

WILD ALASKA

2018 IMPACT REPORT

The Nature
Conservancy 



Anniversary Edition

Director's Letter

January 1, 2019

As I share this update on all that we've achieved in the last year, I want to first express my deep gratitude for your support, encouragement and dedication to our vision for Alaska. Your generosity continues to inspire and empower us to protect nature for its own sake and its ability to enrich our lives.

Nature has an outsized effect on so many aspects of life in Alaska. For everyone who loves this place, and for all whose way of life draws on the wealth of Alaska's lands and waters, the health of our natural systems is fundamental. In this time of a changing climate and volatile ocean trends, our work has never been more urgent.

Last summer, reports from many of Alaska's wild salmon systems had us rapt with attention. In Bristol Bay, astonishingly robust sockeye runs filled nets and smashed records, delivering the largest return since record keeping began in 1893. Meanwhile, the summer left some Alaska fishing communities with more questions than answers. Copper River sockeye returns were the second worst in 120 years. In the Alaska Peninsula village of Chignik Lagoon, families waited for a sockeye run that never appeared. And across Alaska, Chinook salmon returns remain a fraction of historic averages.

These are the uncertainties we face. We can't expect to tackle them on our own. What we have done and will continue to do is build relationships among diverse sectors to find solutions essential to the future of Alaska's lands and waters.

We see the narratives of responsible development and conservation as an evolving dialogue in Alaska. For all of our 30 years in Alaska, The Nature Conservancy has focused on possibilities, and you'll see this up close in the following pages.

Lastly, I thank you again for your appreciation for Alaska's wild places, your dedication to conserving lands and waters, and your support for our mission in this place we know and love.

— Steve Cohn, Alaska State Director



Our First 30 Years

Your Role in Safeguarding Alaska

A lot has happened since we saved a remote homestead at the edge of the world's largest annual convergence of bald eagles. Those lands soon became part of the famed Chilkat Bald Eagle Preserve in Southeast Alaska. It was our first win, and what made it noteworthy is that no one lost. It marked the advent of a welcome approach to conserving nature in Alaska.

Throughout our 30-year history in Alaska, we've continued to seek out new and novel approaches to conserve its lands and waters. We were instrumental in launching the state's first local land trusts. In Bristol Bay, we were the first non-profit to protect flowing water in salmon streams through stringent standards established by Alaska state law. Our business training and loan programs are inspiring a new generation of environmentally sustainable businesses in communities left searching for new futures after the precipitous decline of the Tongass old-growth timber industry.

Our strategies have evolved. Heeding the call to tackle climate change, we entered a successful venture to protect nearly 100 square miles of the Bering River Coal Field on Alaska's Copper River Delta – ensuring millions of tons of carbon dioxide will never be released into our atmosphere.

Lastly, we're especially proud to be known for thinking big and working across sectors in search of lasting solutions. In the Aleutians, the entirety of Hawadax Island is restored in more ways than one for nesting seabirds. In the major shift toward sustainability currently underway in the Tongass National Forest, we're investing in a more diversified economic future for the region, which includes harvesting young-growth trees, restoring forests and streams, and creating jobs in renewable energy, mariculture, fishing and tourism – all of which are easing pressure to harvest more old-growth forests.

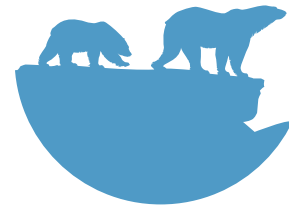
These wins – and others we highlight throughout this report – are just a small sample of extraordinary achievements our supporters helped us attain. We credit every acre we protect to generous donors who stand with us through their financial support.



A World Where People and Nature Thrive

The Nature Conservancy is tackling the root causes of some of the toughest problems facing people and nature today, replicating good ideas to save many places and improve people's lives.

OUR PRIORITIES



TACKLE CLIMATE CHANGE

Nature-based solutions and policy changes that transform.



PROTECT LAND AND WATER

Innovative financing, smart infrastructure siting, sustainable development and working in partnership with indigenous people.



PROVIDE FOOD AND WATER SUSTAINABLY

Sustainable fisheries, working communities and creating less harmful impact.

HOW WE WORK

PROTECT: We develop solutions unique to Alaska, to protect its great places.

TRANSFORM: We engage diverse partners in our work, demonstrating how innovative solutions can transform the use of nature.

INSPIRE: We share these successes and solutions to inspire action at a scale equal to the challenges we face.

