

## WE ARE OCEAN PEOPLE: INDIGENOUS LEADERSHIP IN MARINE CONSERVATION

CINDY BOYKO &amp; 'AULANI WILHELM, GUEST EDITORS

# Traditional Foods of Southcentral Alaska

## Chugach Regional Resources Commission

**Chugach Regional Resources Commission (CRRC)** is a non-profit, intertribal consortium formed by seven Tribes<sup>1</sup> in the Chugach Region of Alaska to protect the subsistence lifestyle through the development and implementation of natural resource management programs to assure the conservation, sound economic development, and stewardship of natural resources in the traditional use areas.

In 2016, CRRC initiated a traditional foods program to conduct a baseline assessment of food consumption, use, and harvest patterns to develop wellness strategies in the face of a changing environment. Through this endeavor, a traditional foods poster (below) was created that portrays subsistence foods in southcentral Alaska. This poster serves as a window into the lives of the people of the Chugach, a glimpse of the traditional foods that are important to their cultural identity, and a stepping stone to protect a subsistence way of life that desperately needs to be preserved.

## Suumacirpet asirpiartuq Our way of living is the best



To the Alutiiq people, subsistence is life. There is no easy way to translate the word subsistence - suumacirpet - into the Alutiiq language. Westerners often think of subsistence as the process of obtaining and eating wild foods, an alternative to buying groceries. This definition, however, fails to capture the complexities of living off the land.

Collecting wild foods is not simply an economic act, but a central component of social and spiritual life. Through hunting, fishing, and gathering, Alutiiq people experience and express native identity. They explore their deep and enduring connection to the land. They care for their families and communities. They celebrate and sustain life.

Subsistence is also a birthright, a way of living passed down from ancestors that has sustained generations. While not a literal translation of the word subsistence, suugacirpet asirpiartuq, "our way of living is best" expresses these many connections.

The Gulf of Alaska, including Prince William Sound and Lower Cook Inlet is one of the richest and biologically productive ecosystems on the planet. A local saying is: "When the tide is out, the table is set."



<b>SEAFOODS</b> 1. Silver Salmon 2. Pink Salmon 3. Chinook Salmon 4. Coho Salmon 5. Herring 6. King Salmon 7. Halibut 8. Crab 9. Shellfish 10. Mollusks 11. Echinoderms 12. Sea Urchins 13. Starfish 14. Jellyfish 15. Anemones 16. Corals 17. Sponges 18. Sea Pencils 19. Sea Anemones 20. Sea Slugs 21. Sea Stars 22. Sea Breeches 23. Sea Nettle 24. Sea Spider 25. Sea Cucumber 26. Sea Pineapple 27. Sea Apple 28. Sea Walnut 29. Sea Cucumber 30. Sea Pineapple 31. Sea Apple 32. Sea Walnut 33. Sea Cucumber 34. Sea Pineapple 35. Sea Apple 36. Sea Walnut 37. Sea Cucumber 38. Sea Pineapple 39. Sea Apple 40. Sea Walnut 41. Sea Cucumber 42. Sea Pineapple 43. Sea Apple 44. Sea Walnut 45. Sea Cucumber 46. Sea Pineapple 47. Sea Apple 48. Sea Walnut 49. Sea Cucumber 50. Sea Pineapple 51. Sea Apple 52. Sea Walnut 53. Sea Cucumber 54. Sea Pineapple 55. Sea Apple 56. Sea Walnut 57. Sea Cucumber 58. Sea Pineapple 59. Sea Apple 60. Sea Walnut 61. Sea Cucumber 62. Sea Pineapple 63. Sea Apple 64. Sea Walnut 65. 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▲ Poster excerpt: the main panel.

We realized that, for many people of the region, connections and memories to traditional foods are intertwined with the stories of their lives. The primary food sources have changed dramatically and foods gathered in the wilderness are no longer available. While traditional foods restore physical health, they are also central to cultural and spiritual traditions. These foods strengthen communities and support the unique culture of the region and are often the center of special occasions such as family gatherings and holidays. The intrinsic value of harvesting foods in traditional ways cannot be overstated. A local statement is, “When the tide is out, the table is set.”

Traditional foods are more than just commodities; they are gifts that help us to always remember who we are and where we come from because foods weave together the very social fabric that makes a community. When people are actively pursuing wild game or fishing sacred waters, they are gifted with new memories and those of a distant past that bring a sense of belonging while promoting balance and generosity.

This creation serves as a legacy to the people of Alaska. Alaskans have great potential to shape a food system that feeds the future in a way that



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◀ Poster excerpt: the side panel.

