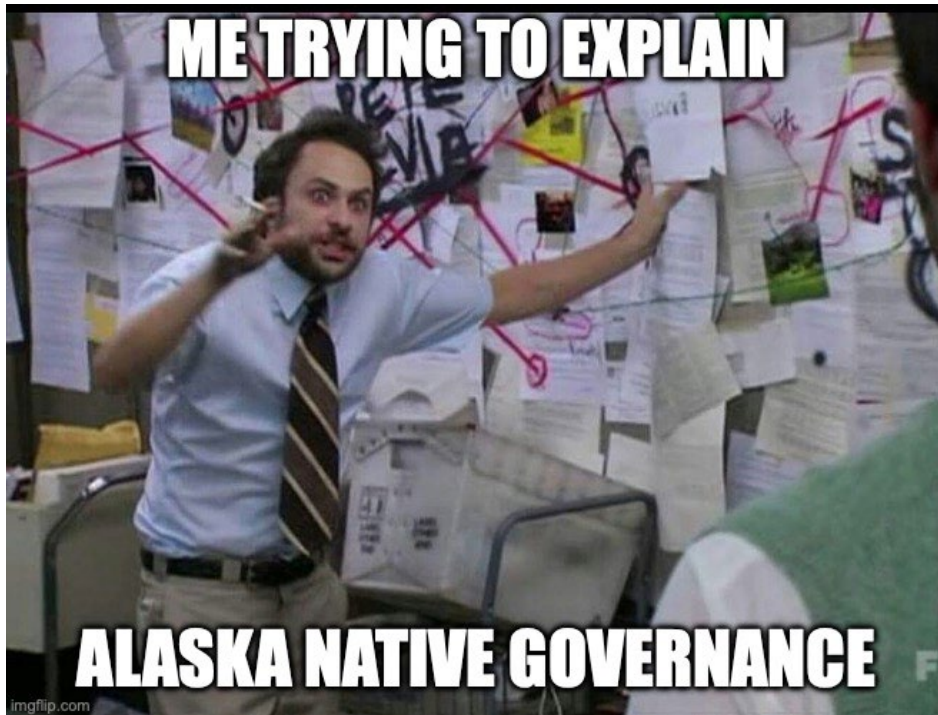


**Complexity in**  
**Motion: Alaska**  
**Native Governance,**  
**Protocols, and**  
**Understandings**

House Committee on Tribal Affairs  
Alaska Legislature  
March 27, 2025

Presented by:  
'Láaganaay Tsiits Git'anee  
(legal named changed from Liz Medicine Crow)  
Co-Founder/Director, Gínga & Igniñ Collective





**We were #itscomplicated  
long before facebook**

## **Goals of Presentation:**

- Unpack layers of Alaska Native Governance
- Build knowledge and enhance understanding
- Strengthen government to government understanding and responsibilities
- Increase opportunity, innovation, and collaboration

We want to help elected officials, other policy makers, and all Alaskans better understand our Alaska Native community. We are not a fixed in time community and our governance changes as it continues to better reflect our peoples.

