



Pacific Environment's Alaska Program



Alaska conjures images of vast open spaces, plentiful wildlife and abundant oceans — and for good reason. But America's last frontier — the crown jewel of our country's wild lands and marine habitats — faces profound environmental challenges.

While Alaska's economy has long been driven by resource extraction, Alaskans and people throughout the United States have committed to protecting the state's wilderness and wildlife as well. But despite this pledge to the environment, the impacts of oil drilling, gold mining and industrial fishing are all on the rise. Coupled with the profound threat global warming poses to the Arctic, these increased pressures on Alaska's wilds could spell disaster not only for the environment, but for fishermen, native peoples and other community members.

Pacific Environment has supported community-led conservation efforts around the Pacific Rim for over two decades. In Alaska, we're working with partners in the native, fishing, environmental and scientific communities to confront threats to our last frontier. Together, we're working to safeguard critical habitat, including the world's largest salmon run, the rapidly melting Arctic habitat of the polar bear, old-growth coral and other important fish habitats, and areas essential to community subsistence.

Protecting the Arctic Ocean

The Arctic Ocean is one of the least studied and most poorly understood areas on the planet. Home to polar bears, ice seals, bowhead whales, and one of the oldest indigenous subsistence cultures in North America, the Beaufort and Chukchi seas are an unparalleled wilderness at the top of the planet. Climate change, however, is causing enormous stress on these ecosystems, and rapidly melting sea ice habitat is threatening the extinction of majestic species such as the polar bear. Melting sea ice is also leading to efforts by oil and gas companies and the global shipping community to increase industrial development in this rapidly melting frontier.

In response to these threats, Pacific Environment is working with communities to prevent the industrialization of the Arctic and decrease greenhouse gas emissions in order to save this vast wilderness. Pacific Environment and our partners are working at the local, regional, national, and international level to prevent aggressive industrial expansion into the Arctic, protect important habitats, and ensure that communities maintain the opportunity to pursue a subsistence way of life. Pacific Environment and our community partners continue to lead groundbreaking efforts to prevent massive proposed oil and gas development and develop adequate safeguards for international shipping throughout the region.



Arctic Ocean Facts

- The Chukchi Sea off Alaska's northwestern coast is considered the most productive Arctic marine ecosystem on the planet.
- The Inupiat communities of Alaska's Arctic coast are considered the longest continuously occupied settlements in North America.
- Over the past four decades the Alaska coast has warmed faster than anywhere else in the United States, with a winter temperature increase averaging 7-10 degrees Fahrenheit.
- Unless we mitigate the effects of global warming, U.S. scientists predict that Alaska's polar bear populations may be extinct by 2050.

Protecting the Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands

The Bering Sea is one of the Earth's richest marine ecosystems and supports half of the United States' fishing industry. Flanking the southern end of the Bering Sea are the Aleutian Islands, a nearly 1,100 mile-long chain of volcanic islands harboring some of the oldest cold-water coral and sponge habitats on the planet. Industrial fishing and marine pollution threaten these rich habitats, which include the Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge and the Pribilof Islands, oft-referred to as the 'Galapagos of the North.' The Aleutian Islands are part of the 'Great Circle Route,' a major shipping corridor between Asia and the Americas.

In response to the pollution threats from cargo ships, tankers, and fishing vessels, Pacific Environment is working with communities to ensure adequate oil spill prevention and response capabilities for the tankers and cargo ships in the area, and to protect habitat essential to endangered species.

Bering Sea and Aleutian Island Facts

- The Bering Sea is home to at least 450 species of fish, crustaceans, and mollusks; 50 species of seabirds; and 25 species of marine mammals.
- The Aleutian Islands archipelago shelters corals that are thousands of years old.
- The Pribilof Islands are the breeding grounds for 90 per cent of the world's threatened northern fur seal population.
- The Alaska Maritime National Wildlife Refuge is home to 40 million seabirds (80 per cent of the North American population).

