

# Alaska 2024



## Our Strategy for Alaska and the World

As the world's largest environmental nonprofit, The Nature Conservancy has an ambitious plan — driven by our 2030 Goals — to mitigate biodiversity loss and climate change around the world.

Alaska will be key to achieving those goals. Our old-growth forest, peat, freshwater, wetlands and kelp beds all pull excess carbon from the air on a globally significant scale. At the same time, Alaska's latitude means climate impacts are touching down harder and earlier here than almost anywhere else.

The urgency is palpable, and the good news is there are endless opportunities to create a more sustainable future for Alaska — and the world. Our team has grown significantly in the last year to meet the moment. This growth includes an increased investment in our government relations work, with new capacity at the state and federal levels.

We spent significant time reviewing our strategy and asking tough questions about our direction. This resulted in a clear mandate to focus on Alaska's potential climate impacts, while continuing longstanding, partnership-based work in Bristol Bay and Southeast Alaska.

We organized our chapter's strategy into five pillars. The first three are related to climate, and reflect our focus on this pressing issue.



### Lower Carbon Future

Reduce emissions and implement renewable energy statewide.



### Natural Climate Solutions

Protect, manage and restore Alaska's carbon-rich lands and waters for maximum carbon sequestration while centering Indigenous rights and self-determination.



### Climate Resilience

Help Alaska landscapes and communities on the front lines of climate change to adapt and thrive.



### Thriving Communities

Work with Indigenous Peoples and local communities to elevate their conservation priorities and identify sustainable economic opportunities.



### Sustainable Fisheries

Support the world's last best wild salmon runs in Bristol Bay and across Alaska, and advocate for equity and sustainability in commercial fisheries.



## A note from our director, Ivy Spohnholz

Alaska has 20% of the land mass of the continental United States and more coastline than all other states combined, one of the world's last robust wild salmon fisheries, and half of the nation's terrestrial carbon. This means we have a globally significant opportunity to make an impact on climate change and biodiversity right here in Alaska. As a result, our work in Alaska is important to people worldwide.

We hope you find yourself inspired after reading this important annual report. Thank you for your support of TNC's work to ensure Alaska's wild lands, waters, wildlife and salmon remain vibrant for future generations.

## About Alaska

**63%** of the wetlands ecosystems in the U.S.

**40%** of the U.S. freshwater supply

**50%** of the terrestrial carbon in the U.S.

**95%** of the nation's wild salmon harvest

**40%** of the federally recognized Tribes in the U.S call Alaska home

**Alaska is Native land**, with evidence of Indigenous stewardship extending thousands of years

Cover: River delta in Kukak Bay, Alaska. © Carl Johnson;

Above: Matanuska Glacier, Alaska. © Paxson Woelber, Flickr, CC by 2.0

## Meet our Team

Addressing climate change in Alaska and maximizing the state's carbon-storage potential is a big job, and our newly crafted strategy for climate and conservation impact calls for a committed team to do the work. We're staffing up to meet the challenge, and immensely proud of the talented team that makes up The Nature Conservancy in Alaska.

IVY SPOHNHOLZ, Alaska Director, Anchorage and Talkeetna

AARON FERGUSON, Deputy Director, Juneau

AMY MILLER, Director of Marketing, Spokane

BRANDEN BORNEMANN, Bristol Bay Program Director, Kenai

BRITTANY REYNOSO, Associate Director of Philanthropy for AK and CO, Boulder

CAITLIN HEDBERG, Director of Philanthropy, Anchorage

COLLIN THOMPSON, Major Gifts Manager for AK and ID, Boise

CRYSTAL YANKAWGE NELSON, Equitable Conservation Project Manager, Juneau

DUSTIN SOLBERG, Writer/Editor, Cordova

GINNY LINDBERG, Operations/HR Liaison and Executive Assistant, Portland

HANK LENTFER, Gustavus Preserve Assistant, Gustavus

JEAN CARTER, Philanthropy Communications Specialist, Juneau

JILLIAN SCHUYLER, Climate and Forest Specialist, Juneau

JULIA NAVE, Southeast Alaska Program Director, Juneau

KATIE MOORE, Bristol Bay Conservation Coordinator, Metlakatla

KAYLEIGH HAMERNIK, Mariculture Policy Project Lead, Anchorage

KELSEY SCHOBER, Director of Government Affairs, Anchorage

MAGGIE PRIEST, Conservation Operations Specialist for AK and Emerald Edge, Juneau

MEGAN MORRIS, Trustee and Donor Relations Manager, Soldotna

NICKI HOLMEN, Director of Finance and Operations, Anchorage

SOMMERS COLE, Alaska Government Affairs Manager, Juneau

STEPHANIE HOLTHAUS, Climate Action Advisor / Women in Climate Co-Lead, Anchorage



Regardless of who we're talking to – be it an oil company executive, a person from rural Alaska, or an academic – **everyone is very aware of climate change in Alaska.** We're able to talk about it with all these eclectic groups because it's happening and people are having to deal with it already.

