



## **Aleut Community of St. Paul Island Announces PRIME Initiative: A New Model for Tribal Co-Management and Indigenous-Led Research and Economic Development in the Pribilof Islands Marine Ecosystem**

*Equitable, Tribal-led co-management model ensures meaningful Unangaꝥ role in decisions affecting marine resources*

*PRIME Initiative, a new marine management approach, will provide flexibility to build and diversify local and regional economies*

*Aniaꝥdun ngiin aqaaꝥan aꝥnangin qulingiin akuꝥ gumalqakuꝥ.* For the coming generations that we don't see yet, for their time here.

*Tanaꝥnangin lꝥayuusalix anꝥaꝥjimchin aꝥnaꝥtxichin.* Live with and respect the land, sea, and all nature.

St. Paul, Alaska; December 20, 2021 – The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island (ACSPI), the federally recognized tribe for St. Paul Island, today launched the Pribilof Islands Marine Ecosystem (PRIME) Initiative, a new approach for one of the world's most important and sensitive marine areas, providing flexibility to build and diversify local and regional economies and advance conservation.

Unangaꝥ (or Aleut) communities on the Pribilof Islands of St. Paul and St. George are directly experiencing a rapidly transforming marine ecosystem, including alarming declines of fur seals, sea lions, seabirds, fish, crab and other invertebrates, with real costs to local economies, culture, wildlife, and human and ecosystem health. The PRIME Initiative seeks to elevate Unangan voices in addressing these issues by working toward a designated, co-managed marine area that will adequately address shared conservation concerns while ensuring the sustainability of local and regional economies, which are intricately tied to the marine environment.

The governance framework of the PRIME will reflect co-management between the federal government and the federally recognized tribal governments of St. Paul and St. George for the waters within 100 nautical miles of the Pribilof Islands. Tribal government-led, dynamic conservation and management measures will result in the most effective management of the PRIME and provide for the inclusion of the Pribilof communities, fishing industry partners and other businesses, state and federal representatives, and other stakeholders throughout the process and implementation.

Amos Philemonoff, President of the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island and a lifelong commercial and subsistence halibut fisherman, said, "Unangan, as the original, enduring stewards in the region, must play a meaningful role in management decisions affecting our waters. As our ecosystem continues to face major threats, the PRIME Initiative will ensure that Indigenous voices are heard, and that federal government policies align with our Indigenous values and the desires and economic needs of our communities. Importantly, it will provide continued fishing opportunities to the wider fishing industry and ensure

sustainable, resilient local economies, including new tourism, research, and education enterprises, while addressing our urgent conservation concerns.

“We are gratified by the extensive support we have received for the approach proposed in our Initiative. Letters of support have come in both from other federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations in Alaska and in the lower 48 and from other island organizations, sustainable business owners, conservation organizations, and commercial fishing operations. We expect this support to grow as we move forward.”

Phillip A. Zavadil, City Manager of the City of Saint Paul, said, “The PRIME Initiative is critical to the ongoing sustainable health of our economy on the island, ensuring future commercial fishing, tourism, research and other economic opportunities that will contribute to our thriving economy for island residents for generations to come.”

One of the PRIME Initiative’s top priorities is addressing the ongoing decline of northern fur seals which have historical and cultural significance to the communities of St. Paul and St. George. The Pribilof Islands and surrounding waters provide a vital breeding and feeding habitat for more than half of the world’s population of northern fur seals, which have declined to less than one quarter of their estimated peak historic population of 2.1 million. A co-management based, cooperative governance framework with federally recognized tribal communities and all affected stakeholders at the table can achieve conservation benefits to the species by designing specific solutions for this incredible ecosystem using bottom-up, collaborative approaches.

ACSPI recognizes that achieving the vision of the PRIME will take time. While Indigenous-led marine stewardship has been successful in Canada and other parts of the world, it is still a relatively new idea in the U.S. There is neither a specific mechanism for designation under U.S. law nor an existing model for tribal co-management that achieves all of ACSPI’s goals. After considerable research, the ACSPI determined that a designation under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act is the best tool currently available to establish a new model for management. This approach explicitly incorporates existing processes for federal fishery management actions through the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and provides the needed flexibility to achieve co-management objectives that balance cultural, environmental, and economic priorities. ACSPI submitted its nomination of the PRIME Initiative to the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries on December 17, 2021.

Implementing the PRIME Initiative will result in what ACSPI refers to as an Economic Resilience Zone that supports tribal and resource-dependent businesses while ensuring that Indigenous and local knowledge is used to inform decisions about resource use and conservation.

### **About the Aleut Community of St. Paul Island**

The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island (ACSPI) is the federally recognized tribe for St. Paul Island, giving voice to more than 1,800 enrolled tribal members. The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island Tribal Government is the governmental venue through which the Unangan (or Aleut) of St. Paul Island can fulfill the intrinsic rights and responsibilities and support, recollect, practice, and pass on Unangan culture. The Tribal Government leads efforts to ensure and strengthen political sovereignty, economic self-sufficiency, continued cultural practices, tribal self-determination and self-governance, and the overall health, welfare, and safety of tribal members. To learn more about the ACSPI and the tribe’s culture, services, and activities, visit [aleut.com](http://aleut.com).

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