speech before the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indians:

*My message comes from my heart and is meant to convey respect, some of our policies forced Alaska Natives to give up the old ways and take up the trappings of American culture. With the removal of fish camps and smokehouses, an essential aspect of traditional patterns of life were lost. Opportunities for families to work together harvesting fish, to pass traditional knowledge from one generation to the next and to learn respectful ways of harvesting traditional foods were diminished. Alaska Native identity and their wholesome ways of life were seriously damaged by past Forest Service actions. I deeply regret that the Forest Service caused this pain.*

That acknowledgment came just 10 years ago.

A second answer has to be this: living a life that tries to reconcile the history.

Ian Johnson grew up in Minnesota, earned a

***I ask him what it will take to heal their spirit. He quietly answers me: “respect and working together again.”***

Master’s degree in Wildlife Biology and Conservation from the University of Alaska Fairbanks and jumped at the chance to relocate to Hoonah, the largest Tlingit community in Southeast Alaska:

*I’m not from Alaska, but this is the lifestyle I’ve always wanted to live. Subsistence living, people relying on nature and themselves to make a good life. My wife and I are grateful every day to be here on this land, learning a way of life from others, hunting and harvesting, doing my part to help the community.*

Ian is a non-Native community catalyst for the Sustainable Southeast Partnership and he and his wife have settled in a community that is 70% Tlingit. He naturally expresses his gratitude and names the people who have made them welcome, and the Tlingit peoples I spoke to were equally quick to praise him for his work. Ian told me,

*I’m a rural person and yet I’m still learning things about rural life. After living in Hoonah for just a few months, with all this help being given to me by people who barely knew me, it dawned on me that if you want people to be involved in your work, you need to be involved*

*in their work. That’s pretty much when I settled down into Hoonah.*

Russell James and his partner, Theresa, live in Kake, a smaller Tlingit community on Kupreanof Island in Keku Strait. Russell is also a community catalyst for the Sustainable Southeast Partnership and Theresa teaches the Tlingit language in school. Learning the language is an important way to enter Tlingit ways of thinking; Theresa and Russell are care-givers to the spirit of their people. Russell tells me,

*Our kids have to have something to come back to, both a culture and an economic opportunity. Culturally based activities will help the most, and all of it needs to be re-taught: the songs, the harvesting, canning, freezing, the giving away of food to our elders, respect for nature alongside respect for elders. My generation is all about learning the language and re-learning Native pride.*

I ask him what it will take to heal their spirit. He quietly answers me: “respect and working together again.”



# A New Vision



**I**f conservationists are trained to advocate and to defend, then advocates of sustainability are taught to integrate and build relationships.

At least this is true for the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, an eight-year-old innovation in collective action between a disparate and now close-knit band of 16 partners representing Tribal government, global and local conservation, Native corporations, city government, and community development institutions all working together to re-make a thriving society connected to nature, the best of Tlingit and western culture combined. “Everyone feels so fortunate to be involved in this frustrating, brilliant collaboration,” says Stephen SueWing, their regional catalyst for workforce development.

Alana Peterson—a former program director—explains the philosophy:

*What we’re doing with the Sustainable Southeast Partnership is a modern-day application of our traditional Tlingit culture, which is all about living in balance. The West’s word for this is sustainability. We’re not trying to go back to the land or back in time, we’re looking for a balance that enables us all to live here growing stronger in place, forever. No more ‘take, make, waste’ or ‘boom-and-bust’ of western culture. The history of Alaska in my lifetime has been a pitched battle between industry that wanted to extract everything and conservation that wanted nothing to change. Neither was right. Our generation is prepared to do the hard work of integrating ideas to re-make something healthier and long-lasting for our home.*

Lawrence Armour is the recently elected mayor

of Klawock, one of the larger communities on Prince of Wales, and he’s also the administrator of the tribe, called Klawock Cooperative Association, which means that he walks between worlds and listens and responds well to variety of people. He was, at first, skeptical of the Partnership:

*Folks on the city council told me at first to stay away from the Sustainable Southeast Partnership because they were just environmental guys with a different name, but really soon I understood they were much more than that and able to help us address our problems more holistically.*

So much is different and refreshing about the partners: they are former Marines and former Peace Corps volunteers, some have degrees in geography, culinary arts, and evolutionary biology while others also bring a lifetime of indigenous knowledge. They are entrepreneurs and ecologists, many are comfortable walking the edge between disciplines. All have learned through working together how to be more culturally competent. They are both experts and knowledge-seekers. Nearly all grew up in Southeast Alaska; their work cannot easily be done without a strong sense of this place being home. Many are Native: Tlingit or Haida people. They personally embody the diversity and opportunity of Southeast Alaska. They are old enough to remember The Timber Wars, young and strong enough to create a different future.

They organize themselves in two groups that are in dialogue together monthly. Community catalysts bring extensive knowledge and connection and deep relationship to the seven primarily Native communities. Regional catalysts work for larger organizations and bring resources to the Partnership’s four focus areas: community

## *Integration rather than isolation has become a call of the millennial generation in Southeast.*

fisheries and forestry, food security, energy independence, and local business. As individuals, they are accomplished, articulate, independent, committed; in the Partnership, they are humble, self-aware, supportive of each other. No one individual takes credit; they all feel it's a privilege to be part of it. It's a web of influences, resources, and connections bigger than any one person. What they hold together is both powerful and fragile: a truly diverse collaboration committed to addressing the root challenges to their home ground.

Three concepts distinguish their work and make it possible for them to strive holistically toward cultural, ecological, and economic prosperity:

1. Honor people and history, but challenge orthodoxy and institutions,
2. Self-sufficiency: all we need is already at hand,
3. A new narrative for the next generation.

Certain tensions are in their partnership. Each of the 16 partners works for a different host organization—a conservation or business group or a Native organization—many of which have been

at odds with each other in the near past. As much as the catalysts themselves might be edge-walkers, often their hosts are large Alaska institutions and Native entities that have longer histories to overcome. Alana Peterson doesn't want to avoid that tension.

*If we don't work through these institutions then we lose the biggest opportunity to make change. That's exactly where conservation has failed in the past: call the corporations evil, speak of 'a us' and 'a them.' We remain relevant and transformative because we are actually within these institutions. Being an agent for change within these institutions, that makes Sustainable Southeast Partnership powerful and unusual.*

Each partner must navigate a loyalty to what their hosts represent and to what the Partnership represents, success is in reconciling the two. They are modeling a new future by working together over time despite differences in culture, education, and professional identity. Southeast Alaska is a place people have come to for a long time, the



Tlingit know this best, and such immigration will not change. Integration rather than isolation has become a call of the millennial generation in Southeast. How might we live better together?

Good human relationships are the foundation of sustainability and resilience because they enable innovation to happen. Paula Peterson is Tribal Administrator for the Organized Village of Kasaan, a Haida community on Prince of Wales Island:

*Asking what we need is the strongest aspect of the Partnership. They don't work in a bubble advocating for what they think is right. They ask us and then bring us the resources and ideas we need. We're in this long-term relationship to help this community succeed, and that's just incredibly different and healthy.*

The Sustainable Southeast Partnership comes to maturity at a time of profound fiscal crisis for Alaska when its citizens are hungry for alternative solutions to drilling their way out of the problem. The Partnership focuses on small, local, positive wins: creating a local food distribution system in Juneau; building a partnership in Hoonah that integrates local knowledge and the best available science to manage their forests; developing renewable energy projects—hydropower, biomass, solar, wind, and tidal that directly lower costs of living and reduce pollution; finding ways in Klawock to protect the culturally important sockeye salmon fishery within a global economy that rarely honors small places and species.