# Aas Kwaani

*The Tree People*

Elaine Abraham, Tlingít Ancestor of Yaawkdáat  
48:04-56:08

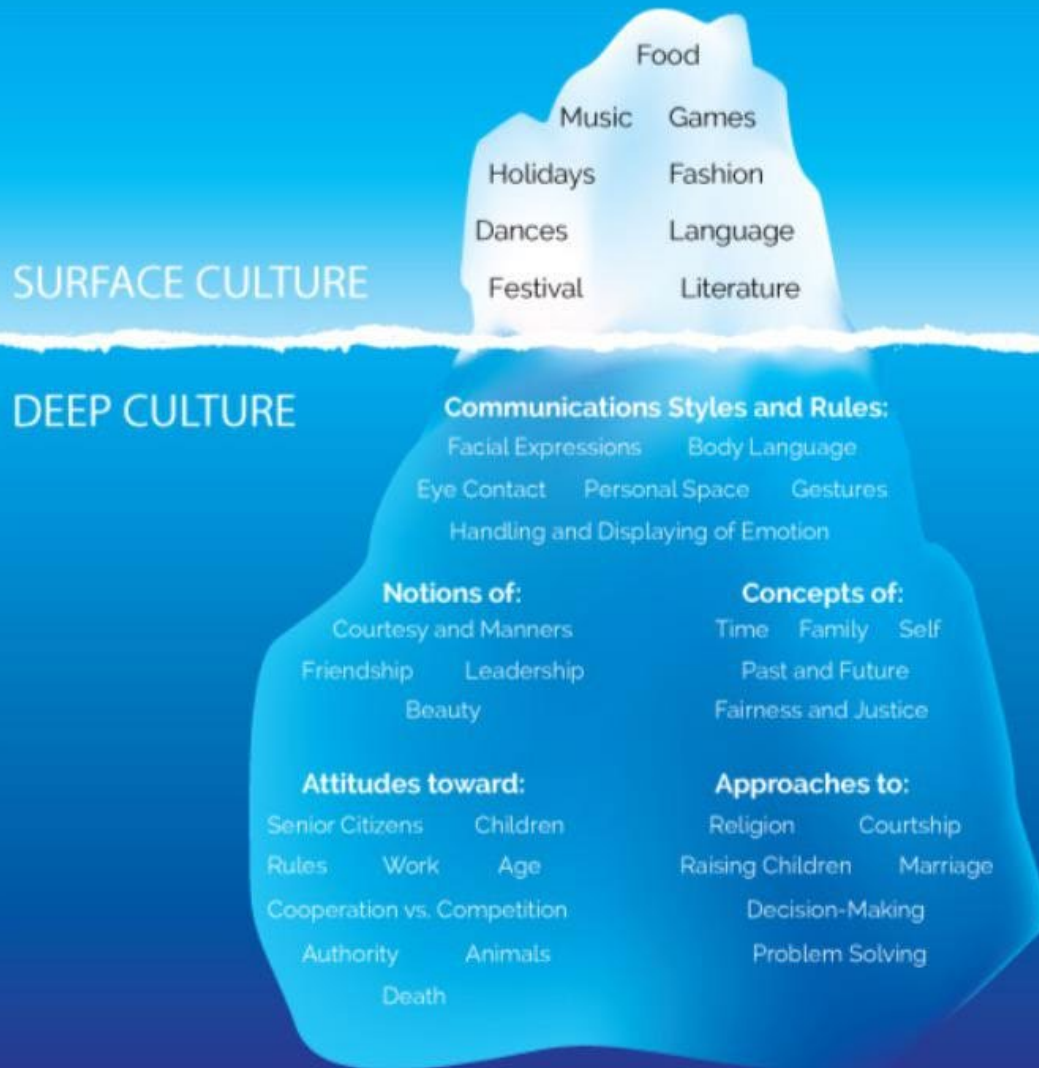




If my math is mathing, here's a generational timeline for Native peoples in Alaska:

- Ice Age, that would make me ~ a 600<sup>th</sup> Generation Haida and Tlingit
- Homo Sapiens, that would make me ~ a 12,000<sup>th</sup> Generation Haida and Tlingit
- Time Immemorial, that would make me ~ an Infinity Generation Haida and Tlingit

# THE CULTURAL ICEBERG



There is no place like Alaska, literally.

For Alaska Native peoples, when we think of our motherland and/or fatherland, of the places that hold our Ancestors, cultures, languages, hopes, aspirations, and our future – it is this beautiful, diverse place.

We belong to Alaska.

- at minimum over 14,000+ years
- Not a monolith, 12-14 distinct Nations
- “Geographic Intelligence” – Akall’eq Sanders

# **Alaska is now home to Three Sovereigns**

229 Tribes

1 Federal Government

1 State Government

**3 ways to get it right!**

The 6 C's of Government to Government Opportunities:

Consulting, Compacting, Contracting,  
Collaborating, Co-Creating, Co-Managing

# Sovereignty.

A short video to help us better understand what this means.