EMERALD EDGE

The Emerald Edge is the largest intact coastal rainforest on Earth—a global treasure of biodiversity across Washington, British Columbia and Southeast Alaska that has been home to indigenous peoples for thousands of years.

A century of overfishing, unsustainable logging and other extractive industries has eroded its lands, waters and livelihoods. The time for bold solutions is now. Across the Emerald Edge, we are partnering on local priorities and scaling up our efforts to create a future in which everyone thrives—people, nature and economies.



CONSERVATION IMPACT
Protected more than 214,000 acres of land through innovative land deals



CONSERVATION IMPACT

Mapped more than 4.5 million acres of the most critical fish and wildlife habitats



Technology Makes Us Bigger. Smarter. Faster.

Mapping for Our Future

Our powerful online Bristol Bay Interactive Map employs GIS to shed light on this interconnected and complicated landscape, so that scientists, decision-makers and concerned citizens can see potential impacts from the footprint of the proposed Pebble Mine.

The Power of Lasers in a Forest

The high-resolution LiDAR images we've gathered from 3,500 square miles surrounding Hoonah and on Prince of Wales Island contains super-fine detail. These aerial images unleash the potential for tribal, government and community leaders to restore streams, protect important natural resources, and diversify the economy by identifying potential new business opportunities around sustainable resources.

Wolves in the Forest

We're helping scientists on Prince of Wales Island monitor wolf population trends through the deployment of a network of trail cameras and the collection of stray wolf hairs plucked from strategically located scent stations. This information is critical because the health of the island's wolf packs is closely linked to deer populations and the health of the entire forest.

There's an App for That

We've developed a mobile application called Hoonah Stewards to support the goals of the Hoonah Community Forest. This tool allows for better communication, collaboration, and interaction between landowners, land managers and the community of Hoonah as they work together to shape the future of the forest and its role in the local way of life.

Climate Change Up Close

Pushing for Action in the 49th State

You know the signs: Warmer temperatures – on land and at sea. Melting glaciers and thawing permafrost. Retreating sea ice and rising sea levels.

But what does it mean for Alaska? Coastal and community flooding, erosion and land loss. Rising ocean acidity and an uncertain future for sea life. More frequent wildfires and more severe storms. Hard economic costs.

What can we do? We're working to lessen the effects of climate change where we can, and adapt to the changes we are already seeing as part of The Nature Conservancy's 50 State Strategy.

We're catalyzing action and support: To address the economics of climate change around the state, we convened a series of roundtable discussions with key industries, including commercial fishing and outdoor recreation, and we helped host the 2018 Alaska Resilience Summit. Then we kicked off the first-ever Women on Climate event.

We're sharing Alaskans' stories because awareness of our changing world is critical to decisions about our future: We created the website tidalchange.org to serve as a portal into the lives of Alaska's fishermen. This fall we gathered more stories from the sea, amplifying the voices of the people who see the changes in our oceans up close.

We're advancing energy policies: To help Alaska's largest city address adaptation and mitigation, we helped produce the Anchorage Climate Action Plan for the Municipality of Anchorage.

We're building support for action on climate change among Alaska's leaders: We were instrumental in forming the State of Alaska's Climate Action Leadership Team, which submitted recommendations to state leaders last fall.

Climate change is here. How we respond is up to us.



30
YEARS

CONSERVATION IMPACT

Ensured around 150 million tons of carbon dioxide will remain locked away in perpetuity

'When It Starts to Change'

Sharing Climate Stories from Alaska's Native Voices

In June, a delegation of Alaska Native women traveled to the Federated States of Micronesia to participate in a Nature Conservancy event designed to bring together women working on climate adaptation in their communities. Denise Tommy (pictured left), who is from the Alaska communities of Bethel and Newtok, shares her experience:

"I don't think that people realize that our environment, when it starts to change, it also effects our health, and our emotional well-being. Growing up in Newtok, I can see the way that the whole community has completely sunk into the land, and things don't freeze properly. I can see the way the people are now, and how they have changed too. There are a lot of emotions involved."

Even in Micronesia, thousands of miles away from my home, there were so many similarities between their people and my people. The role of women and their duties; their older ways; the ways in which they are holding up their culture. I thought that only our area was being affected by global climate change, but hearing from the women of Papua New Guinea, and seeing the Yapese on their farms – it made me realize how the whole world is being affected."