Alana Peterson embodies these aspirations. Her Tlingit name is Gah Kith Tin, from Diginaa Hit, Luknahadi, Raven; granddaughter of Kin Toow, Cecilia Kunz; a child of the Wooshketaan, Eagle moiety, and she's also served in the Peace Corps and earned an MBA:

*I'm a millennial. I know my identity, we're rich in what we have here and we can create something lasting. Tribes and Native Corporations have tried very hard to do their best: put on the suits and do the white man thing. Their intentions were good, but the results were bad. Resource extraction was the result of that era.*

*The separating of profit from governance was baked into ANCSA when it was created, which was a set up to fail. With that division came a deep struggle between us (tribes and corporations) and the desire to figure out how to create an economy within our traditional values. What I want people to understand is that the Sustainable Southeast Partnership is trying to build meaningful, real relationships between people and the institutions that ANCSA created, and to rebuild trust with outsiders who may want to help. All the important things in history have started between two people. We are intentionally creating a working, positive alternative to the alienation of the past and the intentional separation of profit and governance.*

# Deeper Look



**I**n no part of the United States is the story of alienation of Native people so recent or condensed.

If Tlingit experience were explained by hours in a day, there would be 23.5 hours of steady cultural stability and prosperity followed abruptly by 30 minutes of upheaval, loss of balance, and fatality. Glacier Bay is described in living memory as the bread-basket, or ice-box, of the Huna Tlingit, often as the ancestral heart. For thousands of years, Glacier Bay is where Tlingit people fished for salmon, hunted seals, collected seagull eggs, and hunted Sitka deer. Beginning around the 1750s, advancing glaciers began pushing the Huna Tlingit out of Glacier Bay; they have a dramatic, popular oral history about the Eagle site where the earth opened up, creeks appeared where they had not been before, giant landslides wiped out the settlement. The glacier scraped huge masses of earth, tearing down timber and pushing up beaches. Former mayor of Hoonah, Kenneth Skaflestad described it in modern terms,

*It was like your Washington DC getting destroyed. The people of Glacier Bay didn't re-settle at first in Hoonah, but in strategic locations that had special things which made for a great diversity of stocks. But the Natives of Hoonah felt their heart was left in Glacier Bay. Over generations, we concentrated in Hoonah because the Europeans pushed us from other places and because the people of Hoonah had the most experience trying to work with them.*

The Russians arrived in 1800, about two generations after the Tlingit left Glacier Bay. In 1807, 1,000 Tlingit warriors from across the region gathered in canoes to confront the Russians and

show their power. Three generations later the Russians were done and sold Alaska to the United States in 1867 for \$7.2 million; change accelerated then.

If it was nature that first pushed the Tlingit out of Glacier Bay, then it was nature's greatest western advocate, John Muir, who did it the second time.

John Muir arrived in Glacier Bay by canoe with a Presbyterian minister and a Tlingit guide, To'watte, in 1879. He was awed by the glaciers and the vast natural forces at work in this sweeping landscape of mountain, ice, and water. Being in Glacier Bay made Muir feel fully alive, and he translated his experiences in a series of popular articles sent from Alaska in installments to the [San Francisco Bulletin](#). The son of a minister, Muir had created, through his writing and speeches, his own congregation of privileged, white urbanites who wanted their wilderness pure, without people. Muir's writing and advocacy led directly to the creation of Glacier Bay National Monument and helped to establish a dominant theme of the conservation movement: protect what you love by removing the people who lived there.

This story became a memory carried over generations in Tlingit blood. The story goes that Muir, while in Glacier Bay, rocked the canoe several times so that To'watte was unable to shoot a seal and then, later, a deer for food. It was a clash of values that Muir would write about for his urban audience, but it was an experience that the Tlingit would never forget. Some 135 years later, I'm in Sitka talking with Adam Davis, then a community catalyst for the Sustainable Southeast Partnership and he's speaking candidly to his new colleagues about the challenges that conservationists face in



***When conservationists first arrived, they literally took food off our plates. It's happened over and over again.***

rural Tlingit communities:

*You wonder why you're not always welcomed here. When conservationists first arrived, they literally took food off our plates. It's happened over and over again. We've not forgotten that.*

By 1925, when Glacier Bay National Monument was officially created, Tlingit people all throughout the region had already experienced much loss: family members and neighbors had succumbed to introduced diphtheria, influenza, cholera, and smallpox; and ways of life had been drastically changed when many Tlingit left their homes to live near the missions or to work in the canneries and commercial fishing operations. Alcohol, which had been introduced and encouraged, had led to terrible clan warfare. They tried to sustain a venerable culture while facing the tidal wave of America. Their culture was breaking apart.

Many settlements and camps were abandoned as a direct result of forced exclusion by whites. In particular, fox farmers on several occasions took Huna village lands by gunpoint and forcibly expelled those who had lived there. It was in the 1960s, well

within living memory of many Huna Tlingit people, that both the Park Service and the Forest Service burned smokehouses and destroyed summer fish camps. Former mayor Kenneth Skaflestad picks up the story as if it happened yesterday:

*When the National Park Service came around, first, they were full of promises and enamored the Hoonah people with notions of how they were here to help. Too late did we discover that they were establishing a monument for another nation a long way away. We never lost our attachment or sense of identity with Glacier Bay. No, no this place is ours, how come you're putting in those corners? I gave you permission to make a beach camp now you're starting to mark our boundaries. Now you're in charge and you're taking my land from me? And you want my wife to sweep up your kitchen as my reward? There was a grudge and a humiliation that we had been duped about Glacier Bay.*

Concepts of respect, protocol, and tradition are foundations of Tlingit society, and the impact of loss of respect could be as profound as loss of

life. Kenneth Skaflestad continues, “because of our confusion, we mostly didn’t fight back. We believed in the premise that things would get better in the end.”

In 1940, the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida people did fight back through the legal system by suing the federal government over the loss of their land taken to create Tongass National Forest and Glacier Bay National Monument. No Tlingit ever signed a treaty to give that land away. The federal government never settled that case, but this chess move by the Central Council cast doubt over the federal government’s ability to legitimately sell timber, minerals, and oil from the contested lands.

In Alaska, Native tribes fought no major wars against the United States nor did the government attempt to put Alaska’s indigenous people on reservations as happened throughout the lower 48 states, but the US government did pursue assimilation policies very similar to what had been followed to the south. Tlingit kids as young as five were separated from their families and sent away to boarding schools. Forty to eighty percent of all Tlingit children for two generations were removed from their families, sent to these schools, and taught a completely new way of life. One can read government reports that make the case for how this education helped many Alaska Natives, and it may have done so for some, but, far more often, one hears Tlingit people speak of the ghosts of lost generations: those for whom the boarding school experience was degrading and humiliating; it alienated them from much of what they understood. Many returned home speaking English, ashamed of their culture and terrorized into not associating with it. Many children needed to be re-acquainted with parents who had become strangers. This is

why many Tlingit people born in the 1950s–1970s, men and women who would be 60 to 80 years old today, are referred to as the lost generation.

*The moral impacts of those bygone educational policies are evident today. There are many board school-era students who have faced a loss of cultural identity, language, and tradition. They suffer from post-traumatic stress disorder due to the indignities and traumas of years in boarding school. Since the mid-1970s, these individuals have made up the high percentages of alcohol-fueled statistics: accidents, domestic violence, murder, and suicide. Many have passed through the criminal justice system. They have been living on the margins of both societies, caught between the Native world and the Western world. And they have passed this legacy on to their children and grandchildren, never healed from those emotional wounds.*

(Cheryl Easley, October 2005)

Jeremy Grant was born in Hoonah sometime in the 1980s and carries the impact of the boarding school era. Jeremy is full of pride in his life, his military service in Afghanistan, and his job at the Hoonah Indian Association, and he revels in his culture’s capacity to be master craftsmen and master navigators, but he also remembers that,

*In the 1990s, we were still fearful to speak our own language on our own streets here in Hoonah. If I didn’t leave I would have ended up another drunk teenager on the steps.*

It was that cultural crash that enabled a later environmental crash.

In the late 1960s, the message from the United States government to the Tlingit people was that they needed to be in business, and the Alaska

Native Claims Settlement Act (1971) was the result. ANCSA was the response to that 1940 suit from the Central Council, but it went much further to address all Alaska Native claims because the federal government was motivated to sell oil through the Alaska pipeline which crossed many different Native nations. ANCSA returned 44 million acres but it put those lands into the control of new Native corporations that would need to manage that land for profit. Native people expected ANCSA to guarantee their right to hunt and fish and gather food where they had in the past, but the act was silent on these subsistence uses. Former Hoonah mayor Kenneth Skaflestad:

*We looked at ANCSA as a con game. We scoffed and laughed because we didn't think it would really happen. Tlingit people had the same way of doing things for 1000 years we just didn't imagine someone else could come here and change our lives that dramatically.*

But it did happen, and almost overnight every Native person born as of 1971 was a shareholder in one of these Native corporations.

Every culture wants the future to be better for their kids. There were many Tlingit in the early 1970s who saw ANCSA as a civil rights action, a chance to get land back that had been stolen from them. Suddenly, these new Native corporations were the way to do that, and the primary thing the Tlingit owned was trees. The result in Hoonah was that from 1975 to 2006 nearly everybody became a logger, and logging became the transition to a western ideology. The Native corporations maintained the rights to use their land, which is an improvement over what happened in the lower 48, but the deal meant accepting a different ideology: that nature was a commodity to be turned into

money. The timber industry supported Hoonah for 30 years; money flowed in and trees flowed out. The result was Spasski Creek, Gartina Creek, and West Point Frederick: the people of Hoonah, a people deeply connected to the forests, were completely surrounded by clear-cuts. Then the trees, and the money, ran out.

