WALKING THE PATH TOGETHER

How SASS Transformed Federal-Community Partnership in Southeast Alaska

July 2025

An Independent Evaluation By

Prism Kind, LLC
(Evaluation, Facilitation, & Systems Change Consultancy)

In Partnership With

Tlingit & Haida | Spruce Root | Southeast Conference

DISCLAIMER

This independent evaluation was commissioned by the SASS Regional Strengthening Partners—Southeast Conference, Spruce Root, and Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska—to document and assess the impacts of the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy. While the evaluation was conducted in partnership with these organizations, the findings, analysis, and recommendations presented in this report represent the independent assessment of Prism Kind, LLC. The Regional Strengthening Partners provided access to documentation, facilitated connections with project implementers, and reviewed drafts for factual accuracy, but did not direct the evaluation's conclusions. The views expressed in this report are those of Prism Kind, LLC and do not necessarily reflect the official positions of the U.S. Department of Agriculture, the Regional Strengthening Partners, or individual SASS project implementers. All errors or omissions remain the responsibility of the Prism Kind, LLC.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

This evaluation was only made possible with the generous participation and insights of many individuals across Southeast Alaska. We extend our deepest gratitude to:

The **Regional Strengthening Partners** who served as both evaluation partners and interview participants: Robert Venables & Dan Lesh (Southeast Conference), Alana Peterson & Marina Anderson (Spruce Root), and Ralph Wolfe & Ray Paddock (Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska).

The **federal partners** who shared their perspectives : Barb Miranda (U.S. Forest Service) and Keith Perkins (USDA Rural Development).

The **project leaders** who welcomed us into their stories: Eloise Peabbles (Organized Village of Kake), Gabe Sjoberg (Tlingit & Haida), Bob Christensen (Sustainable Southeast Partnership), Rob Cadmus (Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition), Eric Wyatt (OceansAlaska and Alaska Oyster Cooperative), Linda Behnken (Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust), and Ian Johnson (Hoonah Indian Association).

Lee House from the SASS Storytelling Team (Sitka Conservation Society & U.S. Forest Service) for sharing narrative insights as well as contributing all of the photography featured in this report (except for two images from Eloise Peabbles for the first case study (6.1)).

Stephane Granato (Southeast Conference) and **Shannon Stevens** (Spruce Root) for their efforts as part of the project team, corralling project reports, connecting with partners, and reviewing drafts.

All the **SASS participants** who provided project reports, documentation, and supporting materials that enriched this analysis.

The **communities across Southeast Alaska** whose vision, wisdom, and efforts made SASS possible.

Gunalchéesh. Thank you.

HOW TO READ THIS REPORT

For readers with limited time: The Executive Summary provides an overview of SASS's impacts, key findings, and recommendations. This summary can be read independently and captures many essential insights from the full evaluation.

For the full journey: Read the report sequentially to understand how SASS transformed federal-community partnerships, created tangible outcomes, and generated strategic insights for future initiatives.

Report Contents:

- **Section 1 - Introduction:** Context about Southeast Alaska and SASS's origins
- **Section 2 - Evaluation Approach & Methodology:** How we conducted this evaluation
- **Section 3 - Partnership Dynamics & Systems Changes:** The transformation in federal-community relationships
- **Section 4 - Portfolio Outcome Pattern Harvest:** What SASS achieved across 41 projects
- **Section 5 - Resource Allocation Analysis:** How investments generated returns
- **Section 6 - Case Studies:** Seven in-depth stories of SASS in action
- **Section 7 - Emergent Learning:** Cross-cutting insights and lessons
- **Section 8 - Future Direction & Recommendations:** Guidance for sustaining and scaling impact

For Specific Interests:

- **Federal policymakers:** Focus on Sections 3, 7, and 8 to understand how streamlined authorities and trust-based partnerships improve outcomes while maintaining accountability
- **Community organizations:** See Sections 4 and 6 for practical examples of project design, partnership approaches, and sustainability strategies you can adapt
- **Funders:** Examine Section 5 for ROI evidence and case study Strategic Resource Insights boxes to understand how flexible funding multiplies impact
- **Practitioners:** The seven case studies in Section 6 provide inspiration for implementation, with insights directly from the featured practitioners

Understanding the Analysis:

- **Quotes** throughout capture participant voices and lived experiences
- **Three complementary lenses** used throughout are systems changes, outcome patterns, and strategic resource insights—See Section 2 for more details
- **Pattern codes** (like CC-YOU for youth engagement) track recurring impacts—see Appendix 1 for full definitions
- **Call-out boxes** in case studies highlight specific patterns and insights

This report can be read as a complete narrative or used as a reference for specific topics of interest.

