



# Sierra Borealis *alaska report*



SIERRA CLUB ALASKA CHAPTER  
DECEMBER 2021

## ANCSA Fiftieth Anniversary Celebrated

Chapter  
election, candi-  
dates, p. 3

This December marks the 50th anniversary of the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA). In Alaska, to address Native land claims, Congress, in lieu of granting reservations of land to Native groups as had been done in the Lower 48, instead used a corporate model that divided our state into twelve regions, establishing twelve regional corporations to be stewarded by the first peoples of Alaska. A thirteenth corporation is in Seattle, Washington, for those who no longer are residents of Alaska<sup>1</sup>. In addition, Congress established more than 200 village corporations, (now 198 due to mergers) designed to preserve land around the villages primarily for subsistence purposes.

While this act is not enough to mend the harms done to Native People by our country over our history, it was an unusual approach to policy at its time and remains an important feature of our state's history.

When Alaska became the 49<sup>th</sup> state in 1959, it was granted 104 million acres of unreserved federal lands. When the state began its land selections, Alaska Natives, fearing that their own lands claims would be ignored,

organized as the Alaska Federation of Natives and lobbied Congress to address their aboriginal land rights claims. Because of this Alaska Native pressure, the

federal government began to consider new ways to settle Native land claims. Finding oil at Prudhoe Bay added urgent corporate pressure, as Native land claims along the pipeline corridor had to be resolved before the pipeline could be built.

Ultimately, on December 18, 1971, President Richard Nixon signed the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act. According to the ANCSA Regional Association, the federal government transferred 44 million acres of land and almost one billion dollars to regional and village corporations to be held in corporate ownership by Alaska Native shareholders. (The Interior Department now describes it as 46 million acres.) This was the first time in our country's history that land and money allocated for Native Americans was controlled by them, instead of by the federal government.<sup>2</sup> Some of the regional corporations have been highly successful financially; others have not.



The Alaska Native Claims Settlement -- continued page 2

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**ANCSA (Settlement Act) 50th anniversary** --from page 1

Act has been hailed both as a triumph, and also as a failure. While the work of Alaska Natives to settle their claims certainly led to a better outcome than if they had not been involved, this act has not prevented future conflicts for Alaska Native people. On the 40th anniversary of the Settlement Act, Paul Ongtooguk wrote in the *Anchorage Daily News*: "Most condemning for some is that as Native corporations, created in the image of a Western corporate model, have prospered, many Alaska Natives see ANCSA as a vehicle for assimilation." Due to the corporate model imposed on Alaska Natives--thrusting them abruptly into a capitalist world--there frequently remains a tension between efforts to protect traditional subsistence resources and the need to make profits for the corporation. For example, the Arctic Slope Regional Corporation has supported Arctic oil development, whereas the Gwich'in people, in many villages, fear development will harm and potentially destroy their subsistence way of life.

During the negotiations for the settlement act, Sierra Club and other environmental organizations urged our environmental champions in Congress, principally Representatives Mo Udall and John Seiberling, and Senators Henry M (Scoop) Jackson and Paul Tsongas, to include in the final bill a process to withdraw additional lands for study and potential setting aside as new national conservation system units. This provision led to the 1980 Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act. (ANILCA.) It was ANILCA that finally guaranteed Native subsistence on all federal lands in Alaska—not only on Native-owned lands.

Despite ANCSA and its tensions, Native Alaskans continue to fight to protect the lands they have been living on since time immemorial from incompatible resource extraction. The continuation of the rich culture of subsistence living is priceless. We have all watched over recent years as resource extraction interests have moved to exploit public lands that are viewed as essential to Alaska Native People to sustain the subsistence way of life, lands such as the Arctic, Tongass National Forest, and the Bristol Bay region.

Fifty years later, it is hard to imagine where our state would be without the Settlement Act. It is arguably the most successful policy on aboriginal land rights in our country, but the bar is certainly low. I am grateful to Alaska Natives who have fought so tirelessly for this ownership over