Bob Christensen is one of the original founders of the Sustainable Southeast Partnership and lives not far from Hoonah across Mud Bay on Lemesurier Island:

*The Huna Tlingit had been doing pretty great for many more generations than we white folks had been here. We told them to become loggers because that paid more and was our way, and 30 years later there were no trees left. A manifestation of that scar is much more complicated than simply being colonized. Being forced to adopt the western way, giving it all you have, and then finding out this lifestyle's really not sustainable and then wondering, 'now what?'*

What happened in Hoonah was replicated even more profoundly to the south on Prince of Wales Island, the epicenter of The Timber Wars. Marina Anderson is a Haida woman born there during The Timber War era and now works for her community at the Organized Village of Kasaan, one of two Haida communities on the island. She told me:

*Being Haida is the way you do things. All things need to be done in respect and love. This made the timber days particularly hard because that time divided families and divided us from the land. It was personal. It broke who we are. If there were two brothers, one might have been a logger and the other a fisherman. We had to choose between giving our families money*

*or devastating the forests. We were a logging family and all went well for a few decades and then there were no jobs. Mostly, we were left with the wounds.*

A decade after the US government returned 44 million acres to Alaska Natives, they settled on twice that much land (80 million acres) to go to the American public in the form of new national forests, national monuments, national parks, and wildlife refuges. Alaska National Interest Land Conservation Act (ANILCA, 1980) may be democracy's greatest example of conservation: legislating that large areas of our country be protected for and from. How you finish that sentence says volumes about where you stood in that history. ANILCA created a source of revenue for Alaskans in the form of tourism, and it also greatly benefited the fishing industry, which relies upon healthy spawning grounds. And, if you love the reality and the possibility of wildness, ANILCA would be the symbol of your greatest passions and identity. It was a huge victory for conservationists.

But this Act also widened a disturbing divide between Native people and conservationists. Native ways of life, the right to "subsist" as a hunter and fisher, were limited, defined, and given equally to every other rural Alaskan on land that once belonged to Natives. It was the equivalent of saying, "your family hunted this island for 1,000 years? Too bad it belongs to us now." It had to be a highly charged blow to Tlingit identity as much as it was a boon to conservation identity. No doubt, most Alaska Natives do see their cultural survival linked to conservation issues like healthy salmon habitat and wild places, but they also see that survival linked to the basic human right of being themselves on their own land. To embrace the

ideology of conservation in Alaska requires that a Tlingit woman must confront the painful memory of her loss of sovereignty.

ANCSA created the divide within Native communities between profit and governance, and ANILCA created the divide between Native communities and conservationists. The driving force of capitalism connected them both. Capitalism and conservation have been dependable dance partners, a ying and yang that encourage and need each other. Capitalism made conservation necessary, and conservation made capitalism look good. Unrestrained capitalism says we can destroy this over here, and conservation says, let's save that over there from capitalism.

For a people whose society is based on a family clan system with annual ceremonies redistributing wealth and where territory was used but never owned, America's hyper-individualism, accumulation of money, and emphasis on private ownership of land had to be deeply confusing and incompatible. Today, I can imagine that a young conservationist and a young Tlingit might agree on many things, but still feel terribly divided from one another by something as simple but provocative as humming Woody Guthrie's famous "This land is your land, this land is my land..."

Come 2012, in Hoonah, and throughout Southeast Alaska, there were deep and difficult divides around how best to live in this beautiful place; divides rooted in capitalism, conservation, and race that someone, somehow, needed to begin to heal. What might it take to live differently with more balance and without such divides? What might it take to heal the wounds?



# Roots of a New Story



**T**he primary actors of The Timber Wars, still relying on the old scripts, had one last performance and the show didn't end well.

The Tongass Futures Roundtable of 2006 was a serious and genuine effort at progress but was grounded in the old model of negotiating tit for tat: wilderness for increased timber supply. It failed when the opposing actors were unwilling to compromise. Erin Dovichin worked for The Nature Conservancy at the time:

*A lot of people involved were genuinely hopeful that by talking across disciplines and with new voices at the table we could find another way forward. In the middle were loggers, fishermen, mayors, community leaders who put forward so many useful potential solutions but the institutions on opposite sides of each other were too entrenched to change their view of the world.*

The logging industry and the conservationists both felt they'd get a better outcome by not compromising. For 30 years, there was a timber industry saying, "there's only one viable economy and it's us." And on the other side you had a conservation movement who said there was either healthy old growth forests or there was clear-cuts and death. There was little nuanced understanding of the situation, at least not spoken publicly, and perhaps that's what it took to raise money and galvanize action against a much larger industry. But neither industry's nor the conservationists' answer were good for the people who lived there. There was no alternative that worked for them.

But come 2012, many things in life had changed since those actors first squared off: communities

and landscapes were exhausted, mills were closed down, and there was a quickly maturing understanding that the nation's capital was an unreliable place in which to be negotiating the future of southeast Alaska. Perhaps it was time to begin solving Alaska's deepest challenges at the community level, where people had forever been trying to live in relationship to the place they love.

There was a strong desire from some to broaden the tent, follow a new recipe that involved leaders on the ground: tribes, fishermen, local entrepreneurs, people who were actually living there. They gathered others who were willing to ask the question: What would it take to change the complexion and the tone of the dialogue?

Space was being created for other voices to enter. Change often comes from the margins, not the mainstream. Bob Christensen is an unusual man, not someone likely to be described as mainstream. Just out of school, he decided to get a real education by building himself a baidarka—or Aleutian kayak—and then paddling it north, alone, for 1,000 miles to Glacier Bay, a place he had never been before. Even before Bob started collaborating with the celebrated naturalist Richard Carstensen, he devoted many years in the forests of his adopted home of Glacier Bay studying patterns of nature. He stood in the forest and watched things, for hours upon hours, days upon days. He studied bears, he studied trees, he studied the flow of water, he mapped things in journals and later GIS, and he compared what he was observing with what he was reading in books, and increasingly Bob disagreed with the books. And then Bob stopped standing still in the woods and started walking. Walking everywhere. Beginning in 2005, Bob teamed up with Richard to spend four years, paid by the Sitka Conservation Society,

walking the forests to ground-truth the impacts of clear-cuts on the ecology of Southeast Alaska; what they found surprised them. Bob told me:

*We had been hired to find smoking guns that could be used to bolster the case against logging in the Tongass, but some of the biggest 'aha moments' were in recognizing how resilient the landscape really was. Light bulbs started to go off for me that we didn't need to just stop things from happening, we needed to do them differently, to recognize that changes in the forest are not always completely bad, and quite often provide new opportunities. I saw that the conservation community was consistently exaggerating the impacts.*

*This watershed was 'nuked' is such extreme language, and it didn't reflect what Richard and I were seeing on the ground. Adapting to change is our ecosystem's specialty.*

*Actually, walking the landscape taught me that things aren't black and white. The conservation world was emphasizing the costs and none of the benefits realized, their story wasn't an honest account of what was actually going on. It was ecological misrepresentation, probably driven by the funder landscape more than the physical landscape. I started to see things really differently than many of my colleagues in conservation. I didn't want to piss them off, and yet what I was learning felt right and that it was opening doors to new relationships.*

*If you get a single cut on your hand it's no big deal, but if you have 1,000 cuts you're in trouble. Logging isn't bad, what's bad is the timing and scale that we experienced in the last 30 years. Do we turn our backs on these places*

*and these people?*

This was conservation heresy, but it was being expressed by one of their own on the ground with facts to back him up. Bob's journey of discovery expanded when he found his way into the community of Hoonah around 2005. For 15 years or more he had lived not far away as the eagle flies, but in a decidedly different world. His chosen home, the place to which he had paddled long ago, was an in-holding on Lemesieur Island, one of those places taken from Tlingit people by the federal government and defended at gunpoint by white fox farmers three generations earlier. It was in Hoonah that Bob started to see and learn things from new colleagues, the Tlingit people, that became the roots of a community-oriented approach to forestry:

*I went to Hoonah to understand the impacts of forestry and came to learn about the people. I began to be exposed to a middle path, an indigenous path. Their view of conservation was far more nuanced and about cultivation and balance. The work shifted in my mind from putting salmon back in the streams to putting people back in place. I started to understand from direct observation that the power of restoration was as great as the power of biodiversity. You can be actively increasing biological diversity through gardening more than by locking things up.*

His observations could be boiled down to this: managing for food (e.g. blueberries, deer, and salmon) in roaded areas where there are people living will lead to more biodiversity and human well-being.

Philanthropy had been changing rapidly in Alaska too. Many funders were exhausted and no

longer funding campaigns to stop things. New funders like The Margaret A. Cargill Foundation and the Paul G. Allen Family Foundation were more interested in community development, integrated action, and cultivating well-being to salve the wounds of a long battle. In less than a year, \$500,000 was available to start putting into practice a new way forward.