WALKING THE PATH TOGETHER

How SASS Transformed Federal-Community Partnership in Southeast Alaska

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

From the Full Report about the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS)
An Independent Evaluation by Prism Kind, LLC | July 2025

In the summer of 2024, five teenagers pulled up to Kake's dock in a U.S. Forest Service boat, their ice chests heavy with 186 freshly caught sockeye salmon for elders who had raised them. This scene—Indigenous youth employed by their Tribe through an innovative federal partnership—represents how the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) created local jobs and strengthened Southeast Alaska's rural communities. When federal agencies partner effectively with those who know their homeland and waters best, both efficiency and impact multiply.

The Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS): A Community-Driven Partnership Model

Beginning in 2022, SASS allocated $24.8 million across approximately 60 projects throughout Southeast Alaska, building a strategy using existing USDA authorities to deliver faster, more responsive results through community-led implementation. By streamlining administrative processes and asking communities directly, "What is important to your community, region, Tribe?" SASS received a huge response—283 proposals—showing that Southeast Alaska's rural communities have solutions ready when given the opportunity to lead.

Through effective partnerships with three Regional Strengthening Partners—Southeast Conference, Spruce Root, and Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska—SASS demonstrated that more efficient federal processes combined with local expertise improved outcomes. This innovative approach achieved multiple goals: more thriving rural economies, strengthened food security, and young people building careers in their hometowns.

Evaluation Approach

This independent evaluation employed a comprehensive portfolio analysis examining SASS through three evidence-based lenses:

- **Systems Change Analysis:** Documenting shifts in institutional structures, inter-organizational relationships, and overall frameworks and perspectives
- **Outcome Pattern Identification:** Tracking impacts across economic, environmental, and social performance indicators
- **Strategic Resource Analysis:** Assessing effectiveness, leverage ratios, and sustainability mechanisms

Through stakeholder interviews with federal partners, Regional Strengthening Partners, and project implementers, combined with analysis of 41 projects representing $19 million in investments, we identified replicable practices and scalable innovations.

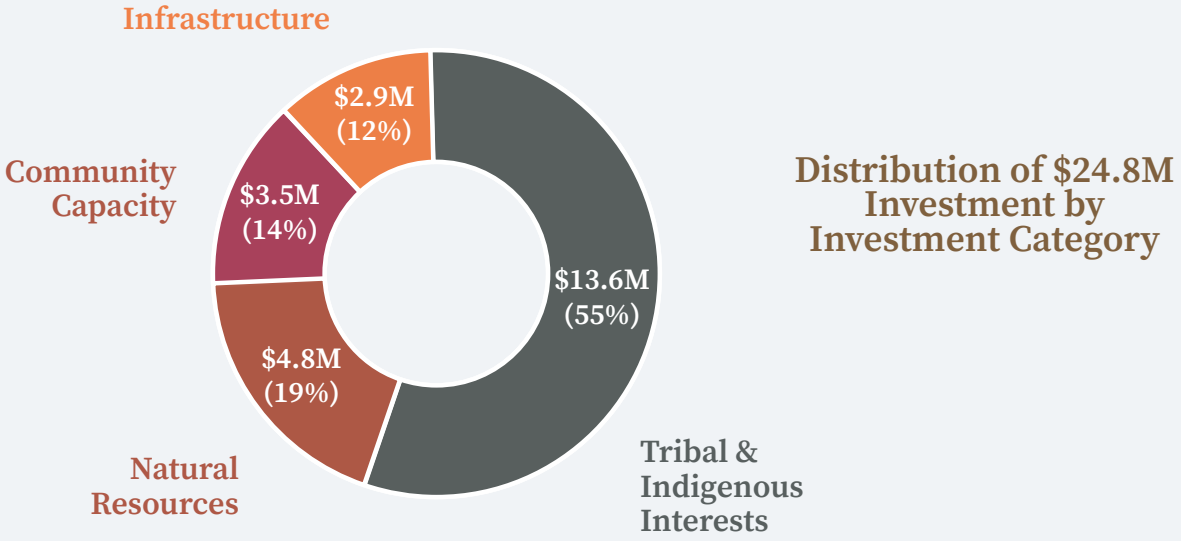
Building Effective Federal-Community Partnerships