Women on Climate

Inspiring a Movement

The room was abuzz with excitement, creativity and passion when 66 women from the Pacific Northwest, Alaska, Hawai'i and other regions gathered in Seattle in October for The Nature Conservancy's inaugural Women on Climate event. Born out of the Alaska chapter's work to elevate the voices of Alaskans on climate change, this event sought to unleash the power of women to generate and accelerate climate solutions.

Attendees brought a range of experiences to the table, from diverse backgrounds including business, tribal, non-profit, social justice, science, government and the arts. For two and a half days, they defined challenges, crafted solutions and launched the beginnings of a powerful new network – one of women inspired to take action on climate change.

"I will say, hands down, this summit was the most impactful, strategic, innovative and emotional experience I have had as a scientific leader. It was phenomenal."

— Sarah Myhre, Ph.D.

New Growth on the Tongass

The Tongass National Forest supports one of the planet's greatest wild salmon nurseries and one of the most lucrative commercial fisheries in the world. But the old-growth forests so important for healthy fish and wildlife have been fragmented by logging, the threat of which still remains. The Nature Conservancy supports a transition to a future where lands are managed with healthy fish and wildlife habitat in mind – one where sustainable economic activities like young-growth timber harvest, mariculture, fishing and tourism replace the harvest of rare old-growth trees.

Restoring Staney

The forests around Staney Creek on Prince of Wales Island – one of the region's most biologically and economically valuable watersheds – were some of the most heavily logged in the heydays of the old-growth timber industry. Trees are growing back, but fewer salmon return to its streams and its young-growth forests lack the diversity that brings life to the Tongass.

To address this, ten years ago we teamed up with the U.S. Forest Service on the Staney Community Forest initiative. We worked with citizens, tribes, scientists and local businesses to envision a different future. The ambitious Staney Restoration Project was a result.

Between 2014 and 2018, we improved over 1,000 acres of young-growth forest by thinning unnaturally dense stands of hemlock and spruce trees. In turn, trees from the forest project were used to restore Staney Creek and its major tributaries. In addition, more than 400 young-growth logs went to a local mill to bolster support for a local young-growth industry. The successes of the Staney project have since spurred similar restoration projects on the Tongass.

“This project is an example of how restoration can benefit not just fish and wildlife, but the economy as well. It’s a model for how we can collaborate on large-scale, sustainable management across the entire forest.”

— Conor Reynolds, Conservation Forester, The Nature Conservancy in Alaska

30 YEARS

CONSERVATION IMPACT

Supported more than 130 jobs in the Tongass through our green business initiative with Spruce Root



30 YEARS

CONSERVATION IMPACT

Protected 2.5 million acres of the most important salmon watersheds and old-growth forest in the Tongass



The Value of Young-Growth

Don “Grizz” Nicholson came to Alaska looking for a wilderness experience. He stumbled upon a vocation – oyster farming. “It seemed like an industry that would allow a person to live in the boonies and still make a living,” Grizz says. He plied his trade outside Coffman Cove for more than three decades.

After he retired, Grizz began milling lumber with a portable sawmill, first for himself – and then as word spread – for his neighbors. It filled a niche. When we were looking for a small operator to produce young-growth timber, Grizz was a natural choice. Since he believes the old-growth should be left where it stands, he agreed to give it a try.

He built a shed in his backyard, where he stacks the lumber he mills from the young-growth trees. It’s fairly priced, and he sells on an honor system. Customers take the wood they need and leave money behind. Grizz’s young-growth lumber is in demand. All over the island, from Whale Pass, to Naukati to Hollis, it’s been used to build warehouses, homes and shops.

“This is the future,” says Grizz. “Carpenters know the quality of their work is more relative to the trueness of the lumber than the number of growth rings.”

Grizz cuts every 2x4 he can from each tree, and then salvages the rest. “It’s huge to get those logs to my mill, with labor and fuel. So, I don’t forget that when I’m milling,” Grizz says. He donates firewood to locals to heat their homes and leaves the shavings and sawdust – good for trails, mulching and chicken coops – piled up for people to haul away. In this way he makes the most out of every log and honors the trees.

“I really support The Nature Conservancy’s efforts to not only experiment with how to enhance wildlife but also make second-growth timber available and demonstrate that it can be and will be a viable source of raw product for making lumber.”

— Don “Grizz” Nicholson (pictured right)



Young and Rooted

Training for Jobs in Alaska's Tongass

We're pleased to support an innovative environmental jobs program for teens and young adults from rural communities in the Tongass.