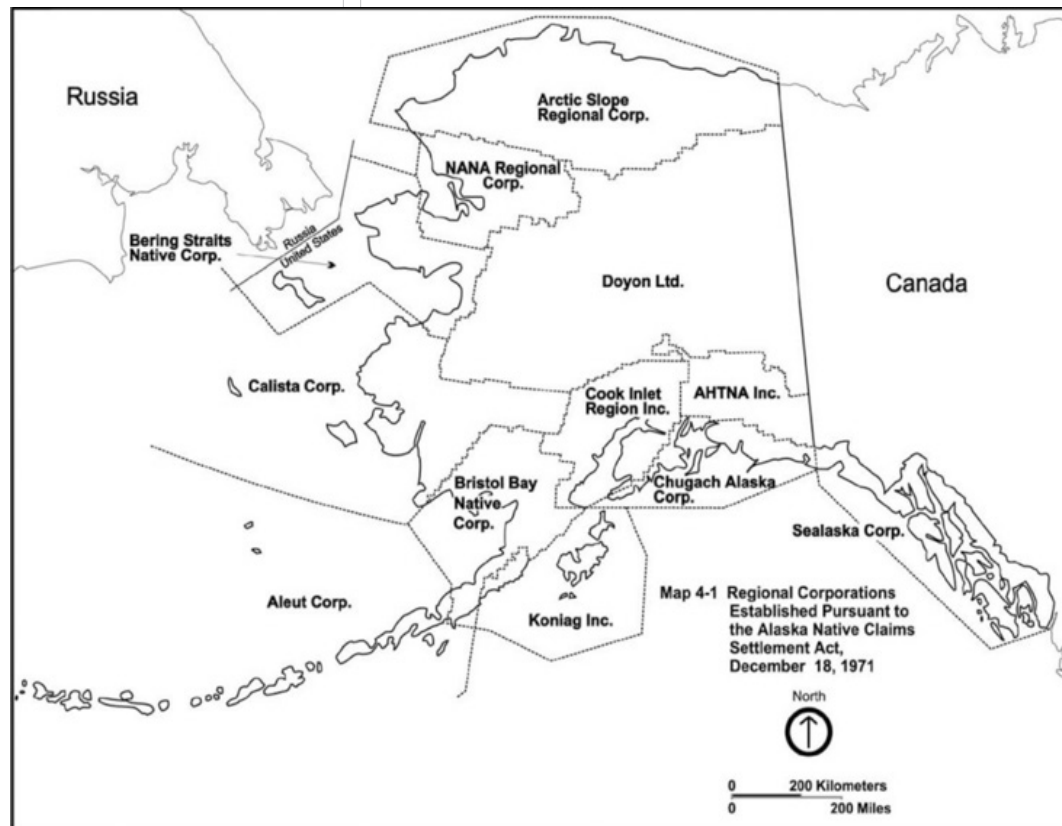
lands that are rightfully theirs, and for all they have done to protect them, but I know gratitude is not enough. As environmentalists, we must listen to Native voices and use their valuable knowledge of these lands to help guide our work.

**Notes:**  
 1 Sullivan, Meghan. "Cheat Sheet: Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act 101." Alaska Public Media.  
 2 Marrs, Carl. "ANCSA, An Act of Self-Determination: Harnessing Business Endeavors to Achieve Alaska Native Goals." *Cultural Survival*.  
 Other sources:  
 "About the Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act." ANCSA Regional Association, 15 Jan. 2021, <https://ancsaregional.com/about-ancsa/>.  
 Ongtooguk, Paul. "ANCSA at 40: Where Are We and Where Are We Going?" Anchorage Daily News. ❖

-- Andrea Feniger

**The Twelve Regional Corporations:**

- Ahtna, Inc*
- The Aleut Corporation*
- Arctic Slope Regional Corporation (ASRC)*
- Bering Straits Native Corporation (BSNC)*
- Bristol Bay Native Corporation (BBNC)*
- Calista Corporation*
- Chugach Alaska Corporation*
- Cook Inlet Region, Inc (CIRI)*
- Doyon, Limited*
- Koniag, Inc*
- NANA Regional Corporation*
- Sealaska Corporation*



**Chapter election time comes with the new year, 2022!**

**VOTE IN THIS YEAR'S CHAPTER ELECTION** — --

This winter has brought us a surprise cold snap and a flurry of snow, but not surprising as the year ends is the annual Chapter election. This year, we have two candidates up for election. We will also have two open seats that can be filled with a special election during the year. If you are interested in filling one of these open seats, please reach out to [alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org).

During a year full of change and adaptation, we have been lucky to have had a hard-working, dynamic, and devoted leadership team through 2021.