Brian McNitt, who worked for many years at Alaska Conservation Foundation—folks in Anchorage who aggregate donated money from different sources and focus it on specific approaches to conservation—sought to design something entirely new from their western perspectives and pulled together a team: Erin Dovichin, Norman Cohen, Bob Christensen, and himself. Erin was the big picture strategist working for a global conservation organization, Norman was the systems-thinker who had a long history of working with indigenous groups as well as large bureaucracies, Bob was the technical, field guy who was challenging the orthodoxies of the movement and willing to go on his own personal journey of change and learning, and Brian was their translator and protector. He brought their vision to foundations, and he used his stature in the conservation world to protect them from the criticisms and disbelief that would come. Their combined work was originally called People, Place, and Fish and when the first grant, that later became a ten-year commitment, came from the MAC Philanthropies, the work was re-named the Sustainable Southeast Partnership.

None of its work would have gone anywhere without a new generation of indigenous leaders who were coming of age, returning home, seeking new answers, becoming the revitalizers.

Many things in life ebb and flow like tides.

Cultures experience deep shocks, like the tidal wave of American values on the Tlingit shore, and can falter or fail altogether, but the long arch of energy is to rebound and return. Young Tlingit men and women in their 30s and 40s today are the grandchildren of the ghost generation, those who disappeared into the boarding schools, forcibly or voluntarily removed from their homes. The ghost generation were the men and women who mostly grew up speaking Tlingit in their homes, but would be shamed into not speaking it again, and many would not learn basic mothering and fathering skills; their children would grow up to be the lost generation, those without cultural markers to know where they did belong, and the children of the lost generation would be Marina Anderson, Jeromy Grant, Alana Peterson, Dawn Jackson and so many others.

Marina Anderson and her siblings, the eldest of which is Quinn Aboudara, community catalyst for Klawock, were born and raised on Prince of Wales Island. Marina went to college in New England. She has red hair and a quick smile. What brought her back to her ancestral roots in Kasaan was a culture camp in 2005.

*The culture camps enabled my brother, Cole, and I to leave the present time and to fall back into our elders' time. I remember sitting in the smoke house and Cole said to me, 'I bet you never thought in a million years that you would be sitting in here doing this.' But we both knew we had the skill, we had the knowledge and the balance inside of us. I knew then that it was time for me to come home. Everything's on us now. We have the Ghost and the Lost generations in front of us. It's nerve-wracking. But it's about keeping the balance, remembering who we are,*



*... it's about keeping the balance, remembering who we are... where we came from, bringing it all into the future.*

*remembering where we came from, bringing it all into the future.*

Marina is now learning the ropes of tribal management from her mentor, Paula Peterson, the executive director of the Organized Village of Kassan (Tribe).

Jeromy Grant is in his mid-thirties and strong, having served two tours in Afghanistan and many more years as deckhand on a fishing boat. He knows those years took something from him: “I’m not sure I have feelings.” But clearly, he does and they are about his home and his people.

*I tell friends in the military, if you don't understand me, you need to see where I come from. Hoonah always was my sanctuary, my place for peace, where I go to find my spirituality, to remember who I am. I've lived all over the world and wasn't sure if it would be safe for me to return to Hoonah. My mom told me about all the good things that were happening again in Hoonah, and I knew it was safe again for me, that it was time for me to return home.*

Jeromy introduces me to another of his

grandfathers, a quiet, kind man who I later learned was instrumental in “keeping Hoonah Indian Association alive in the 1970’s when there were just 53 cents in the bank.” Mr. Ken Grant was also the Tribal leader who worked for decades with the Park Service to have built at Bartlett Cove, on the site of a Tlingit fishing camp, a new Huna Tribal House called Xunaa Shuká Hít—roughly translated as “Huna Ancestor’s House”—completed in 2017. For many it was a physical and symbolic return of the Huna Tlingit to Glacier Bay.

Dawn Jackson is fully coming into her own power as the Executive Director of her tribe in Kake, and three out of four of her grandparents were sent to Sheldon Jackson boarding school in Sitka, which would have been a day’s journey by boat. Dawn was raised mostly outside of Kake, but always longed to return.

*My priorities are being a mother for my kids and to do that through my job at the tribe as well: today our primary work is about restoring language, history, identity, to re-introduce local foods and healthy lifestyles. My life has*

*been about going out into the world to gather tools and experiences and to come back and lift up my community with those new tools.*

Alana Peterson, Sitka, fills in the cultural story:

*My grandfather still spoke Tlingit. He knew the stories, the culture, but it was all taken from him. My father is the result. My generation would be called the survivors, the take-backers, the revitalizers. We have a very important place in this modern day. It was tough feeling I wasn't Native enough and maybe not white enough. Now, I feel we own it all.*

These different worlds brought their yearnings together to form the Sustainable Southeast Partnership. Everyone has yearnings. The logger and the conservationist have yearnings. The Tlingit elder, the Forest Service supervisor, the Native corporation shareholder, the saw mill owner, all have deep yearnings. In changing the dialogue from *What do you fear?* to *What do you yearn for?* the Sustainable Southeast Partnership helps to loosen the tightest knots and, in a respectful way, challenge the orthodoxy of the day. This requires a lot of personal risk and persistence; this work is longer, slower, without flash and easy measurement. Alana Peterson says all change begins with two people.

## TRANSFORMATIONAL PRACTICES

Shaina and Minnie were obviously nervous, facing each other in the folding chairs, in front of a dozen of their colleagues about to share a story about the last 24 hours of their lives.

Few in the room knew one well, and because they lived on different island communities, many

had not met before. It was Sitka, November, 2014 and the first retreat of Sustainable Southeast Partnership, a time to get to know one another and to make agreements. Colleagues by chance, what might be gained from understanding how different their lives are?

Shaina Kilcoyne is the regional catalyst for energy independence, the program director for a statewide nonprofit based in Anchorage, married, with a dog, and cares deeply about the social justice implications of high energy costs. Minnie Kadake works less than a mile from where she was born, in the Prince of Wales village of Hydaburg, is a community catalyst, unmarried, carries a deep concern for how her community will feed itself.

*The salmon run is really important to us. If we don't have that we don't have anything. All of the rest of our food is processed, gets here in containers, and look where we live.*

Gently, slowly, I ask Shaina and Minnie the same questions: What do you wake up thinking about? Who's in bed alongside you? Where do you go to do your work? Who do you interact with the most: a boss, family, community, children, or spouse? Did you eat lunch? If so, what was it and where did it come from? What did you go to bed thinking about? What are the big and small pressures in your world? What makes you happy, and what are your greatest daily challenges? As the conversation unfolds, we learn so much more about the pressures and aspirations of these two very different women and the worlds they inhabit.

The core work of the partnership is about building trust, which can only arise from understanding each other lives. And their task is far more challenging than most collective impact efforts given the geographic isolation of the

# 10 Principles of the Partnership

1. Our work is transparent and based in respectful truth telling.
2. We are oriented toward creating collaborative and innovative solutions together.
3. We believe in the power of creative, synergistic action.
4. We seek to model the behaviors we hope to see in others.
5. The partnership is inclusive.
6. We consciously cultivate cross-cultural understanding.
7. We recognize the importance of equality in Southeast and we commit to modeling our partnership differently.
8. We believe in the untapped wisdom of the community and in crafting emergent solutions to catalyze change that will address community needs.
9. We place a strong emphasis on the power of story.
10. We use people's time and resources well and purposefully.







partners and their human differences. They need to be intentional about keeping the trust between themselves. In 2014, they focused hard on reaching the agreements that became the “10 Principles of the Partnership,” which now have become the culture of their work. Coming together face-to-face for a week each year, the informal social time, the monthly calls to exchange ideas and challenges and to help one another, is costly but may be their most important product. Paul Hackenmueller, their program director, puts it succinctly,

*The magic isn't in the projects, but in how we work together to move a project forward, and what that project ultimately looks like because of a true collaboration. It's about the how.*

But trust has led to a great many projects. Four years after the Sitka retreat, the partnership is now working on 65 distinct projects in food security, energy independence, community-based forestry and fisheries, and localized economy. They are matching resources with community need to develop oyster and otter products, make homes more energy efficient, hire young Native men and women to work on habitat restoration projects, build tiny houses, share a mobile greenhouse, track wolves and ocean acidification, develop markets for wild blueberries, remove mold from Native homes, coach and fund young businesses, support community efforts to protect the sockeye salmon fishery, mentor young men in their first jobs, assist young farmers share best practices, develop technologies that map hunting grounds or alert people to shellfish poisoning, plant seeds for an indigenous network of guardians; in short, do practical things in rural places to build opportunity, to connect people to the landscape and to one another.

