



Bering Sea Elders Group

BERING SEA ELDERS GROUP

RESOLUTION 2024-01

TITLE: A RESOLUTION UPLIFTING OUR TRADITIONAL WAYS OF LIFE, COMMITTING TO SHARING THOSE WAYS OF LIFE WITH OUR YOUTH, AND RECOGNIZING THAT INDIGENOUS VOICES AND WAYS MUST BE CENTERED IN THE STEWARDSHIP OF OUR LANDS, WATERS, AND RESOURCES

Whereas, the Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) is an organization comprised of 38 federally recognized Tribes on the west coast of Alaska; and

Whereas, BSEG represents Cup'ik, Yup'ik, St. Lawrence Island Yupik, and Inupiaq people who live in relationship with the fish, marine mammals, birds, berries, and other traditional irreplaceable resources found in the Bering Sea and surrounding lands; and

Whereas, as Traditional Knowledge holders, our people hold a living body of knowledge that is intertwined with our identity, culture, values, and ways of life, and that we pass on from generation to generation. Our knowledge of our lands, waters, air, and our relationship with each has been developed over millennia and is invaluable; and

Whereas, our Elders taught us never to take more than we need and to never waste anything or the resources would not return; and

Whereas, our Elders taught us to respect the resources we have been given, and to thank the Creator for giving us the animal that we are harvesting. Our Elders taught us that our behavior as people on the land affects how the weather behaves, and that we should try to behave in a good way so the lands, waters, air, and animals respond to us in a good way; and

Whereas, our Elders taught us to share what we have, including with the fish and the water. They taught that the measure of a person is how they take care of others, and the more we share, the more comes back to us; and

Whereas, we have always protected our land and resources because our Elders taught us to. When we were out in the ocean, it was ours together. When we were on the land, it was ours together. We are part of the ecosystem. When our salmon hurt, we hurt. When our seals hurt, we hurt; and

Whereas, when other governments divided up the water and lands we stewarded for thousands of years, the concept of ownership introduced greed; and

Whereas, those other governments—international, federal, and state—do not center sharing, respect, or community well-being in the management of our lands and waters. Trawlers engage in wanton waste! and

Whereas, we see that the whole Bering Sea Ecosystem—of which we are a part and in which each part, including microorganisms, plants, birds, fish, and marine mammals is connected to all other parts in an inter-dependent web of life—has fallen out of balance and is in Crisis; and

Whereas, we see first-hand the profound and destabilizing effects of this Crisis on our lands, waters, air, and communities. We see the loss of fish and fish camps. We see our lands eroding and rivers and lakes expanding, with our drying racks, fishing gear, homes, and communities threatened or lost. We see ponds drying up and structures sinking as permafrost melts. We see toxic algae and chemicals poisoning our fish. We see warmer seas and sea ice disappearing, so that we can no longer travel or hunt on it, forcing us to travel farther and in more dangerous weather to hunt and fish. We see animals changing behavior, and soon we will see them starving; and

Whereas, our young people must travel farther and in more dangerous circumstances to provide for their families and communities, the resources are not there when they do travel, and there are no paying jobs to buy the gasoline to travel or the groceries if they cannot; and

Whereas, this Crisis has harmed our communities. Scarcity has introduced competition. Disconnection from our culture and traditional ways of life has caused loneliness, isolation, and mental health challenges; and

Whereas, this Bering Sea Ecosystem Crisis threatens our food sovereignty, our physical, economic, traditional, and cultural existence, and our very survival; and

Whereas, BSEG, since our beginning, has worked to lift up our communities, and lift up and record our peoples' knowledge; and

Whereas, the knowledge about how to live with the ocean and the land was given to us by our ancestors with instructions not to keep it for ourselves, but to pass it on to our children so that they may continue to prosper and continue our way of being; and

Whereas, we know our own people. We know what our communities want, and we know what our communities need; and

Whereas, our Elders teach by example, and our young people learn by being quiet, listening, and observing; and

Whereas, strong communities listen to their Elders, maintain their languages, and practice their traditional values; and

Whereas, our Indigenous voices and communities should again be the ones making decisions for our lands and waters; and

Whereas, the Bering Sea Elders Group has, for nearly two decades, passed resolutions to address the imbalances that we see in the Bering Sea;

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED: the Bering Sea Elders Group reaffirms our commitment to sharing our traditional ways of life with our young people, despite the increasing challenges facing both Elders and youth; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: the Bering Sea Elders Group commits to supporting communities in building their strength and resilience as guided by Elder teachings; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: the Bering Sea Elders Group respectfully asks that our sister governments, globally, take measures to prevent the total loss of our resources and focus on restoration; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED: the Bering Sea Elders Group prioritizes the importance of centering Indigenous voices and leadership in the stewardship of our lands, waters, and resources, and calls for approaches to management that are guided by our teachings and that recognize that our subsistence is our survival.

ADOPTED by the tribally designated Elder Representatives of the Bering Sea Elders Group, and signed on behalf of those Tribes during its Annual Summit held in Anchorage, Alaska on this 2nd day of October, 2024.