Now in its second year, TRAYLS – Training Rural Alaskan Youth Leaders and Students – offers practical, hands-on vocational training with real work experience and mentorship. Student crews learn from a curriculum led by local experts in fields like forestry, recreation and fisheries. This year, four TRAYLS crews worked in Sitka, Hoonah and on Prince of Wales Island on a variety of projects including stream restoration, coastal monitoring, road and trail maintenance and vegetation surveys.

“We're addressing brain drain. Rural communities are having a hard time retaining young people who want to have good paying jobs,” says Bob Christensen of the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, which The Nature Conservancy helped establish.

TRAYLS also seeks to build meaningful links to local cultural traditions, and all crew members participate in Alaska Native culture camps. “We're seeking to redefine what we mean by work to include cultural stewardship and non-cash work. A primary example is traditional gathering of food,” says Bob. “It's an important role to gather food and share with community members and neighbors. We encourage that as an aspect of leadership.”



CONSERVATION IMPACT
Conserved more than 8,000 acres of prime salmon habitat through coordination of Matanuska-Susitna Salmon Habitat Partnership

30 YEARS



A Land Made for Salmon

Supporting Bristol Bay Traditions and Economy

Alaska's Bristol Bay is home to the planet's largest runs of wild salmon. Every summer, tens of millions of these mighty fish return to its lakes and streams from the North Pacific, completing the remarkable circle of the wild salmon life cycle. Salmon have been at the very heart of local Native food traditions for generations, and these remote waters are now a world-class sportfishing destination. Alaska's careful management of Bristol Bay's 130-year-old commercial salmon fishery shows how an industry built on sustainability can thrive.

We've invested heavily in efforts to inform responsible development in Bristol Bay, where the fate of copper and gold deposits remains uncertain. We've helped to establish a successful watershed council of local partners and a local land trust. We joined with local tribes to create an innovative conservation plan for the area. Our sophisticated scientific efforts have led to more comprehensive understandings of its interwoven rivers and streams.

We believe that permanent protection of Bristol Bay lies in the ability of its indigenous communities to harness the wealth of its salmon fisheries in a way that creates a thriving, sustainable local economy for all. This past year we began engaging with leaders from across Bristol Bay to brainstorm and develop sustainable, long-term solutions to natural resource management and the need for a diversified local economy.

“We are proud to work with an organization like The Nature Conservancy that believes – as we do – that together we can create a sustainable future for people and for nature in Bristol Bay,” says Norman Van Vactor, chief executive officer of the Bristol Bay Economic Development Corp.



CONSERVATION IMPACT
Safeguarded more than 140 miles of salmon streams by ensuring they have the most stringent protections provided by Alaska state law

30 YEARS

Stronger Together

When We Unite, Fish Win

If you were to measure Alaska's vastness using U.S. states as units of measurement, you'd need four Californias. Or 15 Ohios, or 27 West Virginias. It's big like that.

A single West Virginia would cover a pair of neighboring river basins – the magnificent Susitna and Matanuska – that together encompass everything from glaciers, mountain ranges, spruce forests and farmland to growing suburban neighborhoods with big box stores. And there's the water: 24,700 lakes and 53,000 miles of streams and rivers. These explain the tremendous summer runs of wild salmon.

Yet the sheer abundance of clear-flowing water doesn't mean these salmon runs are forever safe – some declines already signal dire warnings. This begs a question: Is it possible for people and wild salmon to live happily together in the same place?

The Nature Conservancy believes the answer is “yes,” but we also know it cannot happen without a shared effort. So, 13 years ago, we helped launch the Matanuska-Susitna Basin Salmon Habitat Partnership. With more than 60 diverse members, the partnership has found success working toward a mutually agreed upon goal: healthy fisheries and healthy communities.

To date, the partnership has forged new alliances among scientists and tribes, commercial fishing and sportfishing sectors, and local business and fisheries managers. It has funded 92 projects to keep habitat healthy and restore places where it's not.

“The partnership's effect is unprecedented here,” says Jessica Speed, who coordinates the partnership for The Nature Conservancy. “You can see the results in new science, restored salmon streams and in the way old habits are giving way to innovation.”

“In the Matanuska-Susitna basin, Alaska's second largest and most rapidly developing community, people live among wild and abundant salmon. Our Salmon-Safe Development Guidelines provide a roadmap for commercial and residential development that allows people and salmon to thrive together as good neighbors.”