Thank you to our outgoing members of the Chapter's leadership team, our outings chair Alyssa Schaefer and Traci Bunkers, our compliance officer. Both of our outgoing members have served this Chapter with passion and inspired dedication during their tenures. An actively involved member for several years, Alyssa led fun and creative outings for all ages, such as spruce bough collecting and wreath making, as well as informed site visits to potentially threatened areas that provided an invaluable service to our Chapter. Seeking to effect change, Traci stepped into the role of compliance officer where she happily and aptly took on the task of balancing local law and national Sierra Club policies and regulations. (See compliance officer notice, p. 6.) We are extremely grateful for the energy and dedication they both brought to the Chapter through their service and volunteer efforts. Thank you to these ExCom members for being part of our Chapter's leadership and for your steadfast commitment to conservation activism in Alaska.

**Alaska's Environment Needs Your Active Involvement.**

Seeking re-election following the end of her first two-year term is Chapter Chair, Heather Jesse, accompanied in running for reelection by Chapter Secretary Deanna Nielson. See the candidates' information below.

This year's elections will be all-digital, with elections held **on our website from January 24 through 27**. This is a departure from our mail-in elections of the past, and from our most recent elections, which accepted a mixture of mail-in and electronic ballots. We hope that in addition to reducing unnecessary waste, this new feature will boost accessibility and involvement. We know this might not be the preferred method for everyone and always seek feedback from our members, so let us know how you feel about electronic elections and your preference for future elections at [alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org) -- or by sending a letter to our PO Box.

Voting is one of the easiest and most powerful ways to engage with your local Chapter, and it is your right as a Sierra Club member to have your voice heard. We would love to engage with all of our members and hear about issues that matter to you so we can all work together to explore, enjoy, and protect this amazing state we call home. Please reach out to us on Facebook or email us at [alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org) to get more involved with the Alaska Chapter or share your ideas for change at a local and global level.

Happy Holidays and seasonal observances to you and your loved ones!

-- Heather Jesse, Alaska Chapter chair

**Heather Jesse, chair**



*Heather Jesse is a lifelong resident of Anchorage, Alaska seeking re-election as chapter chair; she's just completed a successful - if not predictable - two year term on the ExCom. A graduate of the University of Alaska Anchorage, she earned her Bachelors of Business Administration in*

*Economics in May, 2019. As a student, she served on UAA's Green Fee Board, where she championed many sustainable campus improvements, including introducing hydroponic growing cabinets and erecting 27 solar panels. She is also an active member of the nonprofit Alaska Trails-- that builds and maintains sustainable trails across Alaska. She led the transition of chapter meetings to an accessible virtual space and oversaw the hiring of our Chapter Director, Andrea Feniger. Heather is excited to continue serving the Sierra Club Alaska Chapter and furthering her conservation efforts to cultivate a safe and friendly Alaska for all.. ❖*

**Deanna Nielson, Secretary**



*Deanna is 27 years old and was born and raised in Anchorage, Alaska. She has lived in Anchorage for her whole life, with the exception of the four years she spent pursuing a BS in Electrical Engineering and playing volleyball at Gonzaga University. She moved back to Anchorage after college to pursue a career in electrical engineering, but her true love for Alaska lies in nature. She is an avid*

*outdoor enthusiast -- she loves to ski, bike, climb, run, paddle, and hike her way through Alaska and the Lower 48. Her love for the outdoors, particularly the snowy winters, inspired her to fight to protect the lands that have brought her so much joy over the course of her life. ❖*

## An update on the battle to protect the Arctic Refuge

In our *sierra borealis* for June, we reported that the Biden Administration suspended oil and gas leases in Alaska's Arctic National Wildlife Refuge that had been hastily issued in the final days of the Trump administration. The June 1 suspension decree was signed by the new Interior Secretary Deb Haaland.

Since then, the debate continues, and the opposition has grown new teeth. The Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) is now suing President Biden, Secretary Haaland, and the Department of the Interior. The June suspension listed legal issues, including inadequate environmental review, as the cause. AIDEA corporation and supporters protest that this was unlawful – a violation of the Administrative Procedure Act, to be specific. They claim to be moving ahead with the administrative work of acting on the leases won in January of 2021, while pursuing this suit. The complaint was officially made November 4, 2021, in the U.S. District Court for the District of Alaska, in Anchorage.

In good news, the House of Representatives, in the long effort towards arriving at a bipartisan infrastructure bill, included a repeal of the original 2017 language that had allowed for leases in the Refuge. Although the Build Back Better bill has gone through multiple versions, this piece of it has remained intact at the time of this writing (December 2, 2021). We just need the Senate to keep it during the upcoming vote. (Also to note, certain new off shore drilling is also prohibited in this version of the bill).