Community-driven implementation with strong federal partnerships generates strong returns. Communities with deep knowledge of their resources, people, and potential made timely decisions—often deploying resources within one week to address time-sensitive opportunities. Over 50% of funding strengthened Tribal and Indigenous interests, honoring the region's first stewards while creating impact and opportunity for all.

The evaluation results validate this partnership approach:

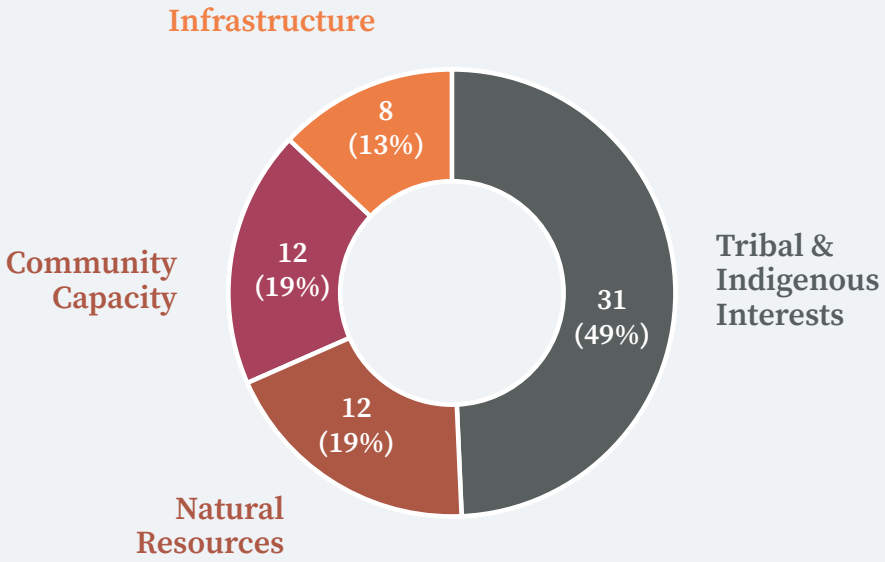
- **Adaptive Management:** 4.4/5 rating for responsive program design
- **Partnership Effectiveness:** 4.1/5 for enhancing cross-sector collaboration
- **Innovation Adoption:** 4.1/5 for enabling creative problem-solving
- **Model Scalability:** 4.0+/5 confidence in replication potential

SASS also effectively implemented storytelling as a vital tool for systems change, with dedicated positions and resources for sharing success stories—building a narrative of possibilities and collaboration can be as important as metrics in driving lasting transformation.



Distribution of $24.8M Investment by Investment Category

Distribution of 63 Projects by Investment Category



Results: Community Leadership and Lasting Impact

Analysis revealed that SASS investments built lasting capacity:

- **97%** fostered partnerships that multiplied impact
- **84%** strengthened local networks that create more opportunities
- **78%** established revenue streams or funding models that continue beyond federal support
- **75%** built organizational capacity
- **63%** advanced Indigenous governance and decision-making authority

Tangible outcomes include: 164 jobs created on an annualized basis from 2022 to 2024, fishing families staying in business, young entrepreneurs launching companies, and rural communities retaining their talent. The Sustainable Southeast Partnership alone grew from 45 to 130+ partners, creating a self-reinforcing collaboration network.