The boots-on-the-ground projects are creating practical change (you can read the case studies for what that looks like) but equally important—maybe more so—is the modeling of a very different approach to sustainability. This is the water that Sustainable Southeast Partnership is now swimming in that's hard for them to see, and yet powerful for the rest of us to observe:

### **a: Honor People and History, but Challenge Orthodoxy and Institutions**

John Hillman was one of the Partnership's earliest and most unlikely allies. A Tlingit forester from Hoonah, John worked for 20 years for Sealaska Corporation during the height of the logging days and sold the contracts that led to many clear-cuts, and so it had to be unusual for him later to be walking that ground with a guy working for the conservation organization that most forcefully fought those timber cuts. Bob Christensen and John stayed open to each other, spent time together, and slowly co-created a vision for a different way of managing the forest that was healthier for the land and for the Huna Tlingit people.

A few years later, there was enough trust in the young partnership that John could express what life was like for him in those days of trading trees for money, how he felt a deep responsibility to provide for his community, and the difficult emotional and physical stresses of those hard logging years, and ultimately, he asked that his intentions be respected.

Bob Christensen and the other partners have not forgotten the importance of honoring people as they challenge orthodoxies and institutions. Five years later, at a gathering of about 50 Tlingit and Haida leaders and a smaller group of non-

Native allies who have been convened to discuss the possibility of forming an Indigenous Guardians Network, Bob tells a group of allies:

*If you ask someone to speak honestly with you, and they feel listened to and honored, that's a down payment on something that will later yield mutually beneficial results. The reward for me is that I'm contributing all kinds of things that five years ago I never thought I would be contributing. If you're prepared to do the hard work of connecting to another human being, and if you're willing to commit to regular communication, we can create powerful new relationships and make change.*

As Bob speaks, I think of all the hard work of Native people who have made the effort to walk toward him, and I consider the intellectual, emotional, and physical ground he has covered to earn the trust of the people in the room. In this moment, he's relaxed, knowledgeable, willing to engage anyone, but I can imagine it wasn't always so.

To practice sustainability, as the Partnership does, with an emphasis on equity, economy, and the environment requires that they understand their world through a lens of power and privilege. The Sustainable Southeast Partnership's work is definitely about decolonization and reconciliation, but they would prefer to model it, not preach it. Aaron Ferguson, the regional catalyst for sustainability, offers me this:

*The Sustainable Southeast Partnership emphasizes the practice, they just do it and don't use words like reconciliation or decolonization. We do those terms, yes, but we don't speak in those terms. We're not putting labels on ourselves or anyone else.*

The lived experience of many of the younger partners may not be about race as much as it's about rebuilding democracy, or healing the urban-rural divide, and that's a testament to the success of the partnership to model the world they aspire to.

A refreshing, unspoken truth about their work is that it's decidedly apolitical. They don't think politics is the best use of their time. Instead they work on things they can solve with the people at hand regardless of peoples' background or ideology. They do practical work that makes sense to people living in the communities, and they reach out to each other and offer the resources they have.

This reminds me of the simple, practical advice that Ian Johnson lives by back in Hoonah: "if you want people to be involved in your work you need to be involved in their work." To really do that, however, you need to first comprehend what they live with and have lived through.

## **b: Self-Sufficiency: All We Need is Already at Hand**

The Nature Conservancy, a founding partner in the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, has assets of \$7 billion, runs significant programs in all 50 states and 70 other countries, and employs something like 5,000 people, but when it comes to their involvement, Dawn Jackson in Kake may be impressed but remains unmoved: "Give us the hard data, and help us to do this ourselves."

Self-sufficiency is a core philosophy of the Partnership. Alana Peterson explains the context for why this is so important:

*In Southeast, there's group think that we need someone from outside to help us. We're told that everything good is outside of here.*

*We're proving we do have the solutions here. We have to believe we have the people and the resources at hand right now. No one outside of us is smarter than us. It's not about us being better or us wanting to be isolated, it's about us being confident in ourselves. It's about believing in ourselves in a world that's told us we're not good enough.*

Much of the Partnership's work is getting hard data—on forest regeneration, where the flow of water and money goes, salmon stocks, shellfish poisoning, where community members hunt and collect berries—into the hands of tribal leaders so they can be stronger advocates for themselves in their dealings with state and federal authorities.

The structure of the Sustainable Southeast Partnership is regional experts in natural resource management, mapping, business development, food security, storytelling, workforce development, renewable energy all facing the communities and asking them, week after week, month after month, what do you need to succeed? So much of the conversation of sustainability has been those kinds of experts telling communities instead: here's what you should do. Michael Jackson, a culture bearer and peace-maker for his community of Kake, makes the value clear:

*What we appreciate about the Sustainable Southeast Partnership is that they haven't asked us to support some legislation or made a case for us doing something, they've asked us what we need.*

A powerful example of building real self-sufficiency that isn't sexy is removing mold from people's homes. Most homes in Kake were built during the logging days when money flowed in, and now they're 40 years old with three and four

generations living inside. The climate is wet and mold can deeply affect everyone's capacity to lead full lives. The Harvard sociologist and MacArthur fellow, Matt Desmond, writes in his groundbreaking book, *Evicted*, that,

*Substandard housing is a blow to your psychological health: not only because things like dampness, mold, overcrowding could bring about depression but also because of what living with awful conditions told you about yourself.*

If self-sufficiency starts with how people feel about themselves, then getting mold out of homes is a really important place to start.

Self-sufficiency is also the goal of Path to Prosperity, a project of the Partnership supported by the Nature Conservancy and Spruce Root Community Development that helps people with a business idea write a plan, get coaching to develop the concept, and then helps to fund the best ones. Two hundred people have shared their ideas resulting in 47 new business plans and 11 funded new businesses. Each of those ideas must be grounded in the "triple bottom line" that is the dogma of the Partnership: projects need to advance economy, equity, and the environment.

### **c. A new narrative for a new generation:**

Places and people are largely the stories they feed themselves. Change the stories individuals live by and tell themselves, and you help them to occupy a new story. The Partnership is shifting the story in Southeast Alaska from confrontation to integration, and from protecting places to putting food on people's plates. Alana Peterson suggests the possibilities:

*We are a new generation. We won't be*

*part of that old narrative of “don’t work with them’. There’s been such a strong attitude, a wall really, about good and evil that no longer holds up to truth. We want to do really effective collaboration. We’re hungry for a new story.*

Colin Peacock is living that new story. He’s the Partnership’s local foods coordinator and has a background in conservation biology and the culinary arts, and he’s the son of Doug Peacock, the Vietnam green beret medic who was famously healed by wilderness, became a beloved writer and colleague of Ed Abbey, and whose story very likely drew thousands a generation ago to wild places like Alaska to find the healing qualities of isolation, bears, and nature. Colin told me this:

*My dad’s generation was about no compromise in defense of mother earth. My path is to help people to collaborate, to bring people together. There’s place in the modern world for both. We also need people who are willing to reach across and help each other and to find ways that everyone can get what they need to live here. I want to work with the people who are from this land and who have lived there all along and who want to remain here.*

Food is central to that story. Food is what connects Alaskans to each other, food is what connects Alaskans to nature, food is what connects conservation to social justice. Food is the story of how to heal a community that wants to live in place forever.

Native life in Alaska looks at the landscape and sees food: dog salmon eggs and seaweed, grilled beavertail, king salmon, smoked sockeye, seal oil, Gumboots, smoked hooligans, abalone, halibut stew, smoked cockles and black cod, venison, a dozen kind of berries. Food is in all four of the

Partnership’s focus areas; food is the lens through which the partnership sees land management and restoration. When Alaska Natives go into the woods they bring something out: protein, fruit, wood. This creates a distinct relationship with nature. To compare philosophies, you can’t take anything but memories from a national park. That’s the point, right, to protect these beautiful places from us? That creates a different type of relationship with nature.

Perhaps everyone living in western culture has been wounded by the world we’ve created. Some of those wounds created by technology, overdevelopment, and war lead to yearnings for purity, isolation, and grandeur that can be found in notions of wilderness. That healed John Muir and Doug Peacock. And then there’s the wounds of alienation and colonization that likely require something entirely different, something like ritual acts of feeding each other.



# Speed of Trust



**I**'ve been talking with Ian Johnson in Hoonah for more than two hours before he feels comfortable enough to share this:

*I felt like we had been cold-cocked. I need to be patient and to realize that the challenges here are so much greater than my challenges, but we invested months and months of time and effort in them and then they disappeared.*

Ian is talking about a young Tlingit couple for whom he had worked hard to get a timber thinning contract and then develop a blueberry harvesting lease from the Forest Service. It had all come together, they were doing a great job, a small-scale success was in hand; and then the couple moved away quickly without calling him. They had challenges or plans beyond Ian's understanding, but likely he felt that he had wasted his time. Maybe this was one of those genuine chances to feed one another—to help them create their own small business, beat the system, feed themselves—and they had walked away.

There is so much that can only move at the speed of trust; there are other times when trust is there and we still fail one another. The focus and commitment to keep showing up for each other, and the humility of knowing the work is bigger and more important than our own human need for personal success, is a big ask of every partner. And trust, alone, sometimes can't overcome the reality of how different the partners' lives are, how the basic life experience of someone living in the island communities is very different at many levels from someone living in Juneau.