| 3 SOVEREIGNS  | TRIBES  | ↔  | FEDS   | ↔   | STATE  |  |
|---|---|--|--|---|--|--|
|   | Tribal Citizens/Members   |  | And Tribal Citizens  |   | And State Residents  |  |
| Self-Determine  | Inherent, Predating the United States; Nations – 12-14 distinct Nations<br><br>Cultures – as many languages 21+<br><br>Social & Governmental Structures: Clans, Families, Villages, Societies | Treaties                                     | Pre-existing relationships with Native Nations   | ANCSA   | Created Under the US<br><br>1 Alaska Native in the State Constitutional Convention – Frank Peratrovich |  |
| Self-Govern   |   | Constitution                                 | Constitution mentions Native peoples three times   | Created Alaska Native Corps   |  |  |
| Legislate   |   | Legislation                                  |  | 12 Regional   |  |  |
| Law   |   | SCOTUS/Law                                   |  | 200+ Village  |  |  |
| Policy  |   | Policy/Regulations                           | Treaty of Session between Russia and US Article III: ‘with the exception of uncivilized native tribes...” acknowledges a distinct political status | Non-profit education/cultural organizations; economic entities like Spruce Root |  |  |
| Regulations   |   | General Course of Dealing                    |  |   |  |  |
| Principles  |   | Depts/Agencies                               |  |   |  |  |
|   |   | Trust Responsibility                         |  |   |  |  |
| *the columns represent various info about Alaska Natives in relationship to Fed/State; they are not meant as a comparison and may not be directly related<br><br>**Work in progress | Tribal Governments: IRAs or Traditional Councils  | Indian Reorganization Act                    | Federal Subsistence Board  | CDQs  | Operates under US Gov’t Structure  |  |
|   |   | Federally-Recognized Tribes List             | Co-Management bodies   | ICWA and Tribal Compacting over Tribal Children’s Welfare                       | Cities   |  |
|   | Tribally Delegated Authority:   | Tribal Compacting over Healthcare            | Whaling  | Multiple Edu laws and Tribal Compacting over Education                          | Boroughs   |  |
|   | Regional Non-profits  |  | Nanuk  |   | Municipalities   |  |
|   | Tribal Health System/Orgs   | Tribal Compacting over multiple BIA programs | Marine Mammals   | PL-280/ VPSO’s  | Schools  |  |
|   | Tribal Fish Commissions   |  |  |   | VPSO’s   |  |
|   | Inter-Tribal bodies   |  |  |   |  |  |
|   | Regional Housing authorities  | PL-280                                       |  |   |  |  |
|   | Other Orgs: UNITY, AFN, ANB/ANS, FAI, AN Science Commission   |  |  |   |  |  |
|   | Terms:“Tribe” v. “Tribal”   | 229 Federally Recognized in Alaska           |  |   |  |  |
| Alaska Native v. Native Alaskan   |   |  |  |   |  |  |

**Native Entities in Alaska**

Scale 1:9,750,000

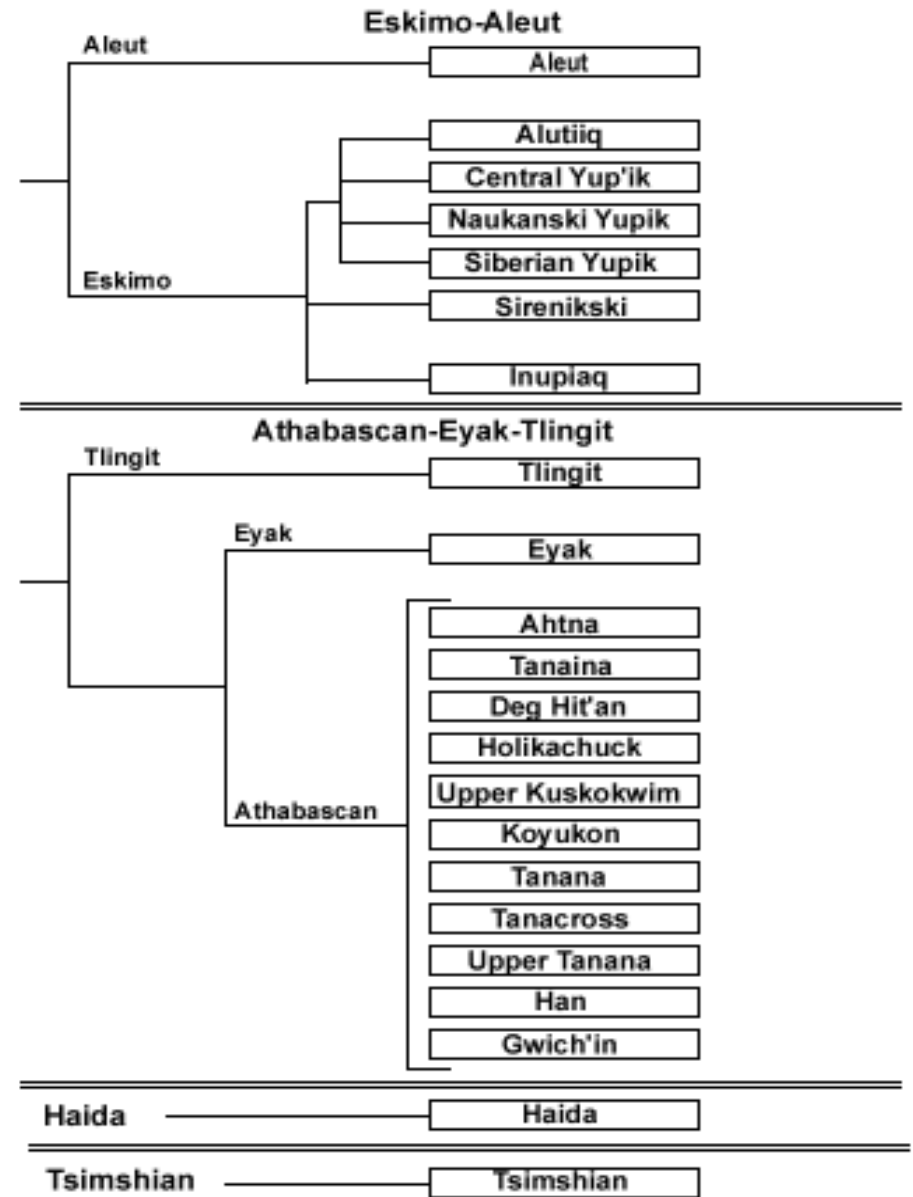
0 125 250 375 500 Kilometers  
0 125 250 375 500 Miles