Finally, in the latest development, the Biden Administration announced on November 26 the results of the lease review by Secretary Haaland. The review imposes increased restrictions, but falls short of an outright ban on more oil and gas leasing on public lands. Among the Secretarial recommendations are increases to royalty rates and provisions to set aside money for future cleanup.

So, the debate on the fate of the Arctic Refuge continues—with the hope for real lasting protection tantalizingly still off in the future. Wilderness designation would be the most lasting protection we could give the Coastal Plain of the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge. Sierra Club Alaska and all her supporters will celebrate present success and fight for that hoped-for outcome

to become reality—some day! Thanks for your work so far, and thanks for the work still to come. ❖

-- Adrienne Canino



photo: Kicab Castaneda-Mendez

On a Sierra Club national base camp outing last summer in the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, led by Rich Gross.

See page 7 for Alaska Chapter celebration of Arctic Refuge 61<sup>st</sup> birthday

### Build Back Better? Infrastructure legislation in Congress—and Alaska

Because Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski was a core member of the bipartisan group of senators who helped negotiate the infrastructure bill, the legislation includes multiple projects meant to benefit the state's ferry system.

Notably, \$250 million is set aside for a pilot program to develop an electric or low-emitting ferry. The measure does not single out Alaska by name, but as the state with the most miles of marine highway, it is guaranteed to be a site for such an initiative.

The Alaska Marine Highway System—which encompasses the ferries that help connect much of the state—stands to benefit from a \$1 billion program in the bill to fund a ferry system to reach rural communities, and a provision that would funnel federal highway dollars toward operating and repairing the service.

#### Highways, roads and bridges — Alaska Highway

The legislation authorizes money to repair more than 300 miles of highway that stretch across Alaska's border and into Canada. It also helps fund rural projects, which Sen. Murkowski's office predicted could be applied to ice roads or transferred to a state commission that oversees basic infrastructure. It is expected to provide \$225 million to fix more than 140 bridges deemed structurally unsound. But Senate passage is uncertain.

(From *New York Times*, September 24, 2021) ❖

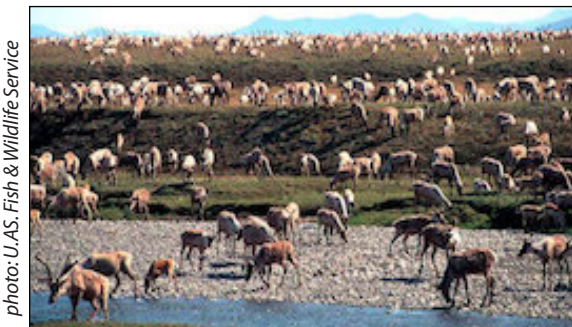


photo: U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service

© Caribou on the Arctic Coastal Plain

## Action Alert

## Tongass and the Roadless rule: Please comment by January 24, 2022

Great News! The Biden Administration has begun the formal process to reinstate roadless rule protections in the Tongass National Forest. The Tongass, often called "America's Amazon," is our country's largest national forest. Scientists call the Tongass the "lungs of our country" because it is one of the world's major carbon sinks—able to store over three billion tons of climate-warming carbon—keeping that carbon from being released into the atmosphere. It is the traditional homelands of The Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian people, and Indigenous communities have urged a halt to the destruction of this ecosystem that supports their traditional lifeways, medicine, and food systems.

And the Tongass is a vital hub of biodiversity. Reinstating its roadless protections is essential to fighting the climate crisis and shaping forest policy in our country for years to come. In short, we cannot afford to lose the opportunity to protect this special place.

**Your** comments will help assure a strong policy and send a strong message to the Biden Administration that Alaskans support his plan to protect the Tongass from new road building and old growth logging.

The 60-day comment period is now open and comments must be received or postmarked by January 24, 2022. Submit your comment in any of the following ways:

- ❑ Electronically using the Federal eRulemaking Portal: [www.regulations.gov](http://www.regulations.gov)
- ❑ Mail to: Alaska Roadless Rule, USDA Forest Service, P.O. Box 21628, Juneau, Alaska 99802-1628
- ❑ Hand Delivery / Courier to: Alaska Roadless Rule, USDA Forest Service, 709 W. 9th Street, Juneau, Alaska 99802
- ❑ Email: [sm.fs.akrdlessrule@usda.gov](mailto:sm.fs.akrdlessrule@usda.gov).