Adam Davis, a leader in Kake and a former community catalyst for the Partnership, points this out while jumping back up on the forklift at the

Kake harbor:

*The Sustainable Southeast Partnership's work is important, but it's also a very hard role for someone to play in the community. I'm related to everyone here; how am I supposed to suggest a different way of doing things to my uncle or my cousin? For us, these organizational conflicts can also be family conflicts. I could only go so far. Also, the community and the Partnership are often operating at different time scales. People here in Kake aren't worried about long-term sustainability but about short-term sustainability. When you're poverty stricken it's hard to think about renewable energy.*

Holding those two worlds together is tough work. While Adam is right, it's also true that lasting community development—something different from booms and busts—results from people caring about poverty and renewable energy at the same time. But in trying to hold worlds together, the Partnership fosters conflicts of timescale and purpose that are hard to navigate and which have taken a toll. There are many more “former” community catalysts than there are “former” regional catalysts, which reflects the disparities in their lives. The regional catalysts tend to live in the urban centers of Juneau, Sitka, and Anchorage, be housed in institutions that are separate from their personal lives, and be white. Community catalysts live and work in remote island communities where many are related to each other, where commitments and responsibilities can be more personal than professional, where resources are thinner, and the catalysts are mostly Native. Quinn Aboudara, the community catalyst in Klawok, believes the regional and community catalysts are accountable to one another, that they

*I hope we remain  
supportive and mindful  
that our community  
catalysts are human  
with human struggles...*

give each other constructive criticism and share differing viewpoints, but it's still hard:

*I hope we remain supportive and mindful that our community catalysts are human, with human struggles, living in human places.*

This intentionality around bringing together—and keeping together—the most connected and the most affected is both the great success and the great struggle of Sustainable Southeast Partnership. The Partnership arose from the most connected people wanting to authentically engage in the most affected communities. Social justice and equity are at the core of their mission, which is not driven by charity but by reciprocity. The partners are interested in changing themselves and their region, not in helping someone else in need far away. In this aspiration, they are not “service providers” trying to collaborate which is the story of most efforts of collective impact. Sustainable Southeast Partnership is not about collaboration, it's about practicing democracy.

Few other collective impact efforts, the term given to deep collaborations between

organizations, are aimed at systemic change the way that the Sustainable Southeast Partnership is. And few, if any, raise money to fund the participation and staff time of the partners themselves. Most collective impact efforts raise money for the shared “backbone” services of leadership. But most collective impact efforts are between fairly homogenous players—culturally, racially, socioeconomically similar—who are trying to collaborate not transform the system itself. The Sustainable Southeast Partnership raises money so that the partners themselves can stay in relationship, to model the world they want, which requires creating the constructive alternative for people to see. This is not easy to do or to measure, but it's exactly what's happening.

Paul Hackenmueller helps people in the communities create new businesses, that means he's had a hand in virtually every project within the Partnership. Paul was the economic development catalyst for the Partnership and was recently made its program director. He talks about opportunity, equity, relationship, and innovation in a casual way

that sounds all so obvious when I know it's not:

*what's place-based work without the people who live in the place? How can we be trusted and genuinely feel that we're working toward community-based work without our community catalysts? Funding a person in the community is about equity, but it's also about innovation. Our commitment to these communities has come to be who the Partnership is, what makes us different, and that commitment is symbolized in the role of the community catalyst. They ask the Partnership, what would be being more inclusive and effective look like? Where would we be without that question?*

If collective impact had been first written about by people of color in a blog, as opposed to being described in the pages of the Stanford Social Innovation Review (2011), it likely would sound a lot more like what Sustainable Southeast Partnership is today. It is a commitment from 16 different organizations, from the most connected to the most affected, to serve a community-determined agenda that pursues mutually-reinforcing activities grounded in trust and strong relationships with an equal emphasis on direct service and system change, all fueled by a transparent and equitable distribution of resources. Some reading this will think I'm describing a social justice effort—they would be right. What makes this innovative and transformative is that the Partnership is equally committed to protecting people's relationship to a place in nature that thrives forever. To do this work well, they must think about biology, ecology and about race; they must worry about economy and about class, they must strive for renewable energy that reduces poverty. They must see their community, and themselves, in it as a whole.



# A Time to Naturalize



**naturalize** • verb

1. admit (a foreigner) to the citizenship of a country.
2. “he was born in a foreign country and had never been naturalized”
3. in biology, establish (a plant or animal) so that it lives wild in a region where it is not indigenous

*Being naturalized to place means to live as if this is the land that feeds you, as if these are the streams from which you drink, that build your body and fill your spirit. To become naturalized is to know that your ancestors lie in this ground. Here you give your gifts and meet your responsibilities.*

(Robin Wall Kimmerer, Braiding Sweetgrass)

**A**nthony Mallot calls his home a Native place not to will it, but to affirm it.

It is a Native place, and it is also a new home to people who aren't indigenous but seeking a place to respect, or a good paying job, or a way of life. A good number come to Southeast to be immersed in the annual cycles of salmon streams, the overwhelming show of life and death, to be part of a stunning beauty that's grabs most human hearts. They come out of respect and wanting to know how to respect. Many stay for lifetimes, some become ardent defenders of the forest and the salmon. A conscious newcomer to such a storied landscape must live tough questions: how does one become truly welcome here? If one can be welcomed here, how do we bring our gifts and meet our responsibilities?

Maybe the most profound work of the

Sustainable Southeast Partnership is the modeling of answers to these questions. Maybe the real work they're doing is helping different people who love this place to become naturalized to one another and to discover ways to live indigenously together. When I first met Anthony Mallott, the chief executive of Sealaska Corporation, he said to me, “I can feel the repair of relationships that's happening today through the Sustainable Southeast Partnership.” And then a few minutes later, Anthony looked me straight in the eye and spoke to me about Bob Christensen, a person I believe he respects, “Bob is living on our land and I think he knows it.”

To know and to acknowledge that you're living on someone else's land is a big step to becoming naturalized to that place.

A few months later, Paul Marks, a culture bearer whose Tlingit name is Kinkaduneek, a child of the Chookaneidí clan, stands before a group of Native and non-Native leaders in Juneau to welcome them at the start of a gathering for the Indigenous Guardians Network. He smiles, compliments the food, and begins with a constructive tweak to the organizers, “It's hard for us to be invited to speak about our land on what was once our land.” Many heads nod in agreement, the moment passes, others introduce themselves, and then Bob Christensen rises from his folding chair in Peratrovich Hall and says “I'm proud to live on Tlingit ground, honored to live on Taas Daa, two-headed island, Lemesieur Island.” In his words lies a truth and this aspiration: how do I share my gifts, what is my responsibility to this place and to these people?

As the conferences progresses, one Native voice after another speaks about the inevitable tension that arises for them when non-Native people assert rights that are really just privileges, or when

***Paul told Fish and Game that this blanket was his deed to hunt and fish that territory as they always had.***

power between cultures isn't respected or is out of balance. Millie Schoonover from Craig Tribal Council tells us:

*I'm sad that we're fighting so often with state and federal agencies but there must be a balance and a respect. If one group always has the majority of power, then the world will always be out of balance. When we're off balance with these agencies there will always be a tension.*

Millie's words help me to see where all this work could be headed. Hoonah Native Forest Partnership, Bob Christensen's acknowledgement of whose ground he lives on, so much of the Sustainable Southeast Partnership is helping Southeast Alaska to model a balance of power between cultures, something closer to a real democracy where everyone's voice matters. One result of a balance of power is to practice co-management of land. They don't use that term, co-management of land, because it's scary to many audiences; it's about legally sharing power over land-use and that's rarely done in the USA between Native and

non-Native peoples. But, no surprise, Southeast Alaska is surrounded by impressive examples of co-management of land, some as close as a few hundred miles away in the Great Bear Rainforest, stretching for more than 250 miles along the coast of British Columbia, where 6.4 million hectares of land are co-managed by 27 separate First Nations and the Canadian Provincial Government.

Bob Christensen tells me:

*We all have scars today. The Huna Tlingit have a powerful opportunity to re-indigenize themselves, and there's a lot of white guys I know who want the same thing. To really live here you have to respect the land and the people who have lived here, you have to try to fit into the world they've created. When I think about how to heal the scar I think about relationships. Hunting with Anthony Mallot here on Lemesiuier would help to heal the psyches. The harder one is to have serious, direct conversations about how best to share the land. The spiritual side is that I need to be invited to stay here. I have faith that we need each other, that we have*

*important things yet to offer.*

Conservation made history in Alaska 40 years ago with ANILCA; today, history is re-making conservation around questions about how we meet these responsibilities to each other. How do we do that? The logical conclusion of the Partnership's work is not that Bob and Anthony go hunting together, though that may happen one day, it's that Taas Daa return to its ancestral people, with Bob Christensen seeking an invitation both spiritually and legally to remain there. Powerful relationships are often built through radical change. What would it be like for you and me to ask permission to live on our farms and in our homes? How would that alienate us and liberate us?