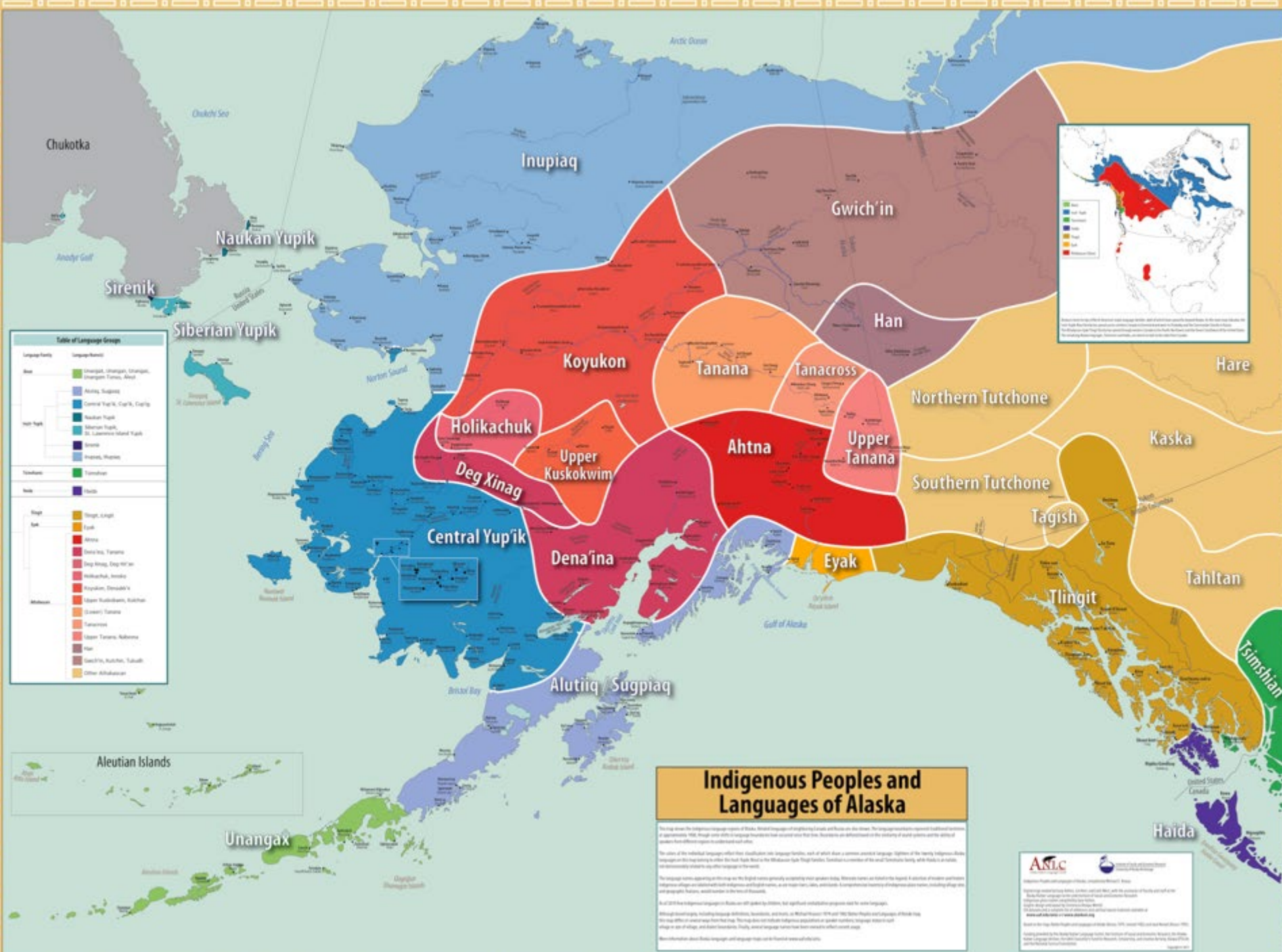
**Inset 1**  
Scale 1:2,000,000  
0 10 20 30 Miles  
Algaaciq (St. Mary's)  
Pilot Station  
Holy Cross  
Pitka's Point  
Marshall (Fortuna Ledge)  
Andreafski  
Iqurmuit  
Asa'carsarmiut Tribe  
Kalskag  
Ohogamiut  
Lower Kalskag