For questions, please contact Andrea Feniger, at [andrea.feniger@sierraclub.org](mailto:andrea.feniger@sierraclub.org). ❖

## Chuck River Wilderness in Southeast expands—(without legislation)

Recently, the Wilderness Land Trust completed its first project in Alaska by transferring the largest remaining inholding in the Chuck River Wilderness to the U.S. Forest Service. Now, the 154 acres parcel is protected as a part of the Chuck River Wilderness, which is adjacent to the Tracy Arm-Fords Terror Wilderness. Both are just south and across the Inside Passage from Admiralty Island National Monument, together forming a wild area of almost two million acres within the Tongass National Forest— about 45 miles south

of Juneau and 70 miles north of Petersburg, Alaska. You must travel by boat or float plane to reach the property, but private inholdings in this area include cabins and commercial lodges.

This property was a series of mining claims from the late 1800s that were worked for gold



photo: The Wilderness Land Trust

Waterfall on Spruce Creek, trail to Wigger, within the newly purchased inholding

from ships in Windham Bay. When our Trust staff

visited the property with the Forest Service, we hiked up an old mining road built with logs being placed perpendicular to the direction of the road. A bumpy ride, but good enough

to haul in a lot of now historic mining equipment! Luckily, the mining was so long ago that the property was not contaminated. Now, it cannot be mined again, no matter how high the price of gold. It is dense with wildlife-rich rainforest that hosts grizzly and black bear, moose, wolves, and many other species. It is home to Spruce Creek, a salmon stream, and muskeg wetlands.



photo: The Wilderness Land Trust

Blueberries, on trail to Wigger

(The Wilderness Land Trust keeps the promise of wilderness—by acquiring and transferring private lands to public ownership to complete designated and proposed wilderness areas, directly protecting wilderness values. Almost 180,000 acres of private land remains inside designated wilderness in the continental United States—that's almost 3,000 private landowners able to decide how to manage their lands in our wilderness, leading to many potential conflicts. We work with individuals and foundations to fund our Wilderness Opportunity Fund with donations and loans to help us do our work by fairly and quickly acquiring private lands threatening wilderness. You can find out more at [www.wildernesslandtrust.org](http://www.wildernesslandtrust.org) or by contacting [brad@wildernesslandtrust.org](mailto:brad@wildernesslandtrust.org).) ❖

**Get Outside!--Winter outings begin**



photo: Heather Jesse

Powerline Pass is a year-round trail great for skiing and running of all experience levels. With an eerily solemn atmosphere, the trail provides a long simple stretch for the lone runner or cross country skier. With ample parking, a dog and critter-friendly group of devoted locals make the trail home for their daily exercise; and it's also a great spot to bring a cup of coffee and meet up with a new friend--or run into an old one.

For a start, Heather Jesse has two suggestions!



photo: Heather Jesse

Though less accessible in the winter time, Mt. Baldy still provides breathtaking views and a quick aerobic hike for locals brave enough to venture out in the cold. If you can handle it, go on an especially cold day: the lower the temperature, the more vibrant the colors of the sky in the late hours just after sunrise and before sunset. Ideally traversed with snow shoes, ice cleats, or skis, the snow transforms every local's favorite Eagle River hike into an unrecognizable winter wonderland perfect for bringing along man's best friend and building up a quick sweat.

**Get More Involved with Your Local Chapter —Seeking Volunteer Changemakers: The Alaska Chapter needs a Compliance Officer!**

Interested in becoming more active in your efforts to promote conservation in our great state of Alaska? Looking for a way to help out your local Sierra Club Chapter? Apply to be the Chapter's Compliance Officer!

Help to plan and create effective change in your community by helping us to stay in compliance with local and federal laws and regulations.

As the Election Law Compliance Officer to the Chapter, you'll advise members of the ExCom about how to conduct political activities in order to ensure compliance with the provisions of the State of Alaska and local election laws, as well as Sierra Club policies and restrictions.

The Compliance Officer serves as an integral member of the leadership team and is essential for the Chapter to undertake any local or state political activities. You'll ensure that the political campaign activities of the Chapter adhere to all applicable election regulations and reporting requirements. As the Sierra Club is one of the oldest conservation organizations in the United States, most local and state laws are thoroughly covered in the orientation materials for this position.

