



**A SUMMARY OF
NATIVE WORKFORCE
DEVELOPMENT MODELS**

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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ABOUT THE COVER

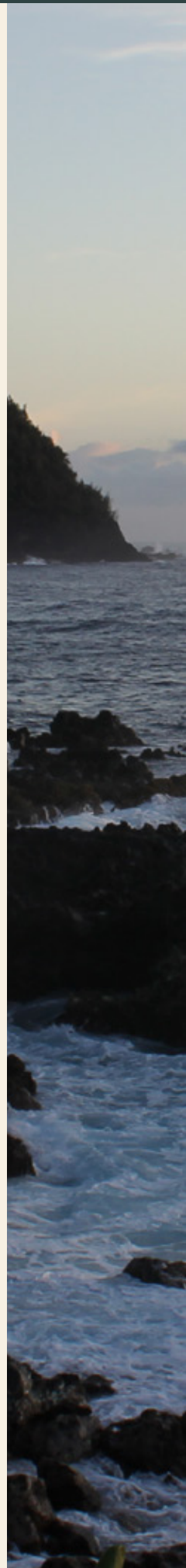
“*Huli ka lima i lalo, ola.* This traditional Hawaiian proverb teaches us that when our hands are turned down to the earth life flourishes. *Kuhikuhi Pu’uone* (Master Architect) Francis ‘Palani’ Sinenci has built countless *hale* (thatched structures) over the past 30 years and his expertise is traditionally honored by the tattoo on his hand. Many people have learned from Kumu Palani over the years, most coming and going as life takes them in different directions. There are the dedicated few that stay and embrace this practice, accepting the *kuleana* (right and responsibility) to carry on *hale* building for future generations. Their commitment is recognized by the single pattern forever embedded on their hand. In *hale* building, *laulima* is essential, the joining of many hands. Together the hands of the master and his students, joined with the hands of the people, are reclaiming Native knowledge and practices as a beacon lighting ancestral pathways of abundance.” - KAUWILA HANCHETT

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In January 2023, First Nations Development Institute (First Nations) announced the 25 Native community partners, including Native-led nonprofit organizations and Tribal governments, to receive \$40,000 to \$100,000 in grant support to create or advance workforce development, implement climate adaptation plans, or facilitate discussions on ways Native Nations are using Native knowledge and practices to prepare for and respond to climate change. The grants were part of First Nations' Climate Change and Environmental Justice project, created in partnership with the Bezos Earth Fund, which made it possible to implement the following grant programs to assist community partners in addressing climate change and promoting environmental justice:

- **Green Jobs in Indian Country** supports Tribes and Native-led nonprofit organizations that are in the early stages of developing and/or expanding programs that support green job development in response to climate change. First Nations awarded 10 grants averaging \$100,000 each to organizations to develop a workforce that is ready to address the ongoing and increasing effects of climate change in Native communities.
- **Climate Resiliency in Indian Country** is catalyzing a critical mass of Tribes and Native-led nonprofit organizations to conduct and operationalize climate change plans and amplify the power of Native knowledge. First Nations awarded 11 grants of up to \$100,000 each for projects related to the development or implementation of climate adaptation planning.
- **Regional Dialogues on Climate Resiliency** supports Native-led organizations to convene Native Nations to discuss Tribal climate adaptation and the U.S. Justice40 initiative in Native communities. First Nations awarded four grants of up to \$100,000 each to projects related to the planning and hosting of regional-focused climate conversations.

This report elevates community stories and themes of adaptation in the face of environmental injustice and climate change for the Green Jobs in Indian Country grant program. It aims to bring attention to policy, infrastructure, workforce development, and job pathway challenges and opportunities in Indian Country and highlights examples of successful and sustainable workforce development models that may be useful to Native communities and organizations. To demonstrate a snapshot of community-focused green job development in Indian Country, this report outlines perspectives and strategies from eight community partners and highlights the experiences of the Organized Village of Kake, Kake, Alaska, and Hōlani Hāna Inc., Hana, Hawai'i.





PREFACE

“Native jobs are green jobs. When we reestablish our Native practices once again as the heart of our economy we will simultaneously reestablish our pono (right and natural order) with the earth, the ‘āina (land), kai (sea), lani (sky/heavens) and all that dwell within these realms as ka ‘ohana o ke ola (the family of life). Native ways recognize the sacred kinship between humanity and the earth and understand that the well-being of each is reflected in the other.”

– KAUWILA HANCHETT,

Hōlani Hāna Executive Director Hāna, Hawai‘i

“If we need to stand up, we’ll do it. It’s always been our land. It gets challenging, especially during the pandemic and with climate change, with the state and federal government trying to regulate our traditional activities that have kept our community fed and safe since our beginnings. We have to push the grey areas of sovereignty and they get uncomfortable with it but if we don’t, what are we doing?”

– JOEL JACKSON,

Tribal President, Organized Village of Kake,
Kake, Alaska

INTRODUCTION

Across Indian Country and around the world, we are continuing to experience a global crisis; the Earth's biodiversity is drastically decreasing and unpredictable weather is causing more frequent social and environmental emergencies worldwide. For many people, the perception that we are only seeing these scenarios for the first time is real. For Native people, navigating drastic environmental changes is a continuous story told across generations since their beginnings. All Tribes are unique in many ways— culture, language, history, governance, food systems, economy, and social organization— however, many share similar core values, ancestral guidance, and a recognition that the world's biodiversity, its ecological systems, and precious resources provide the source of life for all humans, animals, plants, and supernatural beings. Protecting, preserving, and revitalizing these natural systems has and continues to serve for many Native peoples as the foundation for honoring cultural identity and active relationship to past, present, and future generations of Native and non-Native communities. From this relational orientation to our environment, Native peoples have developed life-affirming expertise in symbiotically adapting to the natural world and its everchanging climatic cycles.

Tribes today continue this legacy in facing the climate crisis. Tribes have, over centuries, continuously developed ingenious strategies, technologies, and networks to thrive with constantly changing environments, prioritizing the preservation of ecological, social, economic, and cultural well-being. Today around the world, human-induced climate change is causing more frequent and intense extreme natural events, widespread adverse economic impacts and damages, and irreversible impacts to natural infrastructures pushed beyond boundaries and natural adaptation abilities. Observed and projected climate change impacts for Native communities across all geographic regions are often already severe with Tribes' ongoing management of emergency response efforts for wildfires, flooding, water scarcity, erosion, rising sea levels, and other environmental emergencies that often cause invaluable and devastating land, species, historic, and cultural losses.

However, Tribes and Native communities continue urgently working to prevent, adapt, and respond to these rising challenges to protect community health, preserve natural and cultural resources, and maintain and advance Tribal sovereignty. Although green jobs have recently sparked a new wave of environmentalism and sustainability in the climate change dialogue, for Indian Country, green jobs have been a lifeway since time immemorial. Political and legal advancement of Tribal self-determination coupled with recent federal, state, and philanthropic investments continue to result in nationwide proliferation of projects aiming to restore thriving Native economies. Taking a look at green jobs across Indian Country provides a unique opportunity to learn from Native communities that are resourcefully and innovatively addressing the frontline impacts of climate change with Native knowledges, and political, economic, and technological tools currently available to advance Native Nation building, workforce development, community infrastructure, historic cultural preservation, and Tribal self-determination to strengthen Native economies, communities, and the environment that we all rely on now and into the future.