**Inset 2**  
Scale 1:300,000  
0 10 20 Miles  
Nunapitchuk  
Kasigluk  
Akiachak  
Kwethluk  
Atmautluak  
Oscarville  
Tuluksak  
Napakiak  
Orutsarmiut (Bethel)  
Napaskiak

# Alaska Natives:

- 20+ distinct cultural groups and languages
- 19.5% of the states population, fastest growing





We are citizens of all three sovereigns

We hold a unique political status – predating the United States and recognized in Federal Law

Government-to-government relationship & the Federal Trust Responsibility

Our political status is not a race-based status

- We also have a racial status that is a protected class as analyzed under the 14<sup>th</sup> Amendment Equal Protection Clause
- These are two separate and distinct statuses under US Law

# Native Orgs at a Glance

229 Tribal Governments

12 ANCSA Regional Corporations

~200 ANCSA Village Corporations

12 Regional Native Non-Profit Associations/Consortiums

7 Statewide Native Non-Profit Organizations

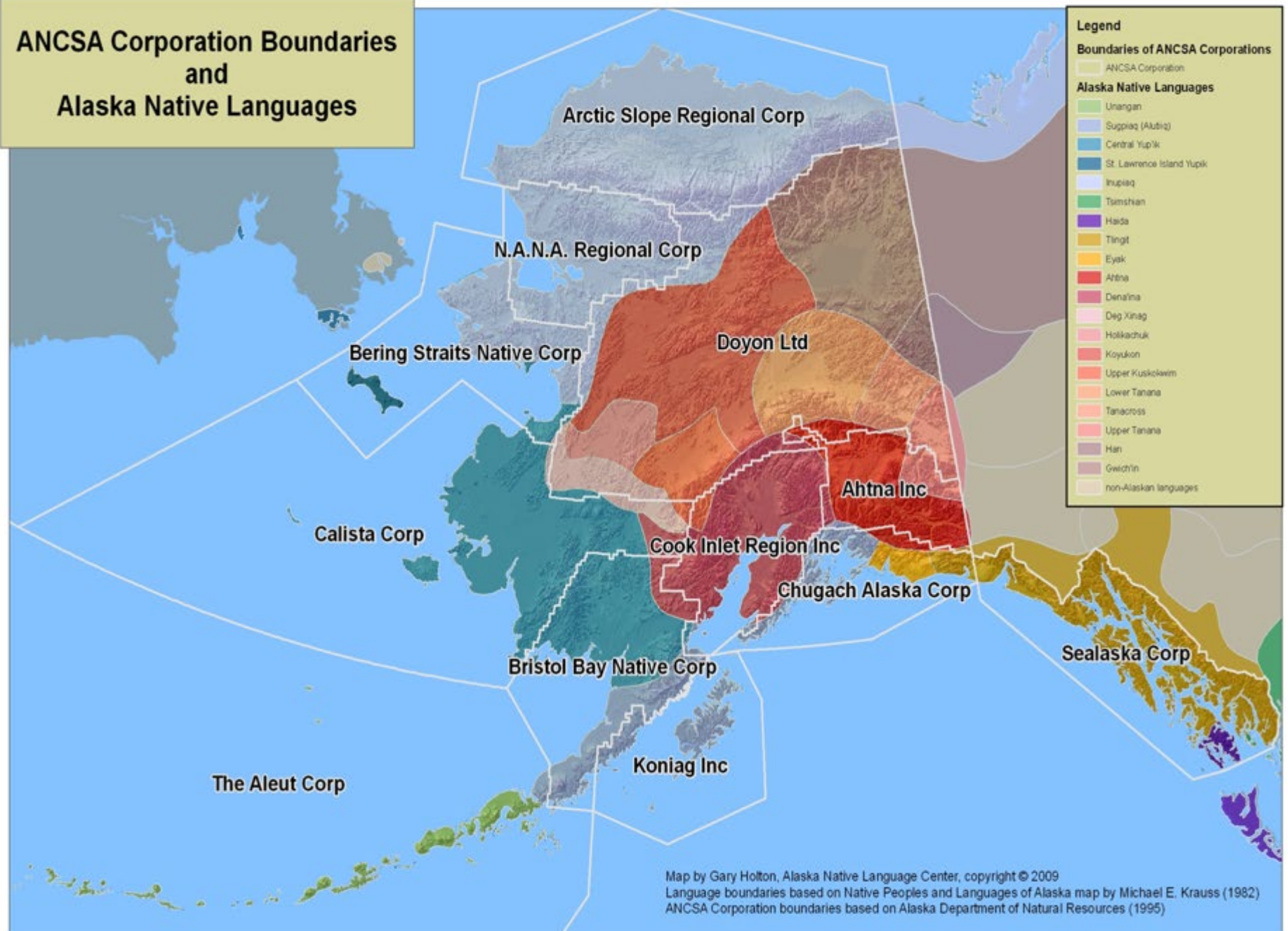
~50 Edu/Cultural Orgs/Centers/Museums

5 Marine Mammal Commissions

Alaska Native Bird Co-Management Council

1 Indian Reservation – Metlakatla

# ANCSA Corporation Boundaries and Alaska Native Languages



# "Alaska Native Organizational Kinship"

- Autonomous, Independent, and Inter-dependent
- Concurrent Community Care
- Outward Connections
- Relationships with Municipal Governments



# PL 280

- PL 280 – the State exercises federal authority concurrent with Tribes over some aspects of criminal and civil jurisdiction
- The State sues Alaska Tribes more than any other state in US – PL 280 is a reoccurring issue in litigation