The Compliance Officer will not need to memorize all regulations and requirements but will be responsible for understanding when these regulations apply to Sierra Club activities. The Compliance Officer serves as an important resource for our political and conservation work and joins an experienced and dedicated group of volunteers, headed by our Legal Chair Greg Stewart. The Alaska Chapter ExCom and Sierra Club national support staff will be there to help you navigate your new responsibilities every step of the way!

If you are interested in serving on the Executive Committee as the Compliance Officer, please see the full position posting at [sierraclub.org/Alaska](http://sierraclub.org/Alaska). To apply for this volunteer position, please send an email to [alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org).

Compliance officer doesn't sound like the right fit for you? Contact us at [alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org](mailto:alaska.chapter@sierraclub.org) to learn about other leadership positions available and other ways to be involved with your Chapter. ❖

-- Heather Jesse, Chapter chair



Eagle and bear canoe © Israel Shotridge

Nature beckons!  
Get Outside

**Welcome Skiing season!**

Have I mentioned I love a good ski? For the first outing of the winter season, I looped around Kincaid Park here in Anchorage. Not only was I reminded of the joy of snow, I got this fantastic view! ❖

-- Adrienne Canino

**Arctic Refuge Birthday Celebration!  
Chapter hike marks 61<sup>st</sup> Anniversary**

While indigenous peoples have been in The Arctic since time immemorial, the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge has just turned 61. On December 6, 1960, President Dwight Eisenhower established the 8.9-million-acre Arctic National Wildlife Range. (Refuge since 1980.) So, we re-booted our anniversary outings program to celebrate with a lively December 5 hike right in Anchorage! The anniversary provides a unique opportunity to gather and share our connection to this special place and recommit our efforts to defend the sacred. ❖

-- Andrea Feniger

**December Outings Update**



photo: Nicole Peltzer

Not only a celebratory hike--there's a birthday cake too: Andrea shows how the Arctic Refuge takes the cake!



photo: Andrea Feniger

## NOAA seeks comments on proposed St. George Unangan National Marine Sanctuary

On November 17, the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) opened a public comment period for a five-year review of the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary nomination. Members of the public are invited to submit comments to NOAA by writing to Paul E. Michel, Regional Coordinator; NOAA Sanctuaries West Coast Office, 99 Pacific Street, Building 100F, Monterey, CA 93940 or by sending email to [paul.michel@noaa.gov](mailto:paul.michel@noaa.gov).

For more information: go online to <http://www.regulations.gov> using docket #: NOAA-NOS-2021-0094. or contact [Paul.Michel@noaa.gov](mailto:Paul.Michel@noaa.gov) (831)241-4217.

St. George is one of the Pribilof Islands in Alaska's Bering Sea. The island has a land area of 35 sq mi and a population of about 100 people, all living in its only community, the city of [St. George](#), which encompasses the entire island.

The Pribilof Islands, sometimes referred to as the "Galapagos of the North," contain some of the world's most magnificent biodiversity and natural beauty. Northern fur seals (about half the world's population), Steller sea lions, otters, cetaceans and more than 200 species of sea birds have long sustained St. George's Unangan community and been a source of wonder to visitors. The waters surrounding St. George Island are also home to significant fish populations that provide prey for marine mammals

and catch for local fishermen. This habitat is now under threat. The waters around St. George and the broader Bering Sea face multiple stresses as well as the added menace of climate disruption.

Sea ice recedes and commerce grows in the warming Arctic. Marine mammal and bird populations are in steady decline.

Conservation is needed to protect

St. George's marine life-and

-to build resilience into the economy and cultural heritage of the St. George Unangan community.

In nominating the area as a future marine sanctuary (the closest thing our nation has to ocean wilderness) the St. George community's letter to NOAA included: The Pribilof Islands are among the most unique ...places in the world. The islands and surrounding waters provide vital breeding and feeding habitat for more than half of the world's population of northern fur seals, as well as important habitat for Steller sea lions and harbor seals. More than three million seabirds flock to the islands during the summer months, and ...the islands play a central role in creating the productive ocean zone that supports some of the world's most profitable commercial fisheries. Visit:

<https://unangansanctuary.net/about-national-marine-sanctuaries/>. ❖



St. George, Pribilof Islands

photo: Marine Conservation Institute

### Sierra Borealis / alaska report

is the newsletter of the Alaska Chapter of the Sierra Club

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