– Jim DePasquale, Spatial Ecologist, The Nature Conservancy in Alaska

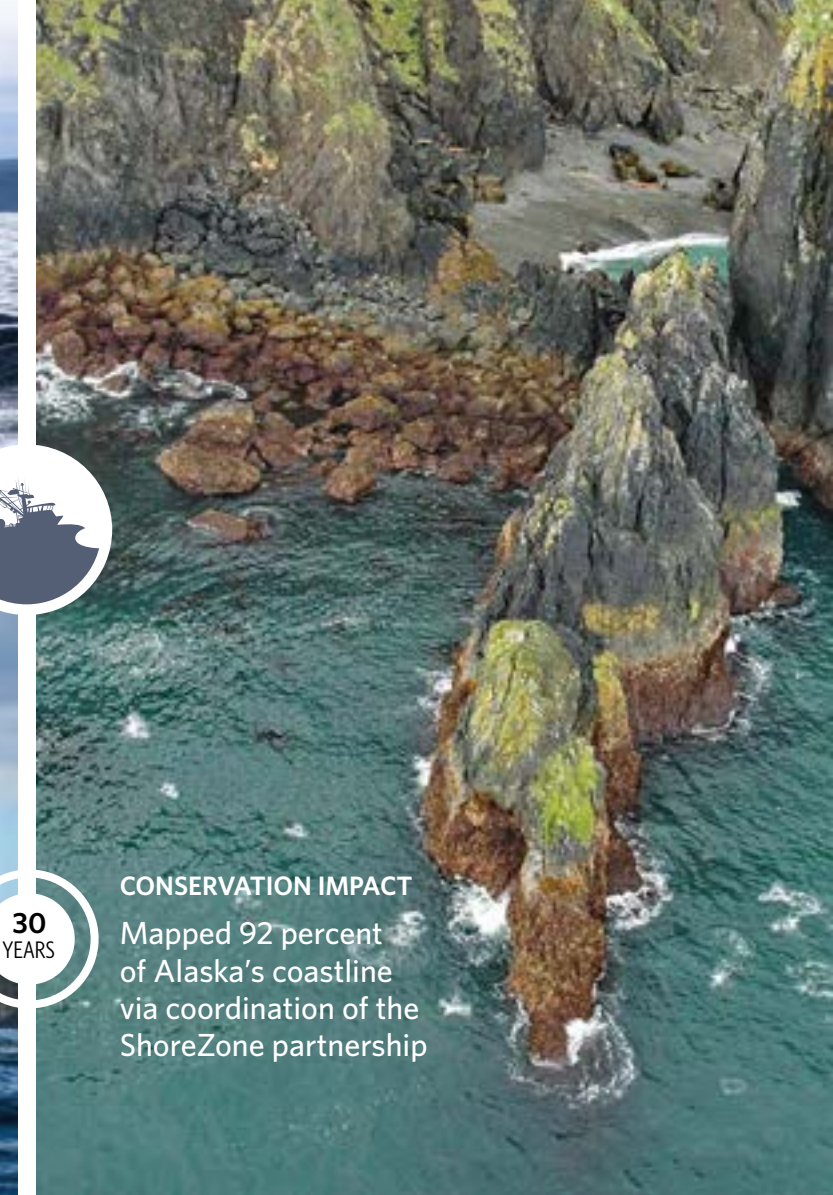


CONSERVATION IMPACT
Made more than 3 million dollars in loan capital available for sustainable businesses

30 YEARS



30 YEARS



CONSERVATION IMPACT
Mapped 92 percent of Alaska's coastline via coordination of the ShoreZone partnership

PROVIDE FOOD AND WATER SUSTAINABLY

Soul Food

Preserving a Springtime Herring Tradition

In the spring when giant schools of Pacific herring appear like flash-mobs in the shallows of coastal bays and inlets, it's hard not to notice. The spawning frenzy of these silver fish turns entire coastlines a milky white, visible for miles. The scene attracts a sudden burst of activity – hungry humpback whales and Steller sea lions, king salmon and bald eagles – transforming aquamarine waters into a food web splashing with life.

Herring eggs are a favorite traditional food among all generations in springtime coastal Alaska. In Sitka Sound, where the tradition of harvesting eggs direct from the sea is alive and well, herring eggs have been called “soul food.” The indigenous herring tradition reaches farther south to the waters off Washington and British Columbia and as far north as the Bering Sea coast. The egg harvest brings people together in a way of life that's anticipated each and every year.