- State receives bulk of law enforcement and dollars, yet provides inequitable service to villages they assert jurisdiction over, remember this is concurrent jurisdiction not exclusive
- Tribal courts hear civil and misdemeanor offenses, but State may dispute; State courts happy to pass cases over with no resources
  - Unique opportunities exist to work together and also create innovative programs

**“Hunger knows no law... what we struggle to get through is our hunger in our minds, spirit and souls. That’s what happens when we aren’t able to get out on the lands and water, to harvest for all of our sustenance. Hunger in our stomach, mind, body and soul. When our people are oppressed and restricted in our ways of life, it creates a void, a hurt that our Ancestors went through.”**

-Protecting Our Ways of Life Summit 2020

# Alaska Native Ways of Life

“We’ve lived in places with such efficiency and grace that later people who have come to our homelands have considered them to be empty of human beings; and they’ve called this a wilderness because they didn’t see us in those places. They couldn’t imagine that a people could live so well in a land that it would appear untouched by them. And we live with the dilemma of that to this day.”

*Paul Ontooguk, Inupiaq, Retired UAA Professor*

- Stewards for thousands of years with a management principle of Abundance
- Not a ‘special interest’ or ‘stakeholder’ group
- Co-management – Tribes, Federal, and State
- “Subsistence” is an inadequate word though it has become a legal term

# PROTOCOLS:

Respect Tribes as co-equal governments

Focus on enduring relationships

Discuss the hard things together → Trust

Activate and operationalize government to government structure

Recognize and collaborate using Self-Governance,  
Self-Determination → Innovation

