



Chugach Regional Resources Commission

January 17, 2020

The Honorable Representatives of Southcentral Alaska
House of Representatives
Alaska State Capitol
120 4th Street Rm 3
Juneau, Alaska 99801-1182

Dear Representatives of Southcentral Alaska:

I am writing to offer Chugach Regional Resources Commission's (CRRC) support for the formation of a House Special Committee on Climate Change, and also to encourage meaningful and substantial engagement with Alaska's Tribes if the Special Committee is formed. CRRC was established in 1984 by the seven Tribes of the Chugach Region of Alaska, including the Tatitlek Village IRA Council, Chenega IRA Council, Port Graham Village Council, Nanwalek IRA Council, Native Village of Eyak, Qutekcak Native Tribe, and the Valdez Native Tribe. CRRC was formed as an inter-tribal fish and wildlife commission to collectively address issues of mutual concern regarding stewardship of the natural resources, subsistence, the environment, and to develop culturally appropriate economic projects that promote the sustainable development of the natural resources.

Our member Tribes are located in Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet, a remote region largely limited in travel to small aircraft, charter aircraft and boat travel, with seasonal Alaska marine highway service. Known as Alutiiq, or Sugpiaq, our members are a southern coastal people of Alaska. There are approximately 1,000 Tribal members living in our seven communities.

CRRC is governed by a seven-member board of directors composed of one Tribally elected representative from each community. CRRC is the primary federal contractor for the Chugach Region for natural resource, environment, and economic/community development projects. Programs under the organization include climate change adaptation planning, migratory bird management, ocean acidification (conducted at our Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Hatchery (APSH)), traditional foods and food sovereignty, fisheries, oyster mariculture, tribal natural resource program development, subsistence governance, and Alaska Native Relations (ANR) training conducted for federal employees who work with Alaska Native Tribes and communities.

Chenega Bay

Eyak

Nanwalek

Port Graham

Qutekcak
Native Tribe

Tatitlek

Valdez Native
Tribe

The APSH is located in Seward, Alaska and raises shellfish such as oysters, cockles and geoduck clams for the private aquatic farm industry and raises razor clams and littleneck clams for subsistence fisheries and personal use. Mass production failures at shellfish hatcheries in the Pacific Northwest led APSH to begin investigating ocean acidification, and engaging with coastal villages through our statewide [Ocean Acidification Sampling Project](#).¹ As stated in House Resolution 12, an increase in ocean temperatures causes ocean acidification, potentially affecting mollusk and shellfish populations and the related fisheries. Our facility is on the forefront of ocean acidification research.

Coastal Tribes in Alaska are at the frontline of climate impacts. As such, in 2013, the CRRC Board of Directors directed staff to engage in climate change planning and to develop a program that could assist the region in addressing climate change issues. Since 2013, CRRC has worked to identify and address climate needs relative to understudied resources of high cultural value to serviced Tribes, combining traditional knowledge and western science through its [Climate Change Adaptation Planning Project](#).² Through our climate change efforts, we have been able to gather the collective wisdom and Indigenous knowledge from Tribal members, building a shared understanding of the climate change work that is culturally relevant, based on the wisdom from the past to better understand climate change and identify work that needs to be done moving forward.

Our Tribes are highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, including declining water resources, reduced aquaculture productivity, spread of vector-borne diseases, declines in fish and mammal populations and changes in traditional harvest timing patterns, changes in migratory route of birds, sightings of unusual birds, massive seabird die-off events, shoreline erosion from increased storm events, and extreme weather such as increased flooding, heavier rainfall or extreme drought. Our Tribal elders forewarned us of this time, and their close relationship with the natural environment has allowed them to observe first-hand the changes happening in the region:

"The climate seems to be warming and with climate warming, water temperatures change."

"There is a change of subsistence patterns." & "Climate change could affect the health of the species we subsist on"

"Climate change would change everything and knows no boundaries"

"Everything around us is changing"

"Spread of the changes is faster than the science can adjust to produce published results"

"We are losing animals because they are not there when we expected or there earlier than expected"

"We are seeing a dramatic change to species and ecosystem shift and that our food resources are in peril"

We can summarize Tribal statements to highlight that subsistence resources are the most important issue for our Tribal members in regards to climate change. The Chugach people rely on species in the ocean, especially shellfish and salmon, and are seeing drastic changes. They are also growing increasingly concerned about terrestrial subsistence resources. As the growing season extends longer and longer into the fall, it is becoming increasingly difficult for our Tribes to harvest moose and other important game during the currently established harvest season. Tribes are concerned with the health

¹ <http://alutiiqpridehatchery.com/ocean-acidification-monitoring/>

² <http://www.crrcalaska.org/website/projects-services/climate-change>

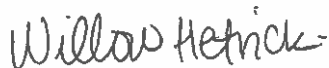
of the foods they are eating and want to be able to continue to subsist safely, adapting to changing seasons while maintaining traditional livelihoods and healthy diets.

Economically, climate change presents many uncertainties about the future, particularly in Tribal communities dependent on natural resources for food and income. The distribution, timing, and abundance of important commercial fisheries are likely to shift as ocean temperatures continue to increase, creating both hardship as species move too far away to harvest and opportunity as new species move in. Changing forest composition can impact communities that rely on logging for income. Deteriorating infrastructure may be exacerbated by climate change, putting a strain on Tribal finances. Permafrost melt, increasing storm frequency and intensity, and the greater potential for flooding in shoulder seasons all pose threats to public infrastructure in Tribal villages. Hotter and drier summers combined with decreased glacial runoff have the potential to cause seasonal droughts that could impact water supplies and increase wildfire risks, threatening rural communities. In short, climate change has impacts across the natural, built, and social environments, though the extent of those impacts is still unclear. Tribal input can help provide additional information and innovative, place-based strategies for mitigation and adaptation to the State's climate change strategy.

Climate change impacts every aspect of our Tribal members' livelihoods and well-being, offering both risks and opportunities. We applaud the 31st Legislature for considering this important topic and hope that this House Special Committee on Climate Change is realized so that Alaskans can partner with each other to identify actions to protect our natural, cultural, and economic resources. Whereas the University of Alaska contributes significantly to the scientific body of work relating to climate change, Tribes are at the forefront of climate impacts as outlined in the resolution. We encourage the Special Committee to establish rules that call for meaningful engagement with Tribes and Tribal organizations, both to understand the unique impacts climate change is having on Tribal communities and to create avenues for Tribes to propose mitigation, adaptation, and resilience solutions that are culturally appropriate and grounded in Traditional Indigenous Knowledge. This effort is too important to terminate upon the convening of the 32nd Alaska State Legislature and we suggest continuing this committee permanently.

Thank you for the opportunity to comment on this important resolution regarding our changing climate. If you have any questions or need additional information, please feel free to contact us.

Best regards,



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