THE ORIGINAL GREEN JOBS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

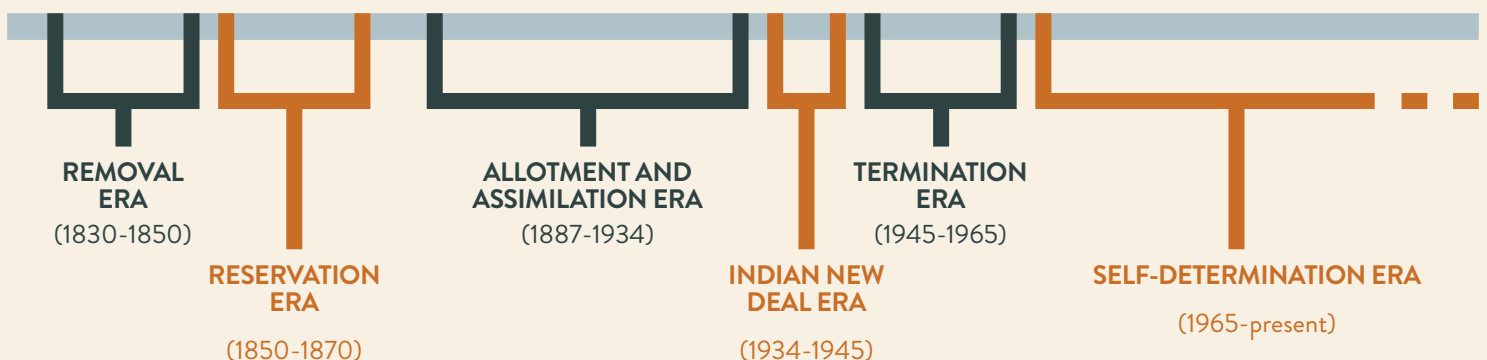
Traditional Indigenous Economies

The passing of stories, histories, songs, ceremonies, traditions, and other forms of living knowledge, along with their archaeological reaffirmations, through generations of Native communities shows that the concept of creating an economy based on ecological and social longevity has been the foundational way of life from time immemorial. As land-based farmers, hunters, fishers, gatherers, water harvesters, infrastructure builders, architects, astronomers, traders, warriors, potters, weavers, and countless other societal roles, there are thousands of examples of Native peoples nationwide and Indigenous communities globally who built advanced economies and sophisticated trade networks to sustain a healthy society and relations with outside networks. For example, the Spanish led by Hernán Cortés were awed by the sophistication and wealth of the Aztecs at Tenochtitlan they encountered in 1519 where there was abundant and advanced community economic and social systems and infrastructure supporting a metropolitan population of over 200,000.¹ Many descendants of this and other communities today continue to strongly maintain, practice, and revitalize the roles, protocols, and systems that sustained their ancestors. These histories of self-reliance and self-determination are the foundation for today's spirit of economic resurgence across Indian Country.

Colonization and its Economic Legacy

To say the course of colonization has drastically shifted all elements of Native ways of life across the country is an understatement. The era of colonization has significantly disturbed, and in some cases, destroyed Native and Tribal traditional institutions, which has contributed to a legacy of severe impacts for Tribes and Native peoples. Across the Americas and internationally, the conceptual foundations of colonization rested on the underlying assumption that Native people were racially and culturally inferior to Europeans and therefore possessed lesser inherent rights to lands and natural resources.

Federal Tribal treaty-making during the colonial era kicked off centuries of federal Indian relations and policy:



Each one of these eras and associated federal Indian policies reflect immense changes, including political limitations and almost complete removal of Tribal sovereignty, along with land dispossession, allotment and confinement to reservations, natural resource exploitation and contamination, cultural assimilation, termination of Tribal governments and reinstatement – all of which continue to severely impact Tribal ability to reinvigorate, practice, and access the traditional structures, systems, lands, and natural resources that ensured community and economic well-being prior to colonization.

These historic policies and the chronic underinvestment in Indian Country create inaccessibility or low accessibility to critical resources, including, but not limited to, housing, childcare, employment opportunities on Tribal lands, affordable transportation to job sites, education and training, and other resources. These all contribute to high levels of economic disparity and extremely complex workforce development challenges across Indian Country for Native communities. The dire economic statistics and data do not adequately capture the full impact of the violent structural and systemic legacy.

The median Native American household made over \$25,000 a year less than the median non-Hispanic white household in 2019. In 2019, nearly one in six American Indian and Alaskan Native families lived below the federal poverty level, and that increases to 26% for families with children under 5 years of age. Native Americans are less likely to be employed than the population as a whole. In March 2022, just 59% of Native Americans age 16 and older were participating in the labor force (employed or searching for work) compared to 62% of all individuals.² The effects can also be seen in socioeconomic and health numbers. The suicide rate among Native Americans has risen 139% since 1999, compared to 33% for the US population, according to the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention's National Center for Health Statistics. American Indian and Alaskan Native persons have a life expectancy that is 5.5 years less than the average American (73 compared to 78.5). These chronic conditions also put Tribal communities at a greater risk of COVID-19 infection, hospitalization, and death. Native Americans were more than twice as likely to contract COVID-19 and die compared to non- Hispanic white Americans.³

These economic disparities also translate to workforce development challenges. The National Congress of American Indians (NCAI) in 2015 compiled a list of the common workforce development challenges facing Indian Country, via a survey of nearly 40 Tribal leaders and workforce development practitioners, along with a list of policy recommendations.⁴ While every Tribal Nation is different, there are similarities in workforce development challenges found across social, communal, environmental, institutional, political, fiscal, and programmatic sectors. Low education levels, severe unemployment, lack of physical infrastructure, inadequate housing, lack of broadband internet connectivity, jurisdictional non-ownership of ancestral lands, policy restrictions on land stewardship and access, inadequate federal funding, overly bureaucratic and rigid state and

federal processes, and inadequate or inaccurate federal and state level data are brief examples that span these categories recorded by NCAI as major challenges facing Tribal workforce development goals. The study urges the federal government to restructure its systems, processes, programs, and funding protocols to meaningfully and effectively respond to Tribal Nation's self-determining authority and need to build their workforce capacity in accordance with their cultural values and community and economic development goals. Atop NCAI's recommendations to remedy and support this movement is the urgent and drastic increase in annual fiscal funding for Tribal workforce development commensurate with the increasing Native population via the Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act Section 166 Program.

The Self-Determination Era and Investment

The door to Tribal autonomy remained closed until enactment of self-determination policies in the 1970s. For the last several decades, federal Indian policy in the U.S. has supported Tribal self-determination through Tribal self-government and initial federal investment. In 1975, the United States Congress enacted the Indian Self-Determination and Education Assistance Act, Public Law 93-638. The Act allowed Indian Tribes increased autonomy and the opportunity to assume responsibility for programs and services administered to them on behalf of the U.S Secretary of the Interior through contractual agreements.⁵ Two decades later, Congress extended the Tribal self-determination concept to many other federal programs serving Tribes and offered Tribes the option of administering federal programs independently under the Tribal Self-Governance Act of 1994. While there are exceptions, the results of addressing chronic underinvestment in Indian Country have been (1) remarkable economic growth across most of Indian Country, and (2) concomitant expansions of the responsibilities and capacities of Tribal governments. The Government Accountability Office, in a study of 1990 and 2000 census figures, found Tribes that engaged in self-governance or a high degree of self-determination tended to experience more improvements in employment, per capita income, and poverty reduction than other Tribes.⁶ Hundreds of Tribes across the country routinely serve their communities with the full array of Tribal governmental functions, services, and programs, and increasing numbers of Tribes are becoming the economic engines of their regions.