-Stephanie Holthaus, Climate Action Advisor



I am proud to apply my policy experience to benefit future generations of Alaskans and the natural systems we rely upon. **Alaska is well-positioned to make meaningful contributions toward conservation solutions,** while continuing to develop our sustainable economic future.

-Sommers Cole, Alaska Government Affairs Manager



Being involved in operations means I get to see the bigger picture of how our chapter fits into TNC's global mission. Whether it's managing finances or ensuring our infrastructure supports our work, **I'm always aware that what we do here in Alaska contributes to the broader conservation goals.**

-Nicki Holmen, Director of Finance and Operations



I think capturing fieldwork and interacting with partners is a big part of what being a conservationist means. **It's about showing what happens outside the office,** how we work directly with the land and people, and making those efforts visible.

-Jillian Schuyler, Forest and Climate Specialist



I love that I get to do **policy work that is seeking to conserve, maintain, restore and safeguard lands and resources in Alaska.** This policy work isn't secondary to meeting our conservation goals, it stands alone as an important lever for scaling our work.

-Kelsey Schober, Director of Government Affairs



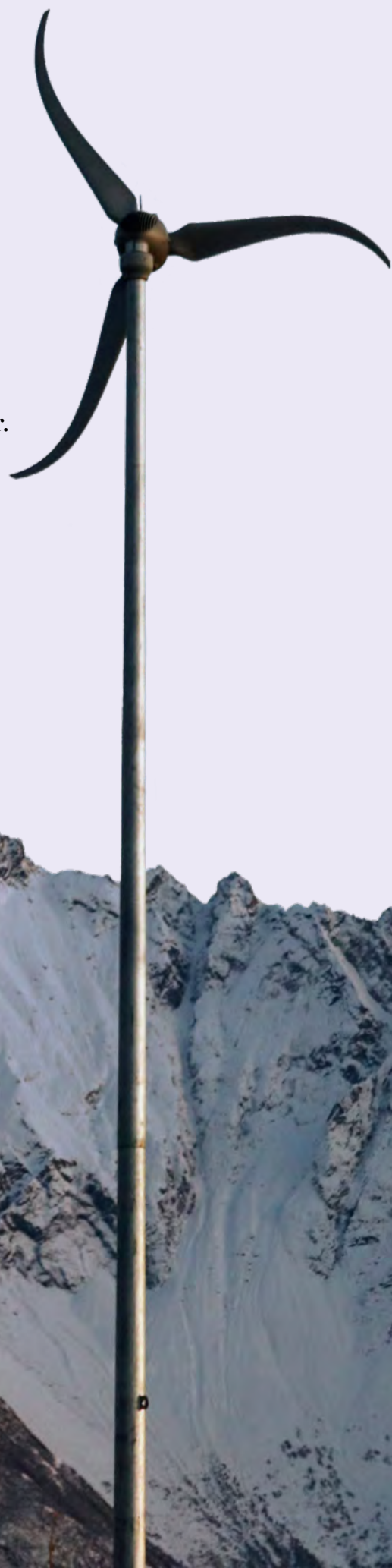
TNC's approach in Alaska really exemplifies that everyone is a conservationist at heart. It's not just about saying the right things but truly understanding and integrating with the community. Since 1988, TNC has shown that **genuine conservation work happens when we recognize and value the commitment of every individual involved.**

-Branden Bornemann, Bristol Bay Program Director

## TNC engagement leads to state policy success



By engaging at the right time, with the right people, and with the right research, TNC successfully supported passage of a bill that established a statewide green bank, dubbed the “Alaska Energy Independence Fund,” during the Alaska legislative session this year.



This big state policy win for renewable energy in Alaska creates a financing institution at the Alaska Housing Finance Corporation to facilitate renewable-energy and energy-efficiency projects.