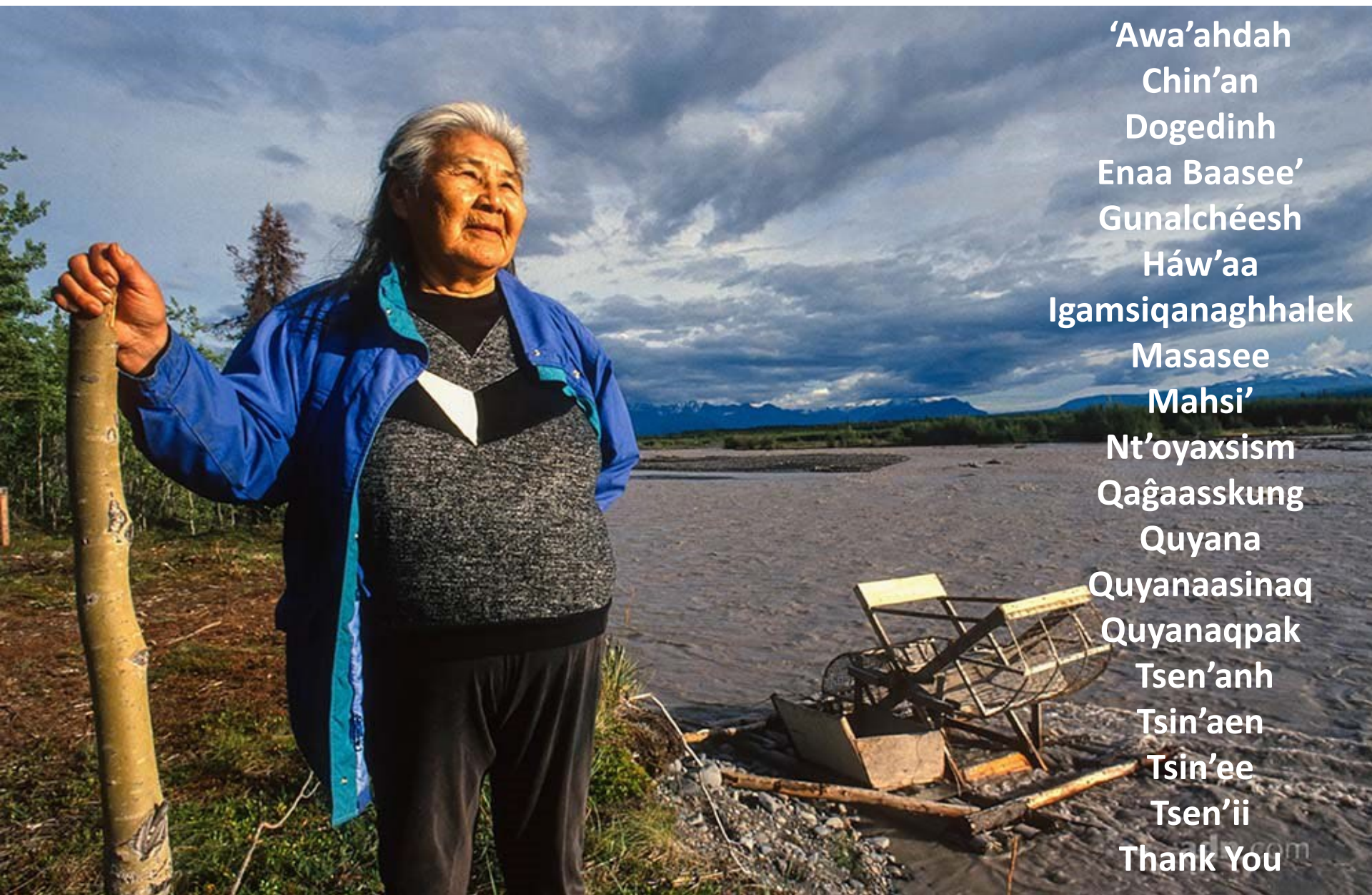
Shared responsibility to Tribal Citizens who are also State and Federal Citizens

Work with Native Organizations – the answer is Yes, now lets chart the path

Visit Native communities - don't just fly in and fly out

Share Resources – funding, infrastructure, time

Humor is a shared value, if not teasing or trying to laugh with you that's a red flag



'Awa'ahdah  
Chin'an  
Dogedinh  
Enaa Baasee'  
Gunalchéesh  
Háw'aa  
Igamsiqanaghalek  
Masasee  
Mahsi'  
Nt'oyaxsism  
Qağaasskung  
Quyana  
Quyanaasinaq  
Quyanaqpak  
Tsen'anh  
Tsin'aen  
Tsin'ee  
Tsen'ii  
Thank You

Katie John, Ahtna Ancestor, she stood for all of us.