There is still a long way to go for federal and private sector investment to Native communities. Federal funding for Native American programs has fallen by 40% since 1975, while funding for the rest of the population has increased by 60%. Since 2006, of all philanthropic funding by large U.S foundations, only 0.4% on average is directed to Native communities.⁷ While new waves of the environmentalism, sustainability, and just transition movements have secured federal investments across the country since the 1980s, Indian Country has only recently been included. In 2009, a coalition of over 250 Tribes and Native-led organizations sent a letter calling on the Obama administration to leverage federal investments toward building a green jobs economy throughout Indian Country to help reduce dependence on fossil fuels and support economic recovery in the United States.⁸ In 2013, President Obama established the first federal

Task Force on Climate Preparedness and Resilience that included Tribal representatives and resulted in an unprecedented allocation of millions of dollars in federal funding to help Tribes address climate change.

The Biden administration recently contributed historic political and funding investments in Indian Country, Environmental Justice, and Tribal Climate Response and Resiliency. In January 2021 President Biden signed Executive Order 14008 on Tackling the Climate Crisis at Home and Abroad, launching the most ambitious environmental justice agenda undertaken by the Federal Government to date. Executive Order 14008 builds on the foundational efforts of Executive Order 12898 on Federal Actions to Address Environmental Justice in Minority Populations and Low-Income Populations, by establishing several new environmental justice initiatives, including the White House Environmental Justice Interagency Council, the White House Environmental Justice Advisory Council, the government-wide Justice40 Initiative, and the Environmental Justice Scorecard and Screening Tool. Alongside these initiatives, Tribes saw milestone federal investments including the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security (CARES) Act and the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) for pandemic response and recovery. The 2021 Infrastructure Investments and Jobs Act and the 2022 Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) were signed into law, making investments in the country's clean energy future and climate goals, including \$720 million for programs dedicated to Tribal lands and Native communities. These programs primarily aim to ensure more Tribal households have access to affordable and clean electricity, make Native communities more resilient to the growing threats posed by climate change, and support Tribal efforts to transition to cleaner energy sources.⁹

THE RESURGENCE OF GREEN JOBS IN INDIAN COUNTRY

These recent investments and continued political support for Tribal self-governance have ushered in a new wave of green jobs in Indian Country. While there is yet to be federally collected data on labor force participation and other measures of employment specific to green jobs across Indian Country, a major response by Tribal Nations and Native-led organizations advocating, seeking, leveraging, and implementing federal, private-sector, and Tribal investments is readily apparent.¹⁰

Over the past 20 years, green jobs have been brought to the forefront of the climate change dialogue as a potential path toward climate change adaptation and economic development. Green jobs are broadly defined as jobs that produce goods or services that benefit the environment. While federal and public investment of this area is relatively recent, making investments toward green jobs in Native communities represents a continuation of a millennia of both culture and economy. As such, Indian Country continues to see a

proliferation of Tribal Nations and Native-led organizations developing projects, departments, industries, enterprises, and workforces related to renewable energy development, energy efficiency and weatherization, land and natural resource management and preservation, cultural resource and ancestral landscape protection, and many other sectors promoting an intersection of cultural revitalization, workforce development, and use of cutting-edge technologies to accomplish goals benefitting our environment for present and future generations. The Green Jobs in Indian Country projects led by Tribes and Native-led organizations provide a snapshot of these new and ongoing initiatives.

First Nations Green Jobs in Indian Country Projects

Several Tribes are working to harness energy from the wind, sun, and water to generate millions of dollars in revenue, create short and long-term jobs, and reduce utility costs for Tribal citizens. Many others are working on the building blocks to ensure sustainability of long-term renewable energy goals. Tribal lands comprise approximately 5.8% of the total U.S. land base but represent an estimated 6.5% of the total U.S. utility-scale renewable energy technical potential according to a National Renewable Energy Lab report.¹¹ The U.S. Department of Energy (DOE) in February 2023 announced \$50 million in funding to support clean energy technology deployment on Tribal lands. This significant investment will strengthen Tribal energy sovereignty by supporting ongoing efforts to lower energy costs, increase energy security and capacity, and provide electric power to unelectrified buildings.¹²

Over the last 19 years, Red Cloud Renewable, a Native-led organization based in Pine Ridge, South Dakota, has focused on advancing workforce development pathways to energy sovereignty. Over 1,100 students from more than 70 Tribes across Indian Country have attended classes hosted by the organization, including two professional-level solar courses for solar installers and a pathway course for national North American Board of Certified Energy Practitioners certification. Their current project serves to normalize small and diverse solar approaches in Native communities through community education and training

DEFINING THE TERM “GREEN”

First Nations’ Stewarding Native Lands (SNL) team acknowledges the challenges that accompany using the term “green jobs” as most Native communities have been working in “green” professional spaces for years, without compensation or recognition. When designing the Green Jobs in Indian Country Request for Proposal, SNL staff were intentional in allowing applicants the opportunity to define green jobs through their Tribal and Native community perspective.

upskilling workshops to expand and increase the marketable skills of present and future generations of Native solar workforce. Aiming to address inaccessibility of solar education and training for Native community members, they are also focusing on development of a mobile solar training lab to provide courses on solar energy and related job opportunities across Indian Country.

More Native communities across the nation are developing renewable energy career readiness opportunities through local and Tribal community colleges. Blackfeet Community College, a Tribal College in Browning, Montana, is creating a solar training program and corresponding curriculum as a career pipeline for students aspiring to work in renewable energy. The program provides students with hands-on learning experience to develop skills for safety, planning, installation, troubleshooting, and repair of alternative energy equipment and upgrading to new technologies of renewable energy in the field. The training also incorporates traditional Blackfeet cultural values. The college's east campus has both on-grid and off-grid systems, and their overall goal is not only to build local workforce capacity in the field of renewable energy, but also to become a net zero campus in collaboration with the Tribal College Renewable Energy Consortium.

Geothermal is another type of renewable energy that can increase sustainability of Native renewable energy goals. An analysis conducted by the Department of Energy in 2002 suggests that 57 reservations may have some potential for geothermal electricity production, representing approximately 10% of the American Indian population on reservations and Tribal Jurisdictional Statistical Areas (TJSA). Another 72 reservations and TJSAs may have potential for geothermal direct-use applications.¹³ Kawerak, Inc., based in Nome, Alaska manages Pilgrim Hot Springs and is working to install a new geothermal power plant that will create new green jobs for operations and maintenance professionals. Currently all communities in the Bering Strait Region (including Nome) are powered by diesel microgrids, with limited integrated

“As climate change continues to make weather unpredictable in coastal communities throughout Alaska, the villages of our region must find creative solutions for providing safe, reliable, and clean energy to their residents. Our energy education workshops provide an opportunity to increase public awareness and create career pathways for young adults and entry-level workers.”

- AMANDA TOERDAL, Pilgrim Hot Springs General Manager



renewables. Through sustainable, clean energy development, Pilgrim Hot Springs aims to serve as a technology pilot for renewable microgrid development, while also training a new clean energy workforce.