Paul Marks shares a story with the Guardians of an occasion not long ago when he met with Alaska Department of Fish and Game and brought with him a very old Chilkat blanket with two sockeye salmon on it that depicts all the territory that the Tlingit people once occupied and used. Paul told Fish and Game that this blanket was his deed to hunt and fish that territory as they always had. Paul said he would bring the blanket back, decade after decade, until he was understood. It is a story told through deep time, and I recognize the Chilkat blanket from history, that it was used 150 years before by Paul's ancestors to explain to John Muir and Yukon-bound miners that this land belonged to Tlingit people.

This is the most fertile work of the Southeast Sustainable Partnership: to quietly, respectfully model a balance of power in relationships, between Native and non-Native, between the most connected and the most affected, to share knowledge and resources in very concrete ways, to affirm that this is a Native place. In this affirmation, perhaps, too,

we will see it as a truly wild place not just in nature but fully alive through our ability to relate.

Hoonah, Kake, Yakutat, Klawock, Hydaburg, Sitka, and Kasaan: vital places with wind turbines and totem poles, native tongues and foreign languages, plentiful fish and bear and human opportunity, places where people want to live, are honored to live. Places that everyone is invited to visit. Those who stay know their responsibility to the place and to the history. Places in balance, forever.

Where our watershed meets the ocean, the young Native woman with the waders and the clipboard has decided to become a scientist, dedicated to stewarding her homeland for future generations. Up the creek, at the foot of that giant Sitka spruce, two people tie into the same deer and, together, find the gift of life in the forest.

**The Sustainable Southeast Partnership—a single drop of water has begun its journey to the ocean.**



# Case Study 1

## HOONAH NATIVE FOREST PARTNERSHIP

**Who:** Hoonah Indian Association (tribal government)  
Huna Totem (Native corporation, landowner)  
US Forest Service (landmanager)  
AK Dept of Fish & Game Subsistence Division  
Sealaska  
Ecotrust  
City of Hoonah  
The Nature Conservancy

**What:** A collaboration to manage the forests around Hoonah in ways that build local economy, employ local people, and support local ways of life, to rebuild sovereignty-muscles. The Hoonah Native Forest Partnership (HNFP) is a science-based, landscape scale, community forest approach to watershed planning and project implementation whose overall goal is to achieve a measurable and resilient blend of timber, salmon and deer production, local economic diversification, and improved watershed health.

**Why:** To model collaboration between the very institutions that have been divided from each other, and to integrate local knowledge and the best available science into an adaptive approach to resource stewardship. To demonstrate that forests can be managed by big institutions in ways that respect small, local places. HNFP builds local peoples' skills, gives them good paying jobs, and improves watershed health across the region.

**Where:** The entire geography of where people from Hoonah live, work, and hunt: about 150,000 acres covering all complete watersheds within Regional Native Corporation (Sealaska) and Village Corporation (Huna Totem) lands.

**Start:** MOU between core partners signed 2013

**Tools:** Stream surveys, workforce development, HoonahStewards.net







**J**eromy Grant looks me straight in the eye and says, “Hoonah Native Forests Partnership is our revolution,” and honestly that feels like an exaggeration until later when I pick up my phone and it takes me two minutes to digitally join Hoonah Stewards.

Reflect for a moment on the historical context of Southeast Alaska, and now take this in: Most people in Hoonah have cell phones, and with those phones they can now get alerts when a Forest Service road washes out or when a brown bear is becoming a problem, or to get the facts on where paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) has turned up. They can also easily map on their phone where they took a deer, harvested firewood, found mushrooms, and collected berries. That information from hundreds of residents is aggregated and uploaded so that federal land managers and the Native corporations can maintain access and productivity of those high use areas. On their phones, they can also apply for a number of different jobs doing stream surveys and land restoration projects that directly support the health of the forest around them.

The project addresses the reality that the environmental, social, cultural, and economic needs of the people of Hoonah are tied up in those forests.

Today, Alaska is the only state in America where people still die of paralytic shellfish poisoning. Lots of folks in Hoonah harvest clams, geoducks, oysters, mussels, and scallops, but it can kill them when certain algae blooms. Every other state has a comprehensive way of testing for PSP and sharing that information with the public. Part of the partnership’s work through Hoonah Native Forest Partnership and their new website, Hoonah

Stewards, is to share that information directly with the people who have their feet in the water at this moment.

In the same way that plugging leaks in a local economy will keep money in people’s pockets, restoring pools of water in streambeds creates a refuge for coho salmon fry and resting places for pink and chum salmon as they return to their natal streams to spawn. This sensitive way of thinking about supporting life—human and non-human—is core to HNFP.

Last summer, Ian’s forest crew had six Tlingit men and women but half the group lost their job due to drug testing which was mandatory for the United States Forest Service. This was a deeply contentious setback. But the group rebounded with new members who tackled months of difficult work, climbing mountains in bad weather, in bear country, without any turnover. The work will continue for five years. Jeromy Grant was on that first crew and now he’s able to work full-time at HIA. Jeromy is the indicator of success of the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership.



# Case Study 2

## SALT & SOIL MARKETPLACE

**Who:** Spruce Root Community Development  
Sealaska Corporation  
Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition  
Takshanuk Watershed Council  
26 food producers,  
470 consumers at Salt and Soil marketplace

**What:** An online farmers market that links consumers and growers, an annual summit for farmers to build their capacity.

**Why:** To forge resilient food systems that decrease dependence on outside sources, spark food-based business startups and improve household and community health. Our shared vision for a regional food system includes a reliable supply of wild foods, thriving agricultural enterprises, and improved access to fresh and nutritious foods for all residents across our region.

**Where:** Salt and Soil Marketplace has provided Southeast Alaska food growers, harvesters, and processors to sell produce in Juneau and Haines. It's allowed rural producers to have access to larger markets and frequent outlets for sales.

**Start:** Farmer summits began in 2015, Moby the mobile greenhouse has been operational since 2016, and Salt and Soil Marketplace launched in 2017.

**Tools:** An online marketplace: [SaltandSoilMarketplace.com](http://SaltandSoilMarketplace.com), annual summit for farmers to share skills and experience, mobile greenhouse that travels to communities as demonstration tool.



**T**he people who live in the lands the Tlingit call a breadbasket now import 95.6% of their vegetables. Southeast Alaska, just like Salinas, California, truly are our nation's breadbaskets, just not for the people who live there.

When a commercial fishing boat pulls into the port of Juneau or Sitka or Petersburg, most of their catch is exported to high value markets elsewhere.

Before the Second World War, Haines was famous for its strawberries and Juneau drank local milk from dairies. This was an isolated place, most everyone grew their own food. They sold their modest amounts of surplus in town. WWII changed all that; it introduced airplanes, shipping, heavy use of petrochemicals, and assembly-line production for ammunition, automobiles, food, and everything in between. Today, Juneau's airport sits where dairies used to be and the system ships out oil, minerals, and protein (in the form of salmon) and ships in nearly everything one needs to eat. When the weather's bad, which is often, and the containers are delayed by just two days, 40% of the lettuce, for example, goes bad. It's not a resilient system, nutritionally, environmentally, or culturally.

Adam Davis, the man who years before had told the partners, "You wonder why you're not always welcomed here. When conservationists first arrived, they literally took food off our plates" now sits behind the controls of an enormous forklift at Kake Harbor lifting a container of 47,000 pounds off pavement while chugging a chocolate milk from India and eating a microwaved breakfast sandwich from China. When I joke with Adam about his choice for breakfast, he shoots me a look that says

it's no laughing matter what food the system has given him. In Kake, if you need to eat western food occasionally, your options are microwavable frozen burritos from China and milk from India. He's right, it's no laughing matter.

Eli Wray thinks he can change some of that. Eli's somewhere in his thirties and on fire about growing food:

*I was born and raised here and I didn't know what a carrot tasted like. We Alaskans have this mindset that we're independent and self-sufficient but we aren't. If the shipping container doesn't arrive, the shelves go bare and we don't eat. It's a crazy system that has to change.*

In order to change the system, Sustainable Southeast Partnership first had to figure out the dimensions of the problem. Then they worked with partners to expand the capacities of the local growers and food producers, and then they had to create a consistent market for the local growers. Turns out that roughly 38 percent of Southeast Alaska's households—or 11,400 total households—grew some food in 2016. In addition, roughly 15 percent of the food grown by households was being shared with others, building social connections and spreading the benefit of local food more widely. Because Southeast Alaska's communities are geographically isolated and vulnerable to shipping disruptions, local food production is also about basic human security.