These investments also strengthened environmental stewardship which supports sustainable economies: restored salmon streams support returning fish populations, well-managed forests provide sustainable resource access while improving wildlife habitat, and locally-controlled fisheries ensure resources and prosperity for future generations.

Maximizing Return on Investment

SASS's $24.8 million federal investment achieved strong returns through efficient local implementation:

- **Rapid Deployment:** Microgrants deployed within one week when opportunities arose
- **Community Investment Match:** Many projects leveraged 2-3 dollars for every federal dollar, with exceptional cases achieving higher ratios
- **Economic Impact:** $13.4M in deployed funds generated $19.8M in regional economic activity
- **Lasting Assets:** Communities built fishing workforce capacity, processing facilities, and food production infrastructure—creating jobs for generations while supporting resource stewardship

Notably, 87% of federal investments stayed in Southeast Alaska communities, supporting local workers and businesses.

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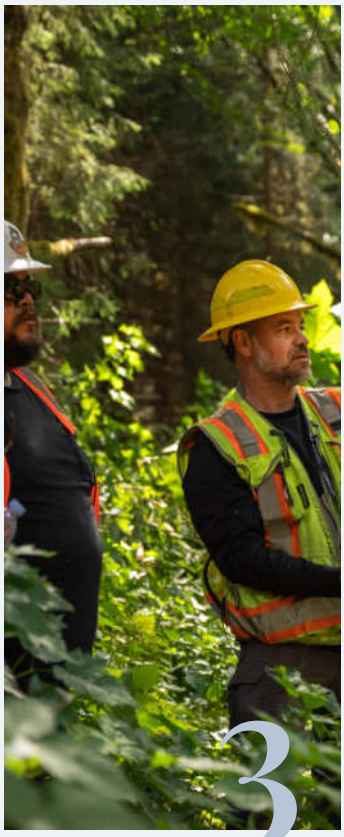

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Success Stories: Rural Families, Jobs, & Prosperity

Seven detailed case studies illuminate successful federal-community partnerships:

1 **Fish, Berries, and Reciprocity: Youth Stewards of Kéex̲' Kwaan—**Organized Village of Kake using federal funds to employ teenagers in natural resource work

Topics: Youth Employment, Workforce Development, Natural Resource Management

2 **Putting up their Hands: Alaska Youth Stewarding Southeast Together—**Local youth crews improving salmon habitat and building career skills and a regional network

Topics: Youth Employment, Workforce Development, Natural Resource Management

4

5

6

7

3 **Plot Twist: Jumping at the Opportunity to Build Southeast's Young Growth Workforce—**Southeast Alaskans gaining technical skills for forestry jobs

Topics: Workforce Development & Natural Resource Management

4 **Pooling Resources: From Local Stream Restoration to Statewide Coalition Building—**Organizations pooling resources to strengthen local forestry and watershed crews

Topics: Natural Resource Management & Organizational Development

5 **Seeds of Opportunity: Growing Alaska's New, Blue Economy—**Southeast Alaska developing its shellfish industry

Topics: Mariculture Industry, Working Waterfronts, Workforce Development, Rural Prosperity

6 **More Anchored in Community: Untangling Capital Barriers for Southeast's Fishermen—**Creating pathways for youth and rural residents to enter the fishing industry

Topics: Fishing Industry, Youth Employment, Workforce Development, Natural Resource Management, Rural Prosperity

7 **Time to Sow and See it Grow: Weaving Food Sovereignty for Hoonah—**Hoonah developing local food production capacity

Topics: Natural Resource Management, Workforce Development, Food Security, Rural Prosperity

Each case demonstrates how place-based federal investment enables communities to develop context-appropriate solutions.