Transitioning from fossil fuels to a clean energy economy is fundamental to addressing climate change and control over energy resources for Tribes represents an opportunity for a just transition that centers workforce sustainability and community well-being. Big Horn County, where the Crow Tribal Reservation is located, has been heavily impacted by coal. Plenty Doors Community Development Corporation, a Native-led organization based in Crow Agency, Montana, is working to understand the impact of energy transition on the local economy and building community capacity by training future leaders to create an environmentally friendly and sustainable economy. Due to the decline in the coal industry, Plenty Doors Community Development Corporation started their leadership project to grow the capacity of current and future community leaders to make informed decisions about energy infrastructure and energy resource development; identify key pathways for addressing alternative energy systems; start community discussion around equitable and effective research on energy systems by prioritizing Native perspectives; and create a replicable model for research, training, and engagement to share with other Tribes in their pursuit of resource dependence and energy justice.

While many Tribes focus on renewable energy development, others continue building other innovative green job projects and programs that address workforce challenges and barriers faced by the community. The Colorado River Indian Tribes in Arizona are building a job corps program to prepare Native youth for entry-level green and conservation jobs involving education and training on historic cultural preservation, natural resource management, and agroforestry practices. Recognizing that their community lacks opportunities for youth without a college degree, the program is designed to have youth receive training and work experience in conservation, renewable energy, and natural resource management. A national study on college affordability for Native students found that financial barriers often dictate where Native Americans apply for college and whether they graduate, once they enroll.¹⁴ For many, attending college is financially unrealistic—the distance and cost of attending a university creates a gap between talented young Native youth and the unfilled positions that are common Tribal job boards. Colorado River Indian Tribes' job corps program aims to bridge this gap by offering youth on-the-job training in addition to field-based education curriculum designed to teach basic science, safety, culturally significant tree management, and job skills.

Sustainable management of waste materials is a concept rooted in many Native traditional values including those around reuse and recycling. Although Native communities face unique circumstances around waste management that challenge their capacity to operate effective programs including those related to existing law and policy, infrastructure, and environmental exposure risk, many are working with local,

state, and federal partners to initiate these important systems safely and effectively.¹⁵ Bear River Band of the Rohnerville Rancheria in Loleta, California is increasing the organizational capacity within their Tribal natural resources department through the launch of a pilot environmental health initiative to develop solid waste, recycling, and food waste management plans and programs. This increase in capacity supports initiation of Bear River Band's Housing Department programming to improve the standard of living, and empower households and members to actively engage in community and environmental programs including community clean-ups, energy efficiency trainings, and solid waste and recycling events. They are also working to educate and raise awareness of regulatory compliance and the important role of these programs in disaster preparedness.

Many Tribes and Native communities have long histories of reusing food materials to reduce waste, enrich soil, and preserve water for future produce. The Thunder Valley Community Development Corporation in Porcupine, South Dakota, serving the Oglala Sioux Tribe is focusing on increasing organizational capacity of their Food Sovereignty Initiative and community farm through launch of a regenerative composting program to promote effective soil health, water conservation, and growing of nutrient-dense foods. Program staff will create the processes and protocols needed to partner with local programs, offices, and schools to transport compost to the Tribe's composting facility. They are planning to track and monitor not only the amount of waste collected, but also how much compost is able to be produced, and measure local carbon sequestration efforts. The data collection effort will provide a baseline for future producers to utilize in their compost efforts, which can also forecast supply for the following year. Community members will also receive training on creating, maintaining, and implementing sustainable regenerative composting sites for community members and Tribal programs to supply their own compost reservation-wide instead of purchasing compost from suppliers located over 80 miles away. Many Tribes continue working with state agencies as well as federal departments including the Environmental Protection Agency and United States Department of Agriculture to receive funding and technical assistance in implementing waste management programs including those related to recycling and composting.

Tribal food sovereignty projects are numerous and continue to grow throughout Indian Country. Tribes in all geographic regions from arid deserts to coastal communities continue to revive ancestral methods of food production to advance food sovereignty, cultural revitalization, traditional food economies, and disaster preparedness. Native Conservancy, a Native-led organization in Cordova, Alaska is developing necessary infrastructure to expand their Community Kelp Seed Nursery and empower their community to contribute to food security in traditional cultural kelp (seaweed) maricultural subsistence. Native Conservancy provides hands-on farmer training and mentoring for job creation. Their Ocean Back program aims to develop a sustainable and equitable seaweed mariculture industry that centers Native ocean sovereignty and Native knowledge. There are many barriers for Native peoples to enter the kelp industry, despite their



“Native Conservancy strongly believes seaweed based policies must be completely re-examined from a Native equity and sovereignty lens. Currently, no regulations exist to ensure access and priority of Native farmers in their ancestral waters.”

- BRYANNA PATINKA,
Advancement Manager

historical relationships with the land and Native knowledge. Native Conservancy is working to break down those barriers to create a pathway for Native peoples to revitalize ocean habitat.

The two highlighted projects of this report include Hōlani Hāna, Inc., a Native Hawaiian-led organization based in Hana, Hawai‘i, and the Organized Village of Kake, a federally recognized Tribe located on Tlingit and Haida ancestral territory in Kake, Alaska. These cases reflect many of the policy, infrastructure, workforce development, and job pathway challenges and opportunities experienced in Indian Country’s resurgence of green jobs and highlight examples of successful and sustainable workforce development strategies and practices that may be useful to Tribes, Native communities, and organizations. Overall, these cases demonstrate how many Native communities are re-emerging a green movement in continuing to weave together: the restrengthening of traditional cultural practices; advancement of Tribal sovereignty; and development of employment, workforce, and a thriving local economy based on Native values.

HŌLANI HĀNA, INC.



“When I was a child, my grandma said to be a Kanaka (Native Hawaiian), she named five things for me. My grandma said to me e mālama ‘āina, take care of the land, take care of your food, speak your language, build a canoe, and the last one of all to be a kanaka is to build a hale.”

– CLEMENT PAISHON,
Hōlani Hāna Hale Building Practitioner

Overlooking the eastern beach of Maui sits the 5-acre headquarters of Hōlani Hāna Inc., a Native Hawaiian organization leading a historic movement to restore traditional Native Hawaiian *hale* (homes), *kūkulu hale* (architecture), and *uhau humu pōhaku* (masonry) across the Hawaiian Islands. Once abundant throughout the islands, ancestral Hawaiian structures, including *hale*, *heiau* (rock-built religious shrines), *loko i‘a* (fishponds), and *pā pōhaku* (walls), have largely diminished. Established in 2009, led by master traditional Hawaiian architect Francis P. Sinenci, and with over 300 *hale* built to date, Hōlani Hāna works to foster a new generation of builders to revitalize the ancestral practice, strengthen Hawaiian cultural core values, and develop *hale*-building and *uhau humu pōhaku* as a culturally rooted and community-driven industry providing accessible and sustainable green jobs.

