

Bering Sea Elders Group

Fall/Winter 2025 Newsletter



U.N. APPOINTS CHARITIE ROPATI AS YOUTH ADVISOR

On August 12, 2025, which is recognized as International Youth Day, United Nations (U.N.) Secretary-General António Guterres announced the appointment of several young climate leaders to his Youth Advisory Group on Climate Change.

According to a press release from the U.N., "The Group provides the Secretary-General with practical and outcome-focused advice, diverse youth perspectives, and concrete recommendations to support the United Nations' work to accelerate global action to tackle the climate crisis."

Among the new appointees is Charitie Ropati, a 24-year-old Yup'ik woman with family roots in the village of Kongiganak. Ropati, who was recognized by the Bering Sea Elders Group with a Young Provider and Culture Bearer award, is one of the first Alaska Native youth ever named to the group.

According to a story by KYUK Public Media, Ropati traces her path to climate leadership back to her community's history. Particularly the 1966 Kwigillingok flood that forced residents to relocate to higher ground, thus creating the community of Kongiganak. Today, the permafrost beneath the village is thawing, threatening its stability and underscoring the urgent need for climate solutions.



Photo used courtesy of KYUK Public Media.

"It really started with the story of my community," Ropati explained to KYUK. "And it's because of that story of survival, I think, that brought me to where I'm at now."

Ropati currently works in New York City, as an engineer designing public housing infrastructure for Indigenous communities across the U.S. She is also the founder of LilnativegirlinSTEM and was recently named to the Forbes 30 Under 30 list.

According to the U.N., the expansion of the Youth Advisory Group reflects the growing urgency of the climate crisis. This year marks the tenth anniversary of the Paris Agreement, and all U.N. member states are required to submit updated national climate plans aimed at keeping global warming below 1.5°C.

Secretary-General Guterres recognized the importance of youth voices, "Young

people's fearless advocacy has been pivotal in the fight against the climate crisis. That means more space for young voices at the table, more space for youth leadership, and more space to shape climate action."

For Ropati, this appointment represents both opportunity and responsibility. "I think this is a huge win, especially for youth in the Arctic. Because I don't think we've ever been given this type of platform before," Ropati told KYUK Public Media, also stressing that climate change is an environmental and human rights issue.

Ropati further believes that Indigenous people have long been on the front lines of environmental change and have essential knowledge to offer global climate solutions. "When we talk about the climate work we've been doing, this is work that has been carried on through generations," she said. "This is work that didn't start with me. It started with my great grandfather, to my grandmother, to my mother, and now me."

For her work with the U.N., over the next three years Ropati will work alongside her fellow advisors from across the globe—including representatives from Kenya, Sweden, and Indonesia—to shape U.N. climate strategies and bring youth perspectives to the forefront of international decision-making.

MESSAGE FROM THE BSEG CHAIR



Jerry Ivanoff from Unalakleet

The Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) was formed over fifteen years ago by Bering Sea area Tribes as a result of their mutual desire to address food security and protect the health of our traditional waters. Today, BSEG has 38 member Tribes that span across the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bering Strait regions.

BSEG's mission is to speak and work together as one voice to protect and respect our traditional ways of life, the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children's future. As Elders, we are messengers to our children, our tribal councils, and the people who make decisions that affect our marine resources, ecosystem, and ways of life.

Since 2008, BSEG has focused on several priority areas. These include lasting protections for the Bering Sea, bottom trawl boundaries and bycatch, amending the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Act, food security, traditional knowledge and the co-production of knowledge and research.

In our work to protect the Bering Sea, BSEG uplifts the unique role of Elders, reinforces the importance of working together, centers Tribes and their right to steward their traditional waters, prioritizes traditional use and traditional knowledge and calls for permanent protections.

A significant portion of our work continues to be done in partnership with key partners that include the Association of Village Council Presidents, Kawerak, Inc., and other Tribes and Tribal organizations. BSEG values these relationships and believes that we are all stronger when we work together. As a result, we are committed to continue working with our coalition partners in a productive and beneficial manner to protect our ocean to ensure the survival of our traditions and the future of our children.

If you would like more information about BSEG or any of the topics discussed in this newsletter, please visit BSEG's website.