As a result of its great size and cold winters, Alaska has some of the highest energy costs and per capita rates of energy consumption in the world. That’s why advancing renewable energy solutions in Alaska has an outsized impact on people’s lives and Alaska’s greenhouse-gas emissions. The green bank bill was designed to help lower energy costs around the state – from rural communities dependent on diesel fuel to population centers facing natural-gas shortages. Alongside the social benefits of lower costs, improving the viability and affordability of renewable energy projects will lead to decreases in greenhouse-gas emissions and improve community resilience by diversifying energy sources.

The bill’s passage was not always certain. TNC Alaska’s new Government Affairs Manager, Sommers Cole, reflected, *“The green bank bill seemed destined to be forgotten, but we were dogged about not letting it die. We did our best to reinvigorate the conversation and built momentum to get it across the finish line by leveraging strategic partnerships.”*

**The green bank bill didn’t pass until 11:30 p.m. on the final night of the legislative session, making it clear that without TNC’s engagement, this bill would have fallen by the wayside.**

TNC’s commitment to the legislation was there from the start. Prior to the 2024 Alaska legislative session, TNC Alaska Director of Government Relations Kelsey Schober identified the bill as a priority. At the same time, Schober was staffing up her team, more than doubling Alaska’s policy muscle. With new capacity, fresh research and clear priorities, it was time to make a move.

The passage of this bill is a great example of how policy can make significant conservation impacts in a way our other work can’t, helping to scale conservation for people, nature and the economy in this great, big state.

Left: Alaska policy staff © Jean Carter; Wind turbine in rural Alaska. © Shawn Reinhardt/iStock  
Above: Prince William Sound, Alaska. © Shorezone

## Beyond Pebble: Bristol Bay's Next Chapter

In early 2023, the Environmental Protection Agency “stopped” the proposed Pebble Mine, functionally vetoing the developer’s plan for what would have been one of the world’s largest open pit mines. It appeared that a generation-long fight was over.

Or so we thought.

For Bristol Bay’s leaders, many of whom had devoted their entire careers to blocking the mine, the respite was brief. Attempts to overturn the EPA’s finding came quickly, and new mine permits were also under review. In a bid to ensure the continued health of the region’s globally significant wild salmon fishery, legislation that would create permanent protections was introduced in Congress this spring – an encouraging development, but one likely to take many years to become law.

While that process unfolds, The Nature Conservancy in Alaska is approaching protection of Bristol Bay salmon from another angle. At the invitation of our partners in the region, we’re working to increase opportunities for the region’s Yup’ik, Alutiiq and Dena’ina people to have access to and benefit from their lands and waters.

Late in fiscal year 2024, we learned that our joint proposal with the Alaska Native Village of Igiugig to expand an Indigenous Guardians pilot project was selected from among hundreds of applicants nationwide for \$2 million in funding from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and the U.S. Department of Commerce, part of a huge package of federal funding for conservation advanced by President Biden. **The award will help Igiugig spread the Indigenous Guardians program to more communities in Bristol Bay, training local crews to collect data and plan for climate change impacts.** Working together, guided by a blend of Western science and Indigenous ways of knowing, the region’s communities can protect their ancestral lands and waters.

Another major part of our work in Bristol Bay in 2024 was to help advance solutions to the inequities in the commercial salmon fishery that make it hard for Indigenous and local fishing families to participate in and benefit from the industry.

Galvanized by the long and winding Pebble Mine saga, the region’s leadership has come together to chart a new path forward. We are proud supporters of their vision.

Sockeye salmon in Bristol Bay, Alaska. © Jason Ching



What excites me most about **Indigenous guardianship** is that it embodies a spectrum of **conservation values and practices that these cultures have long upheld.** It’s not a new model but the most time-tested one we have for stewardship, centered around the people who have successfully managed these lands for thousands of years.

-Branden Bornemann, Bristol Bay Program Director

Nearly 90% of Alaska's 640 million acres are public land, more than any other state in the country. That's why working with lawmakers and agency staff is a key part of our climate-related conservation work in Alaska. **Women are leading in exciting ways, and we are leveraging their commitment to a safe and healthy future through healthy strategic engagements.**



## Women Lead the Way to a More Climate-Resilient Future

A glaring detail jumps out of recent polling conducted by The Nature Conservancy in Alaska to assess Alaskans' attitudes on climate change and the transition to renewable energy:

Regardless of party affiliation or political philosophy, women care deeply about climate change, believe more strongly that we need to transition to renewable energy, recognize that climate change is impacting Alaska now, and are especially concerned about how changing weather patterns are impacting salmon and other subsistence foods.

**So, what do we do with that information? We mobilize.**

Last year, TNC worked closely with leading female philanthropists, political leaders and change makers to inject more resources and greater understanding into the public response to climate change.