Being practical types, the Sustainable Southeast Partnership looked critically at the parts of the system that they could improve and realized that if they could strengthen and expand the community of local growers, they might change the story for what's possible in local food production.

Joe Orsi is not a large-scale farmer, but is the perfect example of what's possible. Joe is one of those 11,400 households who grow their own food, except he really loves doing it and turns out, after a career as a biologist, he's pretty good at it. Joe and his wife, Julie, are the perfect team. "Julie role is to tell me, 'Joe, you can't grow apples here,' and then I go out and grow apples." Joe started growing commercially just 10 years ago and didn't buy more land but simply tuned almost every inch of his home lot into active, productive agriculture. This year, just under half of everything that Joe grows was sold through Salt and Soil, the online farmer's market.

Elie and Kaylie Wray don't own land and they're the next generation:

*Last year, we went to the Farm Summit in Haines that SSP pulled together and we got totally inspired at what other farmers were doing, we wanted to start immediately, but we got back to Juneau and found out quickly that buying land is too expensive. I had a friend who lived in a storage unit and that got me to thinking about all the things you could do with storage units. Maybe I could grow food in a storage unit? We did the research into hydroponics, looked at what others were able to do, we did a campaign through Kickstarter, I got business development support and ideas around long-term sustainability from Path to Prosperity and the Sustainable Southeast Partnership. And next month Panhandle Produce is open for business.*

Salt and Soil marketplace is just like Hoonah Stewards in that it's using a website to bring people together. Because of weather, farmers markets are not the best option in Southeast Alaska, so SSP

developed a virtual marketplace where consumers can place orders for locally grown food that is distributed at set locations every week. In the first year of operation, Salt and Soil had almost 500 registered members, half of whom made an order producing 660 orders and the sale of 2,500 different products.

The numbers are small but the significance is big: it's about creating a new system.

# Case Study 3

## SOCKEYE SALMON RESTORATION

**Who:** The Nature Conservancy  
Southeast Alaska Fish Habitat Partnership  
Klawock Cooperative Association (Tribe)  
Klawock Heenya Corporation (Native Corp)  
Klawock Hatchery  
Bureau of Indian Affairs  
Trout Unlimited  
City of Klawock  
United States Forest Service  
Alaska Department of Fish and Game  
Sealaska Corporation (Native Corp)  
100 commercial and subsistence fishermen

**What:** Problem-solving and policy-making among disparate groups to save Sockeye salmon in one of their most important, threatened fishery.

**Why:** To ensure that local people's priorities are central to fish management. To ensure that Sockeye salmon can continue to exist in watershed that has been heavily manipulated by competing humans uses.

**Where:** Klawock lake watershed: 30,000 acres on Prince of Wales Island.

**Start:** 2013

**Tools:** A Retrospective Analysis of decades of scientific data and traditional knowledge, interviews with hundreds of stakeholders, a facilitated conference to develop a shared understanding of the situation and how to begin to address the problem.





**I**magine a 3,000-acre freshwater lake surrounded by steep mountains with a short river over a few miles to a protected saltwater inlet of the Pacific Ocean, and imagine enormous schools of hundreds of thousands of the most delicious fish arriving every year.

The Tlingit settled thousands of years ago in this perfect place to put a village. Sockeye appears across all Tlingit art and material culture. Many Tlingits will tell you it's richer in taste and simply part of who they are.

Prince of Wales Island today may be known more for logging but it's really a fish culture. The economy and culture have been rooted in the sockeye longer and more profoundly than any other influence. Mayor Armour talks forcefully about the challenges of opiate addiction and the declining numbers of sockeye salmon as indicators of the same problem: alienation from the power of place.

The first cannery in Alaska was built on the Klawock River in 1878. Up until the 1930s, there were 15 internationally-owned canneries operating in Klawock sending that delicious fish-of-the-Tlingit out in cans. Quinn Aboudara, the community catalyst for Sustainable Southeast partnership, has been eating sockeye all of his life, and now studies the species:

*Everyone was warned that the system was pulling too many sockeye, but we didn't see declines until it was almost too late. I remember being 15 and able to catch enough in a single set to feed your family for a year. Today, if you had time and gas money to go out a dozen times, you still couldn't catch enough sockeye to eat.*

Sometime in the 1970s a perfect storm came together to dramatically lower Sockeye population.

Hundreds of thousands before the 1970s dropped to tens of thousands per year in the 80s and 90s, and by 2014 there were perhaps only 4,000 sockeye in the Klawock River. There's no single reason why. Certainly, the decades of commercial and subsistence harvests stressed the fishery. But so did the logging days that removed trees, damaged river habitat, and increased water temperature. Climate change is also increasing the water temperature of the lake. And there's clear data to suggest that other species like trout are also growing predators of sockeye. And in 1977, on the exact site of that first cannery started 100 years before, a fish hatchery was put on the Klawock River to introduce a different species of salmon that was increasingly popular with a different sort of person.

Coho salmon are larger, strike at a single line, and play that line for a good fight; they are the perfect salmon for the sport fishermen, the person from away looking for a challenging Alaskan fishing experience. What is known is that the Klawock River, which never before had a substantial wild run of coho, now has far more coho than sockeye. Culturally, it's a familiar and complicated story. There are plenty of Tlingit people who now run sportfishing camps and fish coho commercially, but the expansion of the coho fishery has diminished a foundation of Tlingit culture and way of life. Quinn lays it out:

*Sport fishermen are mostly vacationers up here for only a few weeks of the year and, yes, their money makes its way into our households but we shouldn't lose our culture because of their fun. If economy alone is the driver, then coho wins. If culture is the driver, sockeye wins. For Sustainable Southeast Partnership, we're interested in hitting a balance between*

*economy and culture.*

The Nature Conservancy's job has been to compile the very best science and traditional knowledge about the fishery. The Sustainable Southeast Partnership's role has been to bring all the stakeholders—many of whom have avoided being in the same room together—to build a common understanding of the history and the current status of sockeye in this watershed. There is no single smoking gun in the past to blame for what happened, nor is there one way out of the problem in the future, which is the best context for enlisting everyone's support in moving forward toward real solutions. Over 100 people came together to discuss possible steps forward. The subsistence fishermen, hard to organize, are critical to crafting a solution. So is the hatchery and the sport fishermen. The commercial fishermen, who are out at sea, have a role to play in reporting on Klawock sockeye returns. If SSP and their partners can keep open, constructive dialogue going and pursue practical projects on the ground, the sockeye will return.

So much of the work here, and elsewhere for the Partnership, is finding a balance between rights and privileges. It should be a great privilege for a person to travel to Prince of Wales Island and fish for a mighty coho salmon, but it should be right for a Tlingit daughter to harvest a sockeye.



# Acknowledgments



**Bill Moyers, one of our nation’s most thoughtful journalists and film-makers, has called himself a beachcomber on the shores of other people’s experiences. I know what he means.**

Taking on a project like this entails combing some fantastic beaches, and the constant gratitude of being with lives and stories that have enriched my own. My greatest hope is that this story is a fair reflection of their purpose: Quinn Aboudara, Marina Anderson, Lawrence Armour, Jon Bonkoski, Bob Christensen, Norman Cohen, Adam Davis, Erin Dovichin, Aaron Ferguson, Bethany Sonsini Goodrich, Jeromy Grant, Dawn Jackson, Paul Hackenmueller, Lia Heifetz, Alan Holt, Michael Jackson, Russell James, Ian Johnson, Molly Kemp, Hank Lentfer, Anthony Mallot, Paul Marks, Brian McNitt, Joe Orsi, Colin Peacock, Alana Peterson, Paula Peterson, Kenneth Skaflestad, Stephen SueWing, Christine Woll, and Kylie and Ellie Wray.

A deep bow of gratitude to all the partners of Sustainable Southeast Partnership for the

innovative example they have put into the world, and for giving me their time and trust with the story of that hard work. I’ve wanted to honor each of you. I’m especially grateful to Aaron Ferguson for his own skill as a writer and designer. His art is felt strongly in this publication. My own life as a place-maker and place-sustainer has been improved in many tangible ways by observing and learning from Alana Peterson and Bob Christensen; thank you both so much for bringing me into the SSP fold in 2014.

There is a very large continent between our mountain farm in Vermont and the salty tides of Southeast Alaska, but a number of dear friends and colleagues have made that pesky continent much smaller over the decades. I’m thinking now of Kurt Hoelting, Michael Barber, Malena Marvin, and Zach Brown. I’m especially grateful to Hank Lentfer and Anya Maier for our adventures together and for their commitment to our shared lives and learning

—Peter Forbes, 2018

**Our hearts are full of gratitude for how you have helped us reflect. Thank you for your dedication to this project, Peter. The ripples of your effort are already being felt.**

**—The Sustainable Southeast Partnership**