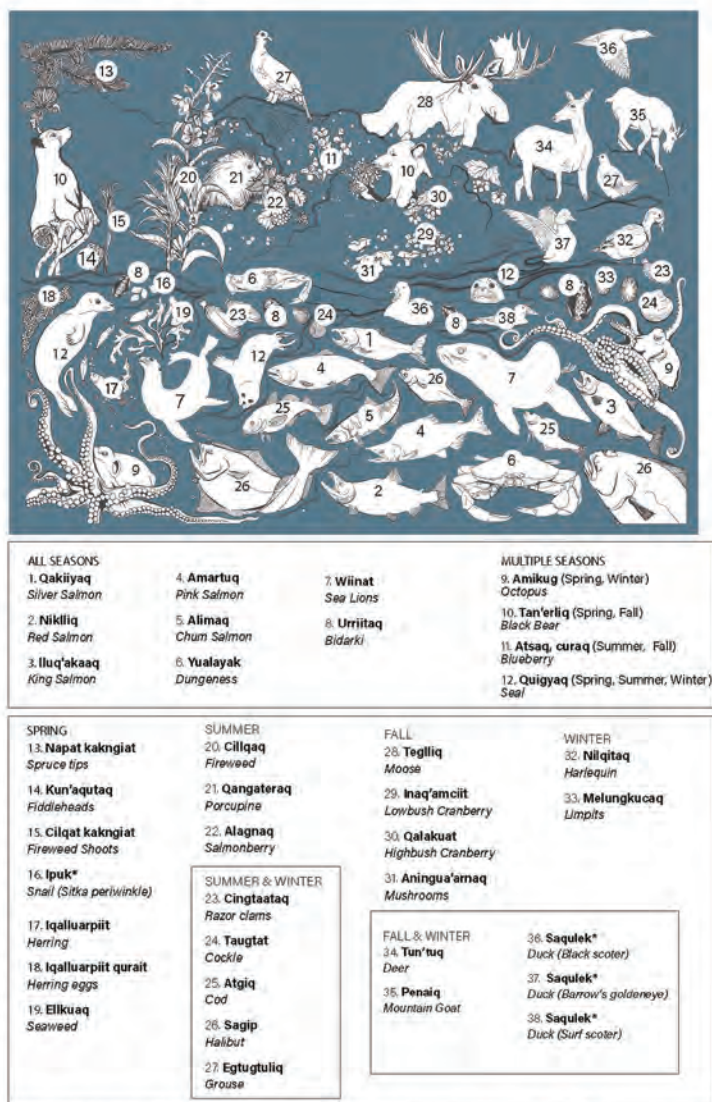
strengthens relationships with all living things and promotes cultural continuity. This can be done by becoming more than just consumers of foods but advocating for ancient foods. We are thrilled to have the opportunity to share a part of the culture with Alaska. Healthy and productive people are the cornerstone of healthy communities.

#### FOR MORE INFORMATION

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\*Where direct translation was impossible, we have provided the closest family name.



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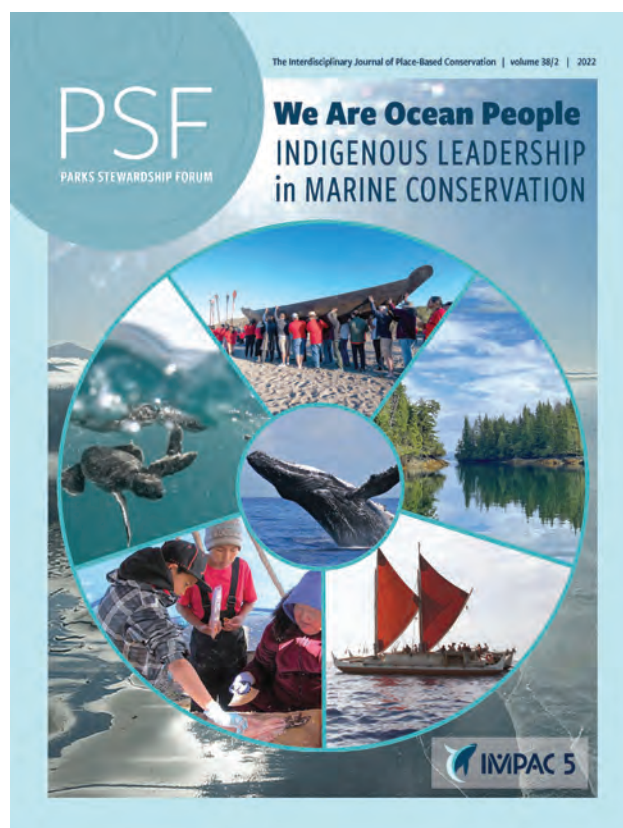
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#### On the cover of this issue

CIRCLE DESIGN, clockwise from top:

- Northern Chumash ceremony | [ROBERT SCHWEMMER](#)
- Haida Gwaii | [CINDY BOYKO](#)
- The Polynesian Voyaging Society's voyaging canoe Hōkūle'a | [NOAA](#)
- Elder teaching youths, northern Alaska | [US FISH AND WILDLIFE SERVICE](#)
- Baby Honu (sea turtles), Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument | [NOAA](#)
- Center: Humpback whale, Papahānaumokuākea Marine National Monument | [NOAA](#)

Background: Pacific Rim National Park Reserve | [PARKS CANADA](#)