911 W. 8th Avenue, Suite 101, PMB62, Anchorage, Alaska 99501

www.beringseaelders.org director@beringseaelders.org [907.891.1229](tel:907.891.1229)

INUIT CIRCUMPOLAR COUNCIL GAINS PERMANENT STATUS

In a historic decision, the Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) was granted Permanent Consultative Status at the International Maritime Organization (IMO), adjusting the provisional status it was granted in 2021. As a result, ICC becomes the first and only Indigenous Peoples Organization with this level of recognition.

The IMO, a United Nations agency, sets international shipping standards that directly impact Inuit communities. From food security and transportation to marine ecosystem protection, these policies influence daily life across Inuit Nunaat.

In a press release from ICC, Herb Nakimayak, ICC Executive Council Member and lead ICC representative at the IMO shared, “This milestone affirms the critical role Inuit play as ship owners, operators, coastal residents, and knowledge holders in shaping international shipping decisions. Becoming the first Indigenous Peoples Organization to gain Permanent Status at the IMO is not only a step forward for Inuit, but also a meaningful step forward for all Indigenous

Peoples.”

ICC Chair Sara Olsvig added, “The decisions made at the IMO directly impact our communities. From the safety of shipping routes to the protection of marine ecosystems, these decisions influence our ability to maintain our ways of life. Gaining permanent consultative status at the IMO ensures that Inuit perspectives will continue to inform global shipping policy now and into the future. We are pleased that this decision recognizes that Inuit contribute with important and distinct policies and knowledge that enrich international discussions on marine governance.”

This achievement adjusts ICC’s provisional consultative status, first granted in 2021. With permanent recognition, Inuit now have a guaranteed seat at the table where international shipping standards are set — ensuring Indigenous knowledge and priorities help guide the future of maritime governance.

This article is based on information published by the Inuit Circumpolar Council on July 9, 2025.

OUR WAY OF LIFE PROJECT



For thousands of years, the Northern Bering Sea has served as a foundation for subsistence lifeways that has sustained Alaska Native communities. The fish, marine mammals, and other ocean resources support our families, cultures, and traditions. The Northern Bering Sea: Our Way of Life Project mapped extensive areas where Alaska Native hunters and local fishermen harvest resources, demonstrating just how inseparable the Native way of life is from the ocean.

This project includes powerful words from elders and hunters, drawn from interviews, oral histories, and published accounts. Their voices are a reminder that as the Northern Bering Sea faces growing threats, decision-makers must understand how deeply connected our people are to these waters and how vital they are to our survival. The project is grounded in the wisdom passed down through generations about where and when to hunt or fish, how to read seasonal patterns and weather, and the methods for processing and preserving food. This Indigenous Knowledge shapes not only successful hunting and fishing practices but also guide cultural customs and spiritual traditions that hold our communities together.

As one definition describes it, “Indigenous ecological knowledge is natural history, based on detailed observations sifted for their meaning, and relied upon for their predictive value. This knowledge is dynamic and evolving... its survival depends on the survival of the ways of life and the experiences upon which it is based.”

To learn more or explore the Our Way of Life Project online, go to <https://eloka.nsidc.org/communities/elders.html>

ARCTIC WATCH: MARINE TRAFFIC REPORT

The Arctic is experiencing a dramatic rise in maritime traffic as a result of the convergence of sea ice, global trade routes, and increased tourism in northern waters. For Alaska Native communities, this surge has brought forth both serious risks and essential opportunities. In response to this crisis, Arctic Watch is working with regional Tribes to develop a sea traffic management system designed to protect subsistence practices, strengthen maritime safety, and promote sustainable vessel operations.

To introduce the initiative and seek input, Arctic Watch convened a partner's workshop in 2024 in Juneau, Alaska. Workshop discussions focused on how Arctic Watch could help communities meet these challenges. Several key overarching themes emerged during the workshop, including: the importance of robust involvement; the need for transparent multi-directional communication; the critical value of Traditional Knowledge; and the paramount importance of protecting subsistence and the environment.

Delegate, Shawn Evan of Shaktoolik, explained in the Arctic Watch Marine Traffic Report, "The concern is more about smaller tourist vessels and other vessels that don't regularly go through the area, who don't know about the area. They need to know to slow down, and to stay a certain distance away."