Traditional Hale-Building, Architecture and Masonry

Between approximately 124 and 1120 AD ancient Polynesians settled on the Hawaiian Islands and for the next 500 years, the Hawaiian culture was born and flourished in isolation from Western contact.¹⁶ *Hale* and *heiau* were built as central sustaining elements for the Hawaiian way of life, everyday social activities and responsibilities, and ceremony. *Hale noa* were for community housing and shelter. Men entered gender-specific meeting houses called *hale mua* and prepared meals in the *hale kuke*. The *hale aina* was the dining place for women and young children, and other *hale* provided for other specific activities. All *hale* together comprised the *kauhale*, or village.¹⁷ *Hale* were traditionally constructed using natural materials consisting of a ridgepole, rafters, and purlins and thatching made from grass, palm leaves, or other materials. Sweet-smelling, rain-repelling pili grass was preferred for thatching.¹⁸ *Heiau* is an ancient Hawaiian temple, wall, fishpond, or shrines used to provide offerings and conduct ritual to invoke spiritual power of deities for the wellbeing of the natural and human world. There were a number of types of *heiau*, including *heiau po‘o kanaka* used for human sacrifices, *heiau ho‘ōulu* to improve fishing, *heiau ho‘oulu ua* to provide offerings for rain, *heiau ho‘oulu ‘ai* for offerings for food



or crops, and *heiau hō'ola* as offerings for treating the sick, among others. Rock for *heiau*, wall, and foundation building were gathered from the land and recognized as having a life force that comes from *Papahānaumoku* (Earth Mother).²⁰ The traditional method for working with rock is a form in which rocks are fitted together to make structures without the use of a binding medium (e.g., cement).

Hawaiian Cultural Revitalization

Originally established by a grassroots team of community leaders with a shared vision to revive and advance Native Hawaiian values, Hōlani Hāna's traditional *hale* and *heiau* building have always gone hand-in-hand with the maintenance and revitalization of Native Hawaiian language, kinship connections, and other interconnected parts of the culture. From the arrival of foreigners on the Hawaiian Islands up until the present day, the Native Hawaiian culture has been largely suppressed and the population has struggled to survive. This is due to the integration of Western influences through missionary work, the spread of foreign diseases, the introduction of a capitalist economy, and the illegal annexation of Hawai'i by the United States Government in 1898. Because of this, the Native Hawaiian language was almost completely lost, the Native Hawaiian population shrunk and has suffered higher rates of illness, poverty, and homelessness. Native Hawaiians continuously fight for the sovereignty of their culture. However, cultural revival is currently strongly underway and the resurrection, preservation and celebration of Hawai'i's Native traditions is at the heart of Hōlani Hāna's mission and practices.

Central to the organization's mission is continued community engagement through *laulima*, or "many hands" gatherings. Each *hale* construction project is an opportunity to involve every generation of the community in each part of the process including learning traditional prayers and knowledge, gathering and preparing the natural materials, thatching and lashing, and the final blessing of the *hale*. *Laulima* also provides a space for community members to reconnect and practice the Hawaiian language, stories, lessons, and other cultural teachings.

“For some kūpuna (elders), when they see the younger generations practicing, it brings back a fire to them. When we have laulima, it’s everyone’s family and we gather as one big ‘ohana (family). The older and younger generations being there is so special to us.”

**– CLEMENT PAISHON,
Hōlani Hāna Hale
Building Practitioner**

Native Knowledge

As vital aspects of Native Hawaiian culture, the *hale* and *heiau* experienced major changes along the course of Hawai‘i’s colonization. The arrival of Europeans and forced conversion of Hawaiians to Christianity in the late 18th and early 19th centuries went hand in hand with a devaluation of both the Hawaiian *hale* and a rejection of the old religious *heiau* sites. The destruction of *heiau* began in 1819 after Liholiho (Kamehameha II) and Queen Ka‘ahumanu declared the end of the traditional religion and ordered that old *heiau* be destroyed.²¹ The first Christian missionaries to Hawai‘i also played a central role in relabeling *hale* as a “grass house,” and as an embodied form of uncivilized living.

This couldn’t be further from the truth as reflected by the richness of Native knowledge embedded in *hale*-building and millennium old understandings and ethics of the land on which Native Hawaiians lived. “Building a *hale* is another example of *malama ‘āina*; everything that we use for the structures comes from the land. There’s no Home Depot,” according to Hōlani Hāna board member and Assistant Director of Hawaiian Studies at Windward Community College, Peter Kalawai‘a Moore. The *hale* is the physical manifestation and product of well-practiced ethics of reciprocity between the land and people taking care of one another. “It takes people and nature in *lōkahi* (in harmony) to harvest, prepare the materials, and then to execute the build,” says Kalawai‘a. Timbers are cut from local community forests and thatching for the roof is gathered from locally grown trees or grasses. Builders chose the woods for the various *hale* from the immediate area and sorted them for their different properties: strength for support poles, flexibility for the roof poles so that the structure would breathe, and bend in extreme weather without pulling apart. Hōlani Hāna currently uses Mangrove (*Rhizophora mangle*), Ironwood (*Casuarina equisetifolia*), Kiawe (*Prosopis pallida*), Inkberry (*Ilex verticillate*) and Strawberry Guava (*Psidium cattleianum*) for the structures – all of which are invasive alternatives to the traditional *‘ōhi‘a* tree. “There are so many great cultural lessons and values, and the technology of our *kūpuna* (ancestors) is built into these structures,” continues Kalawai‘a.



Traditional Hawaiian architect Francis P. Sinenci (Sinenci) goes to great heights to build hales.

He established a traditional school to train students to become certified hale builders.

He is pictured here with his wife, Esmenia (Essie) Sinenci.

“You’re aware of the *‘āina* (land), the forces of wind and water. *Hale* are built to be well adapted to the tropics by providing resilient protection against aggressive storm weather and their convection design also provides natural air-conditioning and cooler spaces during hotter temperatures. “It’s the genius of our *kupuna*.”

Cultural Self-Determination and Policy Challenges

The revitalization of Native Hawaiian culture is intimately intertwined with the fight for Hawaiian self-determination. As Hōlani Hāna’s Executive Director Kauwila Hanchett puts it, “*Hale* is a spiritual reflection of our *lāhui*, or our nation. We can connect to our spiritual inheritance and every part of the hale has a significance in how *hale* is a reflection of life and reflection of our journey to reclaim our place as a *lāhui*”.

The politics and policies of traditional cultural revitalization are an everyday reality for Hōlani Hāna. Today, *hale* must conform to the current statewide building codes specific to Native Hawaiian traditional architecture. The Maui County Indigenous Architecture Building Code was established in 2003 as a result of advocacy by Hōlani Hāna to enable the building of *hale* legally. It establishes the County’s procedures for permitting, constructing, and inspecting Indigenous Hawaiian architecture structures.²² “It’s not easy because we have these two systems, you have the western way of legalities and you have the traditional ways with an [Indigenous] master practitioner and we’re navigating it as best we can,” says Kauwila. There are four counties in Hawai‘i and all have adopted similar codes. The code also requires that all building projects be administered by a county-licensed architect having a builder certification, available through a specific program at the University of Hawai‘i at Honolulu.

These codified requirements are examples of policies that fail to recognize and fundamentally undermine the authority, generations of expertise, and experience of Native Hawaiian traditional architect masters and practitioners. As these requirements remain inaccessible for many Native Hawaiians and Hōlani Hāna team members, it also prevents the organization from providing training opportunities to their workers, and

stifles growing in partnership with the local government on projects that may provide additional revenue, capacity growth, industry development, and overall economic advancement for the local community. As a partial remedy and to advance workforce development goals, Hōlani Hāna continues to formalize a detailed strategy for establishing a Hale Builder Certification program with local Maui Community College in Maui. The organization is currently in the process of mapping all core knowledge and skills required for mastery to benefit present and future *hale* builders. Developing a certification program is an example of an accessible job pathway that Hōlani Hāna is using as a building block to navigate policy challenges, widen the scope of the member contributions to the organization, increase the number of qualified community practitioners or technical experts, and invest in operational expansion while meeting compliance requirements.

