

# The Igiugig Sustainable Future Project

## Place-Based Indigenous Stewardship in Alaska: Honoring Tribal Sovereignty and Nation-Building

### AVF's Place-Based Investments

In Alaska, Tribes are working to fundamentally shift systems of power between Alaska Native Tribes and the federal and state governments, creating opportunities for self-determination over land relationship decisions in their homelands. Indigenous communities and leaders rooted in Indigenous values and places have the most comprehensive practical knowledge of their homelands and are the best architects of their own prosperity and well-being. Through subgranting to local tribes and communities for a wide range of cultural revitalization, climate and conservation efforts and through place-based projects, Alaska Venture Fund is supporting Indigenous leadership, well-being and nation-building. We have chosen several places to invest deeply at a hyperlocal scale. The Igiugig Sustainable Future Project in the Alaska Native Village of Igiugig in the Bristol Bay region of southwest Alaska is one of our place-based projects led by AVF Partner and Program Director of Bristol Bay Sustainable Communities, AlexAnna Salmon. We are elevating the lessons learned from places like Igiugig, to our broader policy and statewide efforts.

### Igiugig Community Goals

#### Tribal Sovereignty and Land Protection

- The people of Igiugig have lived on the lands and waters surrounding the village for time immemorial. Through the emerging regional Indigenous Guardians initiative, Igiugig is working to restore their natural and rightful authority to help steward and safeguard one of the most pristine, intact landscapes on earth, for current and future generations.

#### Cultural Preservation and Realization

- Igiugig has emerged as a leader in cultural preservation in the Bristol Bay region. By uplifting the intergenerational transmission of Indigenous Knowledge, languages, and subsistence way of life the community instills in its youth the core Indigenous values that have enabled survival in this homeland for millennia.

#### Renewable Energy

- Igiugig's Energy Vision is to improve energy self-sufficiency using local renewable resources and workforce, with the goal to minimize environmental impact and maintain cultural identity. Igiugig's target is to transition off diesel fuel by 2025 through integrating wind, solar, and hydrokinetic power, providing a model for other rural communities across the globe.

### Igiugig Sustainable Future Project

The Village of Igiugig is a small, self-sufficient community with approximately 70 year-round residents, located at "Water Down the Throat" (ig-ee- ah-gig), where Lake Iliamna drains into the Kvichak River. Igiugig has strong cultural and environmental values drawn from its Dena'ina, Yup'ik, and Alutiiq peoples. These values and a commitment to self-determination underpin the work of the Igiugig Village Council, which strives to create a prosperous present and future for the community while living in respectful relationship with the lands and waters that have supported their ways of life for millennia. This work is guided not only by a vision of a thriving rural Alaska community, but by a recognition that what is good for Igiugig is good for the region, the state, the nation, and the world. In addition to providing essential services and infrastructure for the community, Igiugig Village Council has embraced technological innovation alongside Indigenous Knowledge, expanding the vision of what is possible for remote communities in Alaska and beyond.



Photos by Nathaniel Wilder

# Igiugig Sustainable Future Project's Impact

## Tribal Sovereignty and Land Protection

- **Indigenous Protected Areas (IPAs):** Anticipating future land ownership, IVC enacted a Tribally Designated Protected Area Ordinance. These efforts laid the foundation for the emerging Indigenous Guardians program, serving all communities in the Lake Iliamna region. Igiugig is also mapping and assessing the extent, status, and ownership of Igiugig's ancestral homeland to inform a "Traditional Use Area Lands Assessment and Stewardship Plan" for Indigenous co-management of state and federal land.

## Cultural Preservation and Realization

- **Igiugig Community Cultural Center:** Designed to prioritize fossil fuel-free energy sources and provide a venue for lifelong learning and language revitalization activities, a repository for cultural resources, and a commercial kitchen that will allow the village to integrate locally grown and locally-harvested food products.
- Igiugig is revitalizing a traditional dance group, establishing a region-wide "Communities Teaching Culture" program in 13 villages across Bristol Bay, hosting cultural camps and creating a physical "language nest" in Igiugig with Yup'ik signage, place name mapping, and language immersion classes.
- **Repatriating ancestral remains:** Igiugig secured the return of the remains of 24 ancestors taken in 1931 by anthropologists from the Smithsonian and kept at the Museum of Natural History. In 2017, they were reburied at the former village of Qinuyang, which was nominated to the National Register of Historic Places in 2021.

## Renewable Energy

- **Hydrokinetic Power:** Igiugig worked with a developer of renewable power systems to install, test, and improve a hydrokinetic run-of-the-river RivGen device in 2019 and 2021 to provide power to the village's grid with a smart grid system and energy storage system. Igiugig serves as a testing ground for cutting-edge SMART microgrid and battery technologies suitable for integrating renewables in remote and high-latitude geographies.
- **Igiugig Northern Field Lab for Optimized Wind Energy:** Igiugig's wind energy research program involves deploying and testing both vertical and horizontal axis wind technologies that address the unique challenges of northern regions. A locally designated field lab allows for the direct translation of research results into real-world implementation.

## Business Ventures and Start-ups

- Igiugig Village generates employment opportunities and revenue through environmentally responsible infrastructure development and construction projects by its two industrial companies, Iliamna Lake Contractors and Iliaska Environmental. Igiugig owns and operates two commercial construction camps and a historic lodge in the region, which offers a starting point to explore ecotourism opportunities. Igiugig also established a community greenhouse, apple orchard and local food program producing fresh fruit, vegetables, eggs, and chickens to supplement the village's subsistence harvest.
- The National Telecommunications and Information Administration awarded \$8M to Igiugig Village Council to support broadband infrastructure and non-infrastructure development for the telecommunications consortium "SALMONet," made up of 16 Bristol Bay tribes.

## Future Vision

The Igiugig Village Council and Igiugig Sustainable Future Project envisions a prosperous future for the community through sustainable social and economic development while continuing to live in reciprocal relationship with the lands and waters that support our way of life to answer the question: What do we need to be, to become a place where our young people want to remain? The future of the Igyararmiut and the fate of the last global stronghold of wild sockeye salmon are intrinsically linked. Restoring Tribal territory, generating a means to assume authority over land relationship planning (i.e., land and natural resource management) and establishing programs and policies specific to our community needs are foundational to our sovereignty. Ensuring traditional Igiugig lands are held in the best interests of the Igiugig community is essential to our well-being and our way of life.



"We really love where we live - we've been living there for over 8,000 years. We want to live in place. Igiugig is where Lake Iliamna is swallowed by the Kvichak River and that's where our people belong."

- AlexAnna Salmon