Following the workshop, Arctic Watch began implementing several communication initiatives to better share information including a social media page (Facebook.com/ArcticWatchAK)



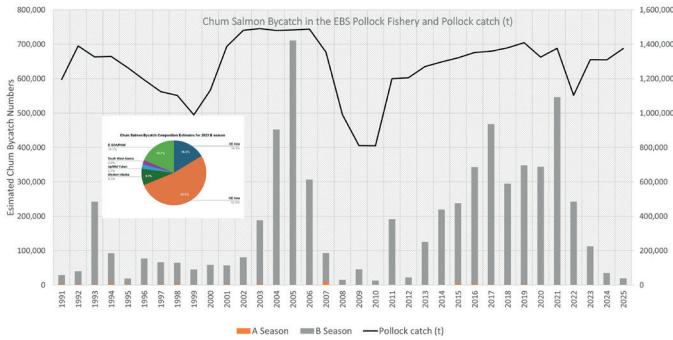
and expanded website tools that provide real-time vessel tracking, weather data, and interactive maps. The Marine Exchange of Alaska (MXAK) also began offering free vessel tracking accounts and training to Tribal members, giving communities greater situational awareness of local waters.

The program secured Congressional funding under the 2024 Consolidated Appropriations Act, to support development of a Watch Center, the creation of an Arctic Waterways Users Guide, and expansion of Marine Safety Sites with upgraded communication technology. Future plans include enhancing AIS and VHF transmission capabilities, building a comprehensive Voluntary Arctic Waterways Guide, and ensuring long-term Tribal input through an inclusive advisory body.

The January workshop marked an important first step in shaping Arctic Watch with Tribal voices at the center. Delegates not only expressed support but also helped identify the values and priorities that should guide the program's growth. As Nathan Topkok of Mary's Igloo reflected, "I will try to send this message to the younger generation when I get home."

For more information please refer to Kawerak's workshop report at <https://kawerak.org/arctic-watch-marine-traffic-workshop-report/>

FINAL ACTION ON BERING SEA BYCATCH SCHEDULED FOR FEBRUARY



The North Pacific Fishery Management Council has scheduled final action on Bering Sea chum salmon bycatch in the Eastern Bering Sea pollock fishery for its upcoming meeting in Anchorage, Alaska, on February 2–11, 2026. If final action is taken at that meeting, regulatory implementation of any chum bycatch reduction measures would likely occur in 2027.

Since 2011, more than 3.5 million chum salmon have been caught as bycatch in the pollock fishery, with a significant portion originating from Western Alaska. In addition to bycatch and interception in both federal and state-managed fisheries.

Western Alaska chum salmon runs have been further impacted

by environmental stressors such as marine and river heatwaves and reduced food availability. As a result, runs remain critically low; for example, the 2024 Yukon River fall chum salmon run was 97% below the historical average.

The Council last reviewed the chum bycatch issue in February 2025, when it considered a second preliminary analysis of management alternatives aimed at reducing bycatch of chum salmon from Western Alaska river systems. During final action in 2026, the Council will evaluate several key alternatives, including:

- Alternative 2: An overall bycatch (Prohibited Species Catch, PSC) limit.
- Alternative 3: An overall PSC limit tied to Western Alaska chum salmon abundance.
- Alternative 4: Modifications to industry-led Incentive Plan Agreements (IPAs).
- A refined In season Corridor Cap focusing on smaller areas with relatively high concentrations of Western Alaska chum salmon bycatch.

The February 2026 Council meeting will be held in person in Anchorage with options for remote participation. For more information, please contact BSEG at (907) 891-1229.



NOMINATIONS ARE NOW OPEN FOR YOUNG PROVIDER & CULTURE BEARER AWARDS

BSEG is pleased to announce that nominations are now open for the third annual Young Provider and Young Culture Bearer Awards. These awards recognize two young people who serve as positive examples and contribute to the health and well-being of their community.

Each recipient will receive an award of \$500. The deadline for nominations is Monday, December 8, 2025. Nominations can be made by a family member, community member, Tribal or corporation board member, teacher, or administrator.

Nominees must be affiliated with a BSEG Member Tribe or reside in a Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area community.

To be considered for an award, a young person must

perpetuate his/her Alaska Native culture in one or more of the following ways:

1. Engaging in activities that are grounded in Indigenous Knowledge and responsible stewardship of traditional lands and waters.
2. Caring for Elders, family and young people through participation in subsistence activities.
3. Being involved in activities that benefit and promote community health and well-being.

If you'd like to nominate a young person (up to age 25), please prepare a short statement about him/ her (one page or less) and submit it to BSEG's Executive Director Jaylene Wheeler via email at director@beringseaelders.org or fax (907) 344-5138. For questions, call (907) 891-1229.

Bering Sea Elders Group
911 W. 8th Avenue, Suite 101, PMB62
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