Workforce Development

To advance workforce development goals, Hōlani Hāna continues to balance addressing policy challenges, and ensuring development and provision of high standards and benefits for the everyday demands of labor-intensive *kūkulu hale* and *uhau humu* work of their employees. For Hōlani Hāna, it's about considering each worker, as not just a worker, but a person who is part of the community, part of Native Hawaiian cultural revitalization, and part of the movement toward community-driven economic well-being. "In modern Hawai'i, many parents have to work full time jobs or more than one job just to live here in their own homeland," says Kauwila. "Reclaiming Native economies where our people can have robust jobs to support their families while doing their cultural practices is where we need to go." The importance of community and social caretaking is one of the reasons many Hōlani Hāna members join the organization. "It's an 'ohana commitment, it's a job but not a job. It's a sense of responsibility, a *kuleana*, given to me, given to us by our ancestors and when we fulfill our *kuleana* that helps us to be happy, strong, well, and content. To be able to get paid to do this job is an honor ... I don't have to show up at some job where I'm just putting in time for a paycheck, I can do something I'm really passionate about and would do on a volunteer basis just because I love it and we all feel that way, which makes a huge difference in how you come together," says Kauwila. This holistic, cultural values-centered community-building approach that emphasizes family involvement and cultural responsibility is the foundation for Hōlani Hāna's workforce and industry development.

The organization is transitioning into their next workforce development phase to ensure sustainable growth through a combination of mission-driven project contracts and grant support. "Everyone we've hired, they were part-time and we're trying to move them up to full-time with benefits. We have to sustain that and then bring on more so that's the part that can be a little scary because this is peoples' livelihoods," Kauwila said in May 2023. "So, we want to make sure we're growing, but that we're growing at a pace that we can sustain in perpetuity and we're navigating that." But the organization has come a long way and is continuing on an upward trajectory due to increased administrative capacity and the high demand for *hale* across the Islands. "The biggest gamechanger for the organization and workforce development has been increasing staff

capacity and having two of our builders also work in an administrative capacity,” says Kauwila. With use of funding support for the 2022 calendar year, Hōlani Hāna reported in July that 26 Hōlani Hāna kūkulu hale and u hau humu pōhaku practitioners received a total of 11,454 hours of paid hands-on skills training at various community-based project sites throughout Hawai‘i. Mission-driven revenue through kūkulu hale and u hau humu pōhaku projects increased by nearly 150%, which enabled Hōlani Hāna to establish four full-time and 11 part-time positions in 2023. These jobs will contribute to increased administrative and hale and u hau humu pōhaku practitioner capacity for the organization.

Industry Development

Hōlani Hāna is one example of Native organizations across the country navigating increasing demand for green projects. The recent significant increase in revenue for Hōlani Hāna is, in part, reflective of the increasing demand for kūkulu hale and u hau humu pōhaku projects across Hawai‘i. According to Hōlani Hāna, there is an incredibly high demand for these structures and a varied market that spans educational and health institutions, schools and universities, national parks and botanical gardens, hotels and golf courses, county and state parks, nonprofit organizations, and nature preserves. The building cost for hale isn’t cheap; on average a hale will cost around \$200,000. The budget is primarily labor, including salary for building practitioners and workers to gather and prepare the natural materials and insurance. They are also in the process of developing regular subcontractors, or suppliers of the natural materials to create and support small businesses as part of an envisioned Hōlani Hāna local economic ecosystem.

Like many Tribes and Native organizations throughout Indian Country, Hōlani Hāna understands that governmental and private-sector funding cannot generate sustainable wealth and authentic interdependency for their community. Their operational funding goal, according to Kauwila, is to sustain the organization with 80% mission-driven revenue and 20% grants and donations. “It’s been a lot of trial and error. We’ve come a long way in determining, negotiating, and clarifying our budget and details. We had a steep learning curve



“We’re a group of people of this place that have responsibility to it, our ancestors, and generations to come.”

– KAUWILA HANCHETT,
Hōlani Hāna
Executive Director

“For us, when we show up to build a hale, we’re not building the hale because we’re getting paid to build the hale. We’re building the hale because we’re hale builders and we believe in what that means, and we’ve heard and felt what that means for us so we’re showing up body, heart, soul 100%.”

– KAUWILA
HANCHETT,
Hōlani Hāna
Executive Director

and had several projects go way over budget.” Hōlani Hāna’s team is now regularly completing projects efficiently within expected budgets and timeframes. The organization also includes within its mission-driven contracts a strategic 20% “give-back” cost, which goes to fund hale projects in other communities. Their industry is growing and they’re exploring ways to work in coordination with other economic giants of the state, specifically tourism. According to Kauwila, “There is a larger issue in East Maui of tourism in general being very extractive and very hard on our communities, on our āina, and our resources. That is the primary economic engine of East Maui so we are working as communities, as interrelated communities, to reclaim that space and find a way to bring it back into pono, back into balance.” Hōlani Hāna continues to work with the tourism industry and department to explore opportunities for a more reciprocal relationship between tourists, local communities, and lands.

When asked about how the organization navigates cultural commodification as part of operating within a capitalist economy, Kauwila responds, “I’ve been surprised by that actually because that is how we are reclaiming this space, finding ways to weave together our different economies. We have the cash economy that overlays us, and then we have our subsistence economy which is how the land and sea sustains our families.”

Funding Challenges

Like the majority of Tribes and Native organizations developing green jobs, one of the biggest challenges continues to be securing funding from state and federal grants, philanthropic, and/or institutional-giving that is in alignment with Native community needs and goals. Hōlani Hāna echoes what Indian Country continues to collectively emphasize to funding partners, agencies, and institutions: that long-term, meaningful funding partnerships that prioritize Tribal and Native leadership is a prerequisite to sustainable economic growth. One of the recent positive developments on philanthropic funding partnerships, Hōlani Hāna notes, is due to the development of a framework of individual organizations coming together to agree upon community goals and projects, and collectively leveraging funding for that purpose. “Rather than individual organizations pursuing their separate missions and separate funding, it’s all of us wrapping

around communities and bringing power back to people and place and ‘āina, and elevating that,” notes Kauwila. “So similar on the funding side, funders in Hawai‘i are now starting to work together and fund communities. For example, during the COVID-19 pandemic, a bunch of key funders got together and formed a funder hui (group) and they work together to fully fund a project.” This paradigm is continuing to grow for their community.

In addition to this system of funding coordination, Hōlani Hāna has also extended support systems for its local community and grassroots groups who lack administrative capacity, yet significantly contribute to community social support. “There’s this huge disconnect because the people on the ground of the place that are grassroots groups carrying 90% of the social work in the community get 5% of the funding and then all these other entities that have skills, they know how to write and manage the grants, they have audited reports, they’ve check-marked all of the boxes and they’re carrying 5% of the work and getting 90% of the funding.” One of the ways Hōlani Hāna is addressing this inequity is by serving as a fiscal sponsor for smaller groups that don’t have the administrative capacity and working with them to help build their internal organizational capabilities to become financially self-sufficient. With the recognition that many groups are in vulnerable operational transition spaces, Hōlani Hāna is lending support and facilitating networking opportunities for smaller organizations in order to benefit their community as a whole.

