

# UNANGAĀ STEWARDSHIP IN THE PRIBILOF ISLANDS MARINE ECOSYSTEM

The Aleut Community of St. Paul Island (ACSPI) has created the Pribilof Islands Marine Ecosystem (PRIME) Initiative, a designated, co-managed marine area that will ensure the sustainability of our local economies while adequately addressing conservation concerns. ACSPI submitted its nomination of the PRIME Initiative to the Office of National Marine Sanctuaries on December 17, 2021. ACSPI has received extensive support for this Initiative, including from other federally recognized tribes and tribal organizations in Alaska and in the lower 48, other island organizations, sustainable business owners, conservation organizations, and commercial fishing operations, and it expects this support to grow.



**To understand the purpose and goals of the PRIME Initiative, it is important to have the following context about the sanctuary nomination process:**

- Indigenous-led marine stewardship has been successful in Canada and other parts of the world, but 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 Indigenous management that achieves all of ACSPI's goals.
- ACSPI believes that designation under the National Marine Sanctuaries Act is the best tool currently available to advance its goals under the PRIME Initiative. Structured as we propose, a sanctuary can provide opportunities for co-management, economic resilience, and comprehensive, inclusive approaches to conservation.
- We seek to build partnership and support for this effort. By elevating our voices and working with Indigenous partners, government, NGOs, industry, and others, we believe that the PRIME will result in what ACSPI refers to as an Economic Resilience Zone that supports tribal and resource-dependent businesses and ensures that Indigenous and local knowledge is used to make decisions about resource use and conservation.

- Our nomination builds on the City of St. George's nomination of the St. George Unangan Heritage National Marine Sanctuary, which proposed a 30-mile radius around most of St. George and 20 miles north toward St. Paul. St. George's nomination was added to ONMS' inventory of successful nominations in 2017. Our nomination differs from that of St. George in two important ways:

→ *Our Indigenous and Local Knowledge tells us that the area 100nm around the Pribilof Islands is of central importance to our communities, seals, and birds. This knowledge is verified by volumes of western science that includes studies of fur seal foraging areas and the bathymetry around our islands.*

→ *We seek to advance Indigenous stewardship through a sanctuary designation. Accordingly, one of the stated purposes of the designation is to elevate federally recognized tribal and Indigenous marine stewardship and expertise in all decisions regarding the sanctuary. We also seek to have roles and agreements explicitly defined through co-management with our federally recognized tribal governments of St. Paul and St. George similar to those the federal government has entered into with states and state agencies in other sanctuary governance bodies.*

- The next step in this process is for our nomination to be reviewed by the NOAA Office of National Marine Sanctuaries. From there, we will work with NOAA and all affected stakeholders to advance the nomination.
- All commercial fishery management will continue through the existing North Pacific Fishery Management Council process. We will work to elevate our Indigenous and Local Knowledge and the best available western science to identify needed federal fishery management actions that will help our fur seals, birds, and communities.



TO LEARN MORE ABOUT OUR NOMINATION, PLEASE SEE [www.aleut.com](http://www.aleut.com).  
 INFORMATION ABOUT THE SANCTUARY PROCESS CAN BE FOUND AT <https://sanctuaries.noaa.gov/>.