Sitka Sound is also the nexus of a multimillion-dollar commercial herring fishery – a fishing fleet harvests herring predominantly for eggs, or roe, that are destined for the valuable Japan export market. Amid declines through much of the Pacific herring's original range, the Tlingit, Haida, Tsimshian and Aleut people of the Sitka Tribe of Alaska are asking questions about the future of the fishery, its status as a vital forage fish in the natural system and the fate of the tradition it sustains.

So The Nature Conservancy's Emerald Edge program helped the federally recognized tribe build new learning relationships through an exchange that brought members of the Heiltsuk Nation, including researcher Desiree Lawson, to share Heiltsuk experiences in defending indigenous claims to herring harvests in British Columbia.

“For Desiree and Heiltsuk Nation to come and share how they were able to move their government, it offers us encouragement and lights a path that we didn't know existed until she came to tell us.”

— Tammy Young, local attendee, Emerald Edge program

Local People, Local Fish

Fish Fund Brings New Commercial Fishing Finance Options

Each year Alaska's fishermen pull enough bounty from the sea to feed every person on the planet at least once. They are spread throughout the state, typically living in small, remote communities that rely heavily on natural resources like fish for food and income.

Alaska has one of the most sustainably managed fisheries in the world. Even so, the next generation of commercial fishing families sometimes face barriers to taking part. Too often, younger fishermen face prohibitively expensive entry costs as they try to buy into the lucrative halibut or sablefish fisheries. Without a family member in the business to offer a helping hand, the younger generation is often priced out of participating in a vibrant fishery.

That's why we're so excited to announce the launch of the Local Fish Fund. This innovative new loan product provides the next generation of commercial fishermen in Alaska's fishing communities with a new financing tool for buying in to the halibut and sablefish fisheries

– and investing in the sustainable future of a fishery important to local communities.

Repayment terms are designed to reduce the risk for entry level fishermen. The program will also increase marine stewardship and the voices of Alaska's villages in fisheries management. Funding recipients will be required to participate in conservation programs that improve the industry's sustainability - like collecting scientific data, engaging in policy and decision-making, or working on conservation education and outreach.

The creation of the Local Fish Fund is a collaborative effort led by the Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust and made possible by a unique team that includes the Alaska Longline Fishermen's Association, The Nature Conservancy and Craft3 Community Development Financial Institute. The program is made possible by funding from The Rasmuson Foundation and Catch Together.

“Encouraging local participation in our commercial fisheries helps foster a long-standing Alaskan tradition of community-based stewardship of our natural resources.”

— Christine Woll, Southeast Alaska Program Director, The Nature Conservancy in Alaska

Decades of Honorable Service

Susan Ruddy Retires

As we celebrate 30 years, we turn to the matriarch of The Nature Conservancy in Alaska, Susan Ruddy, for a story from our early days; a story whose results continue to guide our work today.

The Kenai River was “being loved to death,” says Susan. In the early 1990s, local landowners were concerned about the health of the river due to heavy use. But they were also concerned about the possibility of restricted access to the river if a conservation organization got involved. Allowing the landowners to guide the decision-making process, The Nature Conservancy provided the science to explain what the river and its salmon needed to thrive. Thus, the Kenai Watershed Forum was launched as one of our earliest community-based conservation projects.

We continue to see the value of our science-based, community approach across the state. This work has stretched from the Pribilof Islands in the Bering Sea, to the rapidly expanding communities of the Matanuska-Susitna Borough, to the old-growth forests of Southeast.

Susan established The Nature Conservancy in Alaska in 1988, determined to reach across Alaska’s political spectrum to protect Alaska’s lands and waters for future generations. She served for 13 years as state director, and for many years on our board of trustees. This year, Susan retired as a trustee. We thank her for her decades of service to The Nature Conservancy and to Alaska.



CONSERVATION IMPACT

Launched more than a dozen enduring conservation partnerships throughout the state



Meet Our New Leadership

Guiding Bold Initiatives in the 49th State

State Director Steve Cohn successfully served as deputy state director for resources in Alaska with the federal Bureau of Land Management, in addition to serving in senior postings in Washington, D.C. and Arizona.

Steve holds a bachelor’s degree in government from Harvard University and a master’s and doctorate from the University of California at Berkeley College of Natural Resources.

Director of Conservation Adrianna Muir is the former deputy senior Arctic official at the U.S. Department of State, where she formulated and represented U.S. Arctic policy and interests abroad. Previously, she served at the U.S. Department of the Interior on Alaska energy and science policy.

Adrianna holds a bachelor’s degree from Tufts University and a doctorate from University of California, Davis.



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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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