Legacy

Kaukaohulani Morton, Hōlani Hāna’s Operations Manager, summarizes the complex, multiple layers of her hopes for the social, cultural, and economic legacy of Hōlani Hāna. “I hope that we reclaim this space and it continues to be a *pu‘uhonua*, a place of restoration, solitude, safety, and peace for our community. I hope we continue to inspire, and be inspired, and for the work that we do, mostly I just hope that my daughter and her kids want to perpetuate the work that we’re doing. I hope she has an urge in her to activate her *na‘au* (spirit) and *ike kūpuna* (ancestral teachings) to want to continue the traditions, and continue expanding our cultural intellect, and our practices for her mo‘opuna, for her future generations. That’s going to be the legacy, our *kānaka* (Native Hawaiians) stepping into our practices where it becomes our lives and our livelihoods.” Hōlani Hāna continues to demonstrate what many, if not all, Native organizations and Tribes are striving for in the green jobs revolution: to advance the mutually beneficial goals of economic development, cultural revitalization, and overall return to authentic Native self-determination.



From left to right: Clement Paishon, Francis P. Sinenci, Kahale Unciano, Kaukaohulani Morton, Kauwila Hanchett, Aliah Irvine, & Esmenia Sinenci




THE ORGANIZED VILLAGE OF KAKE

The Organized Village of Kake (OVK), a federally recognized Tribe in Kake, Alaska, is an example of how green jobs, for many Tribes, continues to be a lifeline and crucial for Tribal disaster preparedness. Maintaining consistent food production and healthy ecosystems, especially in times of crisis, is one of the central challenges of our time. Yet, OVK and other Native Alaskan villages, through use of shellfish gardens, have been doing it for millennia. Shellfish gardens are an ancestral technology consisting of intertidal rock-wall terraces built to provide habitat for clams and other shellfish harvested by the community. For OVK, they are being reconstructed to address food insecurity challenges for the relatively isolated community, provide an opportunity for intergenerational cultural revitalization, and increase Tribal economic and workforce development. In navigating the political landscape to advance this and other food sovereignty initiatives, the Tribe highlights the restoration of shellfish gardens as a matter critical to Tribal self-determination.

Tribal Overview

OVK sits on the northwest coast of Kupreanof Island in Southeast Alaska bordered by the Tongass National Forest, Kake City, and lands owned by the Kake Tribal Corporation and Sealaska Regional Corporation. OVK as a Tribal government was the first Alaska Native village to form under the provisions of the Indian Reorganization Act in 1948 and holds 14 acres of Tribal trust land on which the reservation sits. The local corporation for the Tribe is the Kake Tribal Corporation (KTC), established in 1975, under which all Tribal members are shareholders. Their population of 600 Tribal members practice a continuation of food harvest traditions in largely maintaining a subsistence lifestyle through hunting, fishing, and gathering. Accessible only by seaplane or ferry, the cost of commercially produced food runs very high and only arrives during times of the year when weather permits. The town has a small grocery store and food delivery is not a cost-effective option.



“One of the Tlingit sayings we have is that ‘when the tide is out, the table is set’ and it’s really such a true statement because when we have those minus tides, there are so many different things, we can go to beach and get clams, octopus, seaweed, gumboots, cockles, mussels, sea asparagus, and other buffet foods. It’s one of the things our people have relied on since time immemorial.”

– SIMON FRIDAY,
Organized Village of Kake Shellfish Garden Project Lead

The Pandemic and Food Security

The challenge of food security for the community was exacerbated by the pandemic. Like elsewhere across the country, COVID-19 caused a near complete shutdown of Kake’s programs and services, including transportation for travel and food delivery. “When it first hit the United States, we lost the ability to get meat from the store here,” recounts OVK President Joel Jackson, “We had community members calling more and more every day.” To address food shortages due to COVID-19 disruptions, Tribal leaders declared a Food Security Emergency in June 2020 and requested an emergency subsistence hunt permit from the Federal Subsistence Board (FSB), which granted a permit to hunt within lands managed by the United States Forest Service. In response, the State of Alaska’s Department of Fish and Game responded to this decision by filing a lawsuit against the FSB for authorizing the emergency subsistence hunt permit, demonstrating the inequities and challenges to Tribal subsistence rights. This case is currently active.

Despite legal objection from the state, the Tribe held a successful subsistence hunt, providing shellfish and produce harvested in their newly built community gardens. “I did hear a common theme that, as a result of seeing the shelves at the store go bare, people generally leaned on traditions and subsistence more heavily and were motivated to get more fish, clams, seaweed, and deer than in years past because it was a reminder of how fragile our food system is here,” says Miakah Nix, OVK Tribal and community member.

Shellfish Gardens

Tribal leaders explored expanding their disaster preparedness measures for the future to ensure shellfish and other intertidal harvested foods continue to be plentiful, especially in times of emergency. “That really brought to light [*the need for*] food security so we started looking at our clam gardens, cockle project, because we have to make sure future generations have the opportunity we have now,” says Jackson. According to

A shellfish garden in Kake. Photo credit: Shaelene Moler

“Customary and traditional is different from subsistence. All rural Alaska residents qualify for subsistence activities or rights. It’s important to make the distinction that what we’re talking about is our customary and traditional rights because it’s about our self-determination versus what is regulated or allowed by the state.”

– MIKE JACKSON, OVK Chief Judge



research conducted by Simon Fraser University and the University of Washington, clams can grow up to 300% more densely in gardens. Strong evidence exists that suggests clam gardens strengthen shellfish growing conditions and expand ideal clam habitat.²³ Furthermore, the additional habitat increases biodiversity by providing space for other intertidal species such as sea cucumbers and sea urchins.²⁴ Due to influences of settler occupation, land dispossession, and shoreline development that have displaced Native Alaskan communities, traditional shellfish gardens have been significantly depleted. But now, they are resurging as an urgently needed climate-resilient food source.

Climate Change

Climate change impacts in Kake and throughout Southeast Alaska include increasing variability and extremes in weather events. Year-to-year fluctuations have led to unprecedented drought periods in recent years, followed by extreme rainfall. Unstable weather patterns are projected to cause increased storm intensity and frequency and the potential for shoreline erosion and coastal flooding. Shellfish gardens have been shown to buffer coastal communities from impacts of extreme weather events and natural disasters. Shellfish beds also protect the shoreline from storms and minimize erosion by stabilizing sediments. Yet another benefit of shellfish beds is their ability to sequester carbon. Rising ocean temperatures and increased wind and storm events due to climate change are likely to impact clam contamination, growth rates, and dispersal of larvae. Ocean warming is likely to increase the occurrence, intensity, and distribution of harmful algal blooms (HABs), which impact the level of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning (PSP) toxins. Currently there is no antidote for PSP.²⁵ Changing ocean chemistry due to increased carbon dioxide emissions are likely to impact shell

accretion rates. These gardens are also able to more effectively adapt to ocean acidification, which causes shells to dissolve and has other harmful effects.²⁶ With climate change likely to impact multiple aspects of shellfish ecology, restoration and enhancement of shellfish gardens is critical in supporting disaster preparedness, carbon sequestration, and food security.²⁷

Workforce Development

Significant investments were leveraged by the Tribe to create and expand a clam garden pilot program, which addresses two major past challenges of food insecurity and workforce development. Historically, the Tribe had a thriving local economy and control of trade routes around the Kuiu and Kupreanof islands. In 1912, the first cannery was built near Kake. OVK operated the cannery until the late 1970s when, along with many other Alaskan canneries, finances and changing market conditions forced its closure. A second industry, logging, came to Kake at about the time the cannery closed but was subsequently also closed in 2004 due to KTC bankruptcy.

