



FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
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CONTACT:

- **Organized Village of Kake**
Joel Jackson
president@kake-nsn.gov
(907) 518-1592
- **Bristol Bay Native Association**
Gayla Hoseth
ghoseth@bbna.com
(907) 842-5257
- **Native Peoples Action**
Kendra Kloster
kendra@nativepeoplesaction.org
(907) 917-0854
- **Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission**
Mary Peltola
marypeltola@kritfc.org
(907) 545-6206
- **Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska**
Richard Peterson
rpeterson@ccthita-nsn.gov
(907) 463-7103
- **Sealaska Corporation**
Anthony Mallott
anthony.mallott@sealaska.com
(907) 586-1512
- **First Alaskans Institute**
Barbara “Wáahlaal Giidaak Blake
barbarablake@firstalaskans.org
(907) 677-1709

***Alaska Native entities take a stand against
State oppression of Indigenous ways of life***

ALASKA – A broad coalition of Alaska Native Tribes and organizations are holding the State of Alaska accountable for its continued mismanagement and interference in Alaska Native ways of life. The current [State of Alaska lawsuit](#) (State of Alaska v. Federal Subsistence Board, et al. 3:20-cv-00195-SLG) once again threatens the health and wellbeing of Alaska Natives who harvest for their families and communities as a cultural, spiritual, nutritional, and physical practice as they have for thousands of years on their homelands.

The Organized Village of Kake, Central Council Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska, Bristol Bay Native Association, Kuskokwim Inter-Tribal Fish Commission, Native Peoples Action, First Alaskans Institute, and Sealaska Corporation, jointly release the following statement.

The Alaska state government in its current lawsuit against the federal government, is once again prioritizing action to sue its own citizens.

Unfortunately, this is a continuation of attempts by the state to target and punish Alaska Native peoples for living our ways of life by usurping the laws of the land in such a way as to try to deny our inherent sovereignty and constitutionally protected rights. This action is stunningly shameful.

We stand with [the Federal Subsistence Board's decisions in this matter](#) and call on the state to withdraw its litigation against our ways of life. We invite them to instead prioritize learning from the longest running and richest source of knowledge to help save Alaska from the current pattern of exclusion, extinction, and demise caused by the state's management system. As the first and forever stewards of these lands, Alaska Native peoples and our Tribal governments have upheld our shared responsibility to ensure the health and wellbeing of our peoples, lands, animals, and waters for over 10,000 years.

Despite the recent couple hundred years of colonization, genocide, and efforts to remove us and our voices from decision-making, we have never ceased in our stewardship and we never will. Though we carry thousands of years of highly evolved, data-driven and intact Indigenous knowledge and proven successful stewardship, we have faced tremendous obstacles. These obstacles sanctioned through structural racism and perpetuated by the institutions have prevented us from managing the land in a way we know best supports holistic and systemic health as demonstrated by the abundance present in Alaska prior to colonization.

Alaska Native Tribal sovereignty pre-exists the founding of this country and state. Recognizing that our political relationship with the state and federal government is distinct we have continuously, with great effort, and under generational duress worked to underscore the importance of having good relationships for better shared decision-making. Despite our best efforts to work collaboratively through government-to-government processes, we continue to face discrimination, racism, erasure, and assaults to our autonomy over these clearly defined and protected inherent rights. Without fail – despite the fact that “subsistence” represents the smallest percentage (0.9%) of the overall “take” of said “resources” (quotes indicate western management terms that are not resonant with Native stewardship) – our access to our ways of life continues to be unjustly over-regulated and excessively enforced.

Over the short 200 years these outside systems have been imposed on Alaska, they have degraded and decimated the very animals, lands, and peoples they are responsible for protecting. Examples of this degradation are displayed in [the number of fisheries disaster declarations](#) that now occur on an near annual basis. Today, policy and legal maneuvers by the state further strangle and constrain our ability to practice our Alaska Native ways of life by reducing the already unlawfully diminished and miniscule

harvest we are “permitted” under the state’s discriminatory management system.

Salmon and other fish are diminishing from the numbers and sizes they once were, and our moose, caribou, and deer are already reduced by more than half of the populations that our Elders knew as youth. A recent [study by the University of California](#) confirms reduced salmon size and the impact it is creating. The looming extinction of our animal relatives – and the critical ways of life connected to them – is now a very tangible possibility. We know that Indigenous stewardship over these sacred bodies, our lands and animals, protects and strengthens the abundance for all. The time has come to advance a governance system that respects, honors, and integrates our Alaska Native values, knowledges, and stewardship. Despite overwhelming systemic barriers, Alaskans and our Alaska Native community have a history of unity. In Alaska, we are all connected to Alaska Native ways of life by hunting, fishing, and gathering as well as the sharing and ceremony that goes with it.

This lawsuit is a disgraceful continuation of outdated, exclusionary, racist management practices by the State of Alaska. If the State of Alaska upheld Tribal sovereignty, did not unlawfully undermine the federal rural subsistence priority, and provided for Alaska Native ways of life, our animal populations would not be in such jeopardy. State law itself recognizes subsistence uses as the first priority of any harvestable surplus of fish or game, yet continuously insists upon prioritizing other uses in violation of law.

Alaska Native ways of life that make our cultures and communities so unique keep Alaska strong. We walk in the footsteps of 400+ generations that predate the generations of today. By ensuring the health and wellbeing of our world and furthering Native stewardship, together we can find a path forward that supports the betterment of all Alaskans.

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