Key Principles for Federal-Community Partnerships

SASS validated four principles for successful partnerships:

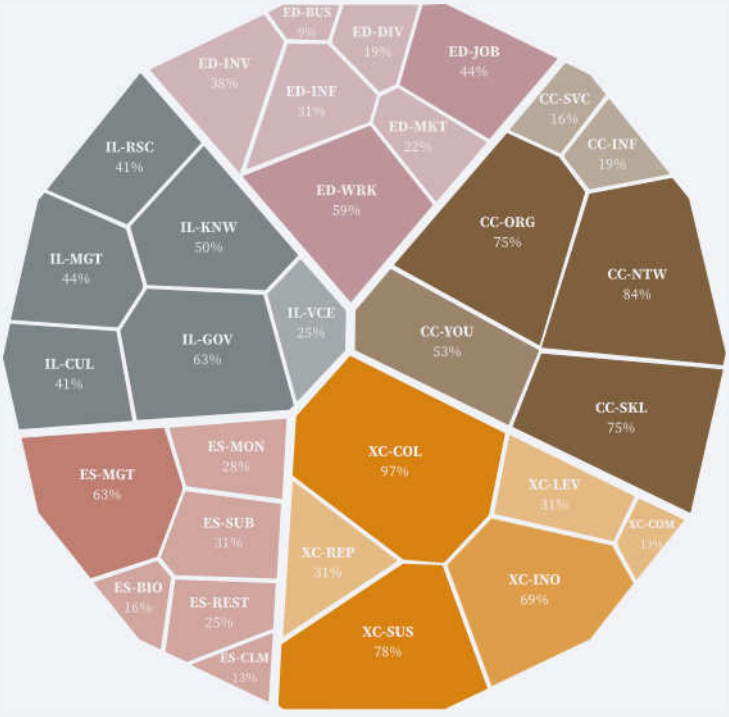
1. **Trust Enables Efficiency:** Communities managing resources directly achieved more with less administrative burden
2. **Relationships Multiply Impact:** Local networks amplify federal investments beyond any single program
3. **Assets Generate Long-term Returns:** Supporting revenue-generating infrastructure and human capital creates self-sustaining prosperity
4. **Local Expertise Improves Outcomes:** Those closest to challenges develop the most effective solutions

Challenges & Ongoing Work

While SASS achieved significant successes, the evaluation also documented important challenges:

- **Institutional Continuity:** Maintaining collaborative approaches through changes and transitions remains a challenge, highlighting the need to embed partnership practices into institutional structures
- **Economic Development Gaps:** While positive, economic development impacts (3.5/5) lagged behind other areas, suggesting more work is needed to translate systems change into immediate job creation
- **Administrative Hurdles:** Despite overall improvements, some processes like reimbursements remained challenging
- **Incomplete Journey:** While Indigenous leadership and participation was strong, the journey to direct resource management is incomplete

These challenges underscore why one Regional Strengthening Partner advocated for "building a middle ground of partnerships and respect, having processes and approaches that are so boringly normal that they will get overlooked by the 'ping-pong' politics of changing Administrations."



Outcome Patterns: Frequency Across Impact Domains

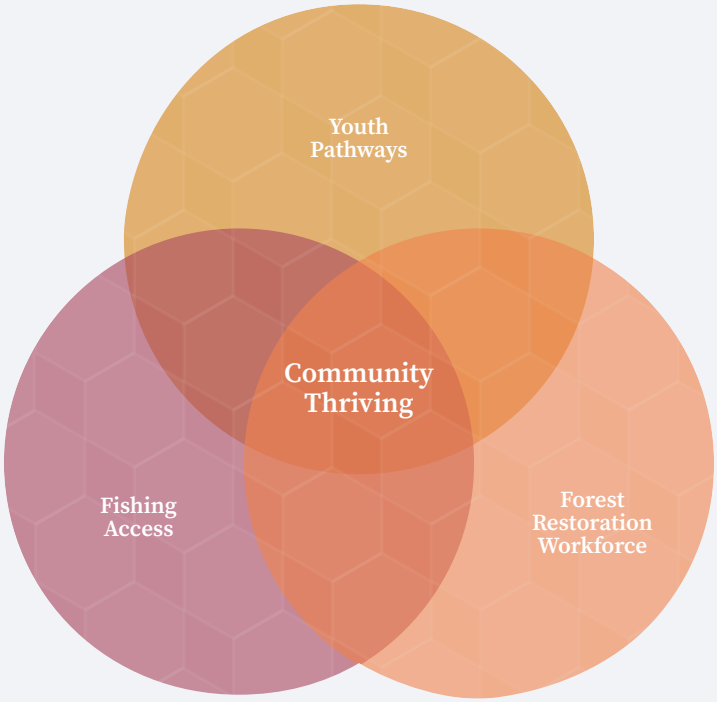
Domains:

- Cross-Cutting (**XC**)
- Community Capacity (**CC**)
- Indigenous Leadership (**IL**)
- Economic Development (**ED**)
- Environmental Stewardship (**ES**)

Frequency Gradients:

- **Established (≥75%)**
- **Growing (40-74%)**
- **Emerging (<40%)**

The Compound Effect: Interwoven Returns



Sustaining Momentum

Southeast Alaska's leaders identified priorities for continued success:

- **Funding Stability:** Multi-year commitments that enable long-term planning
- **Streamlined Processes:** Maintaining administrative efficiencies that reduce burden while ensuring accountability
- **Community Leadership:** Strengthening local capacity for resource management
- **Knowledge Sharing:** Helping other rural regions adapt successful approaches

The vision is clear: Southeast Alaska communities effectively managing resources, creating jobs, and building sustainable prosperity through continued federal partnership.

A Model for Rural America

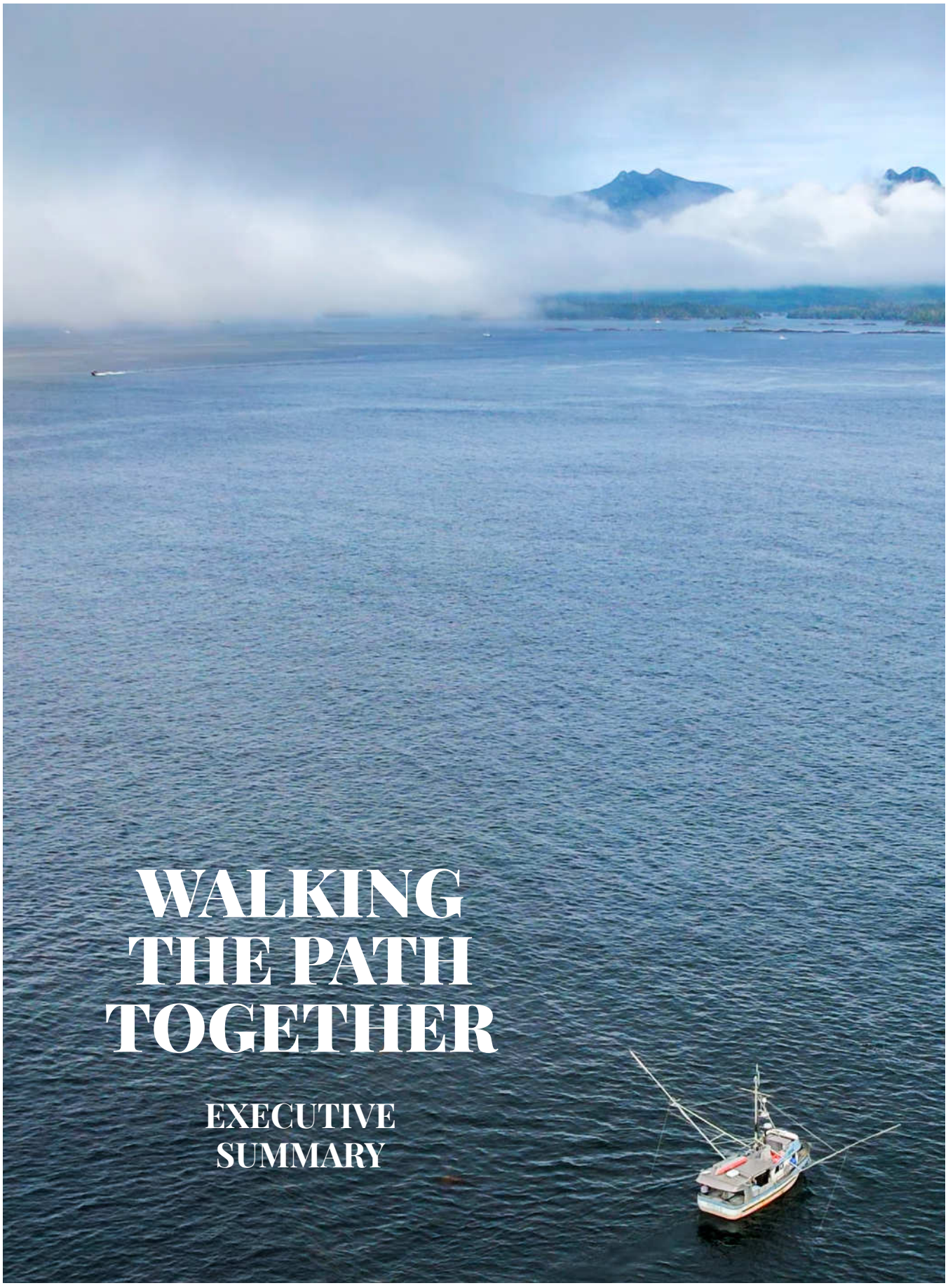
Evaluation participants agreed: the SASS model could benefit other rural communities. Requirements for success include:

- Leadership commitment to federal-community partnership approaches
- Existing community capacity and organizations ready to implement
- Multi-year funding that enables relationship building and effective planning
- Accountability systems focused on outcomes and community prosperity

As one longtime federal employee observed, SASS represented a "rewiring of how agencies do business"—where streamlined processes and strong community partnerships create greater impact. While implementation approaches may evolve, the core insight remains: federal investment achieves the best results through genuine partnership with communities.

Southeast Alaska has illuminated an effective path toward rural prosperity that could benefit rural communities across America—from fishing communities on Prince of Wales Island to farm towns in the Lower 48. That path of partnership and place-based expertise remains open to all federal agencies and regions with the will to walk it together.

This executive summary presents key findings from the full evaluation. For detailed methodologies, complete case studies, and comprehensive recommendations, please refer to the complete report.



WALKING THE PATH TOGETHER

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

FULL REPORT

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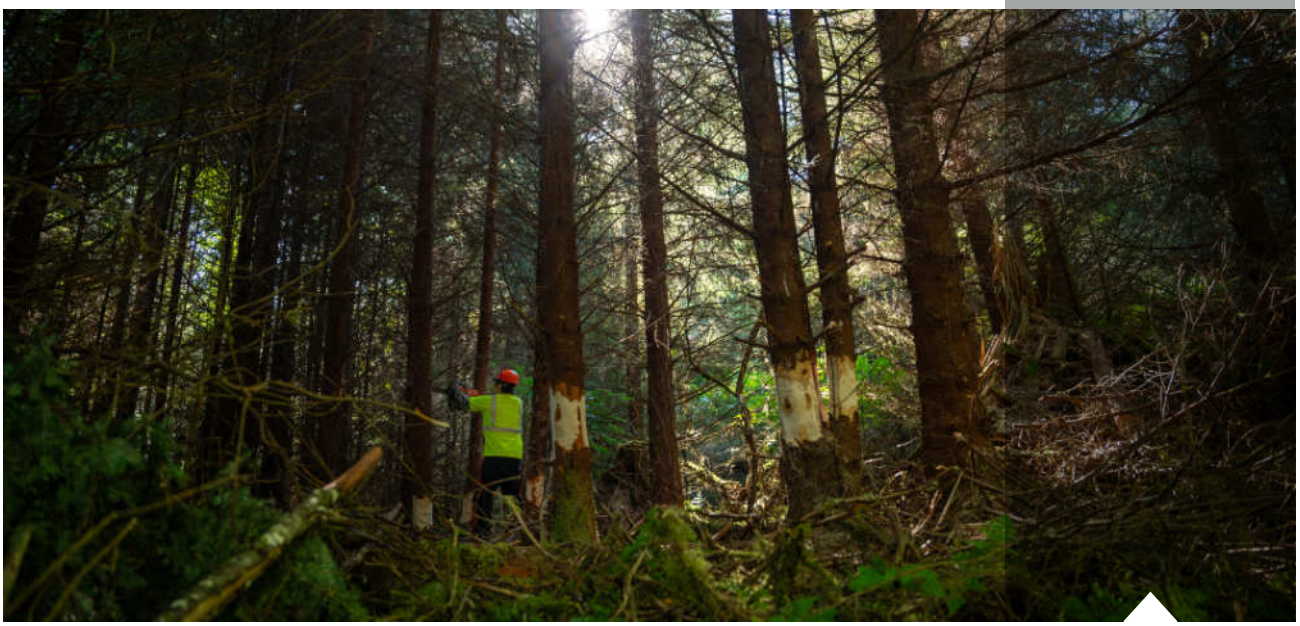


01 Introduction

In the summer of 2024, five teenagers pulled up to Kake's dock in an United States Forest Service boat, ice chests heavy with 186 freshly caught sockeye salmon. Elders waited with empty coolers and full hearts, watching youth they had raised practice the subsistence traditions that have sustained Southeast Alaska for millennia. What made this scene surprising wasn't the fish or the traditions being honored, but who was ultimately funding it: the Forest Service, through a funding approach advanced through the United States Department of Agriculture that would have seemed impossible just a few years earlier.

This scene captures the essence of the types of impacts the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) achieved. Beginning in 2022, SASS committed $24.8 million across approximately 60 projects[1], touching many corners of Southeast Alaska.

[1] Project counts vary between 59-63 depending on reporting source and methodology. The Forest Service's project list included 65 projects (consolidated from an original 70 and two of the 65 projects were canceled), while Rain Coast Data's economic impact analysis evaluated 59 projects. This evaluation's pattern analysis examined 41 projects through available reports. These minor variations reflect different counting methodologies and reporting periods but do not affect the evaluation's findings or conclusions.

See Case Study 6.1 "Fish, Berries, and Reciprocity: Youth Stewards of Keex' Kwáan" to read how federal dollars flowed through a Tribe to pay Indigenous youth (the Alaska Youth Stewards crew) to share with their elders

To measure SASS merely in dollars and projects would miss its real significance. This initiative sparked changes in how federal agencies and communities work together, showing that when government trusts local wisdom and funds local priorities, federal funding can be leveraged for greater societal impacts.

This evaluation documents these outcomes and changes. Through interviews with those who designed and implemented SASS, analysis of project outcomes, and the stories of communities touched by this initiative, clarity emerges: SASS didn't just fund projects—it altered relationships between federal agencies and the communities they serve.

Southeast Alaska was a testing ground for this experiment in relationship-centered, Federal-community partnership. The transformation that followed offers lessons not just for Alaska, but for any place where federal agencies seek authentic partnership with the communities they serve.

1.1 Southeast Alaska Context

Southeast Alaska is a place where geography shapes everything. As Marina Anderson (Spruce Root), a lifelong resident, explains: "Southeast Alaska is very unique in that we have this archipelago and we think of ourselves as one community... we've never seen this water as a division but as a connector." This temperate rainforest region—the largest intact rainforest of its kind in the world—encompasses over 17 million acres of the Tongass

> “WE THINK OF OURSELVES AS ONE COMMUNITY... WE'VE NEVER SEEN THIS WATER AS A DIVISION BUT AS A CONNECTOR”

National Forest, stretching across islands and communities mostly accessible only by boat or plane.

The Tlingit people have stewarded these lands and waters—Lingít Aaní—since time immemorial, developing sophisticated systems of resource management that sustained abundant salmon runs, ancient forests, and thriving communities. More recently, the Tlingit people have shared this stewardship with the Haida people, who arrived just before western contact, and the Tsimshian people, who came from Canada post-contact. These peoples' knowledge systems, passed through generations, understand the deep connections between forest health, marine ecosystems, and human wellbeing. Today, there is growing recognition that these Indigenous knowledge systems can be woven together with contemporary scientific and technical approaches, creating more holistic and effective strategies for stewardship. These braided knowledge systems continue to be present in daily life for many people in the region.