With the loss of salmon fishing and processing, and then logging, the economy of Kake essentially collapsed. The loss of jobs was so great that between 2002 and 2005, the population of Kake fell from more than 800 to less than 500, as at least 150 working-age residents were forced to relocate in search of employment.²⁸ When asked what challenges Kake faces in growing and developing in ways that benefit the community's economy, social well-being, and surrounding natural resources, the Tribe overwhelmingly responded that there is a great need to draw back and retain those community members that have left to find employment elsewhere.

OVK, like many Tribes across Indian Country, highlights housing as central to addressing its economic and workforce development challenges. "At the core of workforce issue is actually a housing crisis. We can fundraise, we can create jobs, but we're really struggling to have housing to attract people, whether it is community members returning or potentially new community members that want to fill those jobs,"



We're looking after our people, looking after the land, and being the stewards we've always been."

– SIMON FRIDAY

OVK Green Jobs Project Lead

Organized Village of Kake Tribal Office.

Photo credit: Clarisa Diaz

The Totum Pole is core to the cultural heritage of Kake.

*Photo credit:
Clarisa Diaz*



mentioned Miakah Nix. Tribal leaders recognize the vast economic potential that exists for their Tribe, with abundance of natural resources and opportunities for sharing of cultural heritage. They acknowledge that, while housing is a foundational challenge, there are multiple building blocks like childcare, the cost of living, job readiness and training, and other needs to enable further development of a skilled, creative, and empowered workforce to take the lead on making economic opportunities a reality.

OVK Tribal leaders stress the need for wrap-around services involving high levels of coordination between state and federal agencies responsible for supporting Tribes with these multiple challenges around housing, childcare, and other areas. One example of how the Tribe is increasing coordination to tackle these issues is through the community's local Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy assessment. The assessment enjoins OVK, the City of Kake, KTC, the Kake City School District, and Gunnuck Creek Hatchery (local non-profit fish hatchery) to create a unified vision to enhance the socioeconomic welfare of the community and grow the population. The goal is to provide essential infrastructure that utilizes community land, natural resources, and social resources to improve the economic and cultural conditions through a holistic approach.

Funding Challenges and Opportunities

While there is a growing interest to fund Tribal climate adaptation and workforce related projects, the Tribe stressed the need for funding partners to understand and support workforce development as a building block for project growth and sustainability. Workforce development is essential to build adaptive capacity in response to climate change. Many Tribes across Indian Country, including OVK, continue to address key barriers to workforce development like housing, childcare, and job training – issues addressed previously. Funding partners who recognize the plethora of these and other prerequisite needs are short in number, according to OVK. The Tribe stressed the need for state, federal, and institutional funders to be educated about these foundational needs in order to restructure their funding

policies and processes to prioritize flexibility, technical support, and sustainable partnership with Tribes. This would allow Tribes like OVK to address needs and accomplish projects in a holistic, rather than compartmentalized manner. OVK Tribal Council affirmed the need for funding that supports the dynamic nature of project development and implementation, especially those being undertaken in this unique moment of complexity and uncertainty introduced by the pandemic and climate change. To give an example, the Tribe has been successful creating jobs, but young people with families are not incentivized to take a new position in Kake because childcare is only available six months out of the year.

Tribal Sovereignty

Development of the Shellfish Garden Project is integral to the revitalization and perpetuation of Keex' Kwaan natural and cultural heritage. Tribal leadership and the project's coordinators are passionate about this project because it is about continuing to reserve sovereign rights to strategically implement proven Native technology on their ancestral homelands that has been used over thousands of years. The Tribe asserts its sovereign right to restore a traditional cultural practice that will address food insecurity and climate change events and risks. With required federal and state permitting, including an Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation 401 Water Certification and a U.S. Army Corps of Engineers Nationwide Permit 27 on Aquatic

“When you’re building a Shellfish garden, you’re not thinking about it for yourself, you’re thinking about it for your grandchildren and great grandchildren. It’s important to have everyone involved because we need young people to learn how to build and maintain the gardens, and we need the elders to plant the seed of knowledge by teaching them. These gardens transcend generations.”

– SIMON FRIDAY

**OVK Green Jobs
Project Lead**



First Nations staff gather with consultants and OVK staff at the Tribal Office. From left to right: Jacquie Demko, Eloise Peabbles, Simon Friday, Elizbeth Figus, Carson Viles, Miakah Nix (front), Justin McDonald, Mike Jackson, Joel Jackson, Mona Evan, Clarisa Diaz, Lincoln Bean, Marissa Naranjo (not pictured) Dawn Jackson and Sheryl Kelly



Habitat Restoration, Enhancement, and Establishment Activities, taking up to a year to be obtained, the Tribe has continued moving forward with the project. “Why do we need to get a permit from the state of Alaska to put rocks on the beach when that should be a Tribally-led decision instead of waiting on the state to provide a permit?” asks Dawn Jackson, OVK’s Executive Director. “That is always in the back of my mind when we’re working on food security and food sovereignty. How are we pushing the envelope?” As the Tribe looks to future expansion of the gardens to nearby intertidal areas outside of their 14-acre reservation but within their ancestral territory, they will have to coordinate with surrounding jurisdictional landowners including the City of Kake, KTC, Sealaska Regional Corporation, and the U.S. Forest Service.

Legacy

While Tribal leaders continue to tackle the politics and legalities of traditional cultural restoration, the project’s lead coordinator, Simon Friday, focuses on efforts just as important: community connection and cultural education. Thus far, this has included presentations at Tribal community meetings, conferences, and the local high school, in addition to organizing community events at the Tribe’s shellfish demonstration garden. Friday highlights that building and maintenance of shellfish gardens will involve collective efforts of Tribal members and leaders across generations. They will turn over sediment, oxygenate, and aerate the shoreline, and remove large rocks and predators in addition to learning about the histories of the ancestral technology. “I hope the legacy of this project will be community effort because that’s what it’s always taken, that’s what it will continue to take to not only build the gardens, but also maintain them and make sure we’re doing it for the right reasons.”

CONCLUSION

One common theme throughout Indian Country is the existence of prosperous, innovative, and adaptive Native economies despite the impacts of colonization. The history of colonization and its persisting challenges have created a legacy of poverty for Tribes across Indian Country. These challenges include but are not limited to land dispossession; land inaccessibility; lack of land management authority; substandard or lack of Tribal infrastructure, including housing and other services; local, state, and federal policy effectively limiting Tribal sovereignty; underinvestment; small amounts of discretionary funds; and little access to long-term resources by governmental and private-sector funders.

Despite this, Tribes and Native organizations continue envisioning and forging pathways to resurge workforces and economies based on Native core values of reciprocity and balance with the natural environment. Many Tribes and Native organizations continue building necessary roadmaps and routes involving development of community infrastructure, job pathways and training programs, revenue-generating operations, fiscal administration capabilities, and other strategies to accomplish longer-term goals toward economic growth and sovereignty. The road to success for Native communities involves a simple idea that includes the consistent prioritization of Tribal leadership and sovereignty among local, state, and federal partners, and long-term investments that center Native needs.

Overall, as demonstrated by both Hōlani Hāna, Inc., and the Organized Village of Kake, the future for green jobs across Indian Country is a bright one with unceasing hope and determination to restore traditional values and culture, and authentic Tribal self-determination for the well-being of present and future generations and our shared natural world.

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