In the fall, U.S. Sen. Lisa Murkowski (R-AK) addressed TNC trustees from around North America during TNC's biannual Advocacy Day event in Washington, D.C. The event pairs trustees with lawmakers to discuss urgent conservation issues. Murkowski and co-presenter U.S. Sen. Chris Coons of Delaware told guests that TNC is known as a trusted partner that can be counted on for nonpartisan information and pragmatic solutions. The pair also highlighted the important role TNC plays in bringing coalitions together and finding common ground.

In January, TNC Alaska's Stephanie Holthaus organized the 6th Women in Climate Innovation Lab in Arizona, attracting 35 female philanthropists, foundation leaders and impact investors from around the world to spend three days focused on raising money to fund women working on climate change research, adaptation and solutions. The event was such a success that the Women in Climate program is now partnering with TNC CEO Jennifer Morris to host a luncheon at New York Climate Week in September 2024 to continue to bring visibility and funding to this urgent issue.

Closer to home, Alaska Chapter Director Ivy Spohnholz was tapped by incoming Anchorage Mayor Susanne LaFrance to help shape the city's energy strategy – critical at a time when Alaska's Railbelt is facing an impending natural-gas shortage.

TNC Alaska State Director speaks with TNC CEO Jennifer Morris in Washington D.C. during TNC Advocacy Day, 2024. © Adam Auel

## Movement to Advance Indigenous-Led Conservation Grows in Southeast

With support from The Nature Conservancy in Alaska this April, dozens of crewmembers from Southeast Alaska's community forest partnerships and tribal stewardship crews gathered in Thorne Bay to brush up on wilderness first aid, field navigation, data collection and other forestry skills for the summer season to come.



Back home, crewmembers spend the summer field season managing local land and waters based on community priorities, like the ability to gather wild foods that are relied upon in Tlingit, Haida and Tsimshian communities throughout the region. This sustainable, holistic approach to forest health is influencing federal land managers in Alaska and beyond while highlighting the effectiveness of Indigenous-led stewardship.

Community Forest Partnerships are just one element of the work carried out in Southeast Alaska by members of the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, which is funded in part by the Seacoast Trust. **This year, the trust attracted another \$1 million in funding, and three years after its launch has just surpassed its first major fundraising milestone – \$25 million, or one-quarter of the way to its \$100 million goal.** Earnings from the fund will contribute to stable and predictable support for Indigenous-led conservation for generations to come.

Far from the whine of chainsaws, our conservation and government-relations teams went to work weighing in on the Forest Service's update to the Tongass Land Management Plan, which will define management practices and policies in the 17-million-acre rainforest for the next 15 years or more. The past year also saw the completion of a comprehensive carbon map for the entire coastal temperate rainforest, a transboundary region we call the Emerald Edge, which stretches from Oregon through Washington, British Columbia, and the Tongass, all the way to Kodiak, Alaska. This will help landowners and managers consider the carbon impacts of their land-protection or management strategies.

Left: Sitka black-tailed deer © Lance Nesbitt; Left and above: Crew members learn new skills. © Connor Meyer

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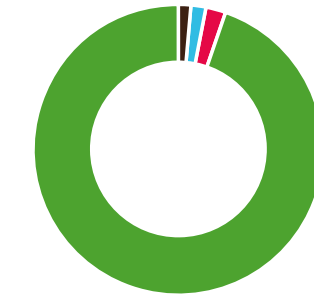
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## Financials | FY 2024



### Revenues | \$3,493,000

**Annual Philanthropic and Legacy Gifts**

US\$3,314,000

**Grants and Contracts**

US\$54,000

**Investment**

US\$55,000

**Other**

US\$70,000



### Expenses | \$3,493,000

**Climate**

US\$1,963,000

**Thriving Communities**

US\$813,000

**Sustainable Fisheries**

US\$717,000

**Thank you for your generous support!**

Your contribution makes it possible for us to continue our vital work in Alaska, from conserving wild places to strengthening community ties.

Support our future work by donating at [www.nature.org/supportalaska](http://www.nature.org/supportalaska) or contact us at [alaska@tnc.org](mailto:alaska@tnc.org).



Left: Ravens fly past an eagle in Juneau, Alaska. © Lance Nesbitt

Back cover: Two black bear cubs climb a tree in Juneau, Alaska. © Lance Nesbitt



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Our vision is a world where the diversity of life thrives, and people act to conserve **nature** for its own sake and its ability to fulfill our needs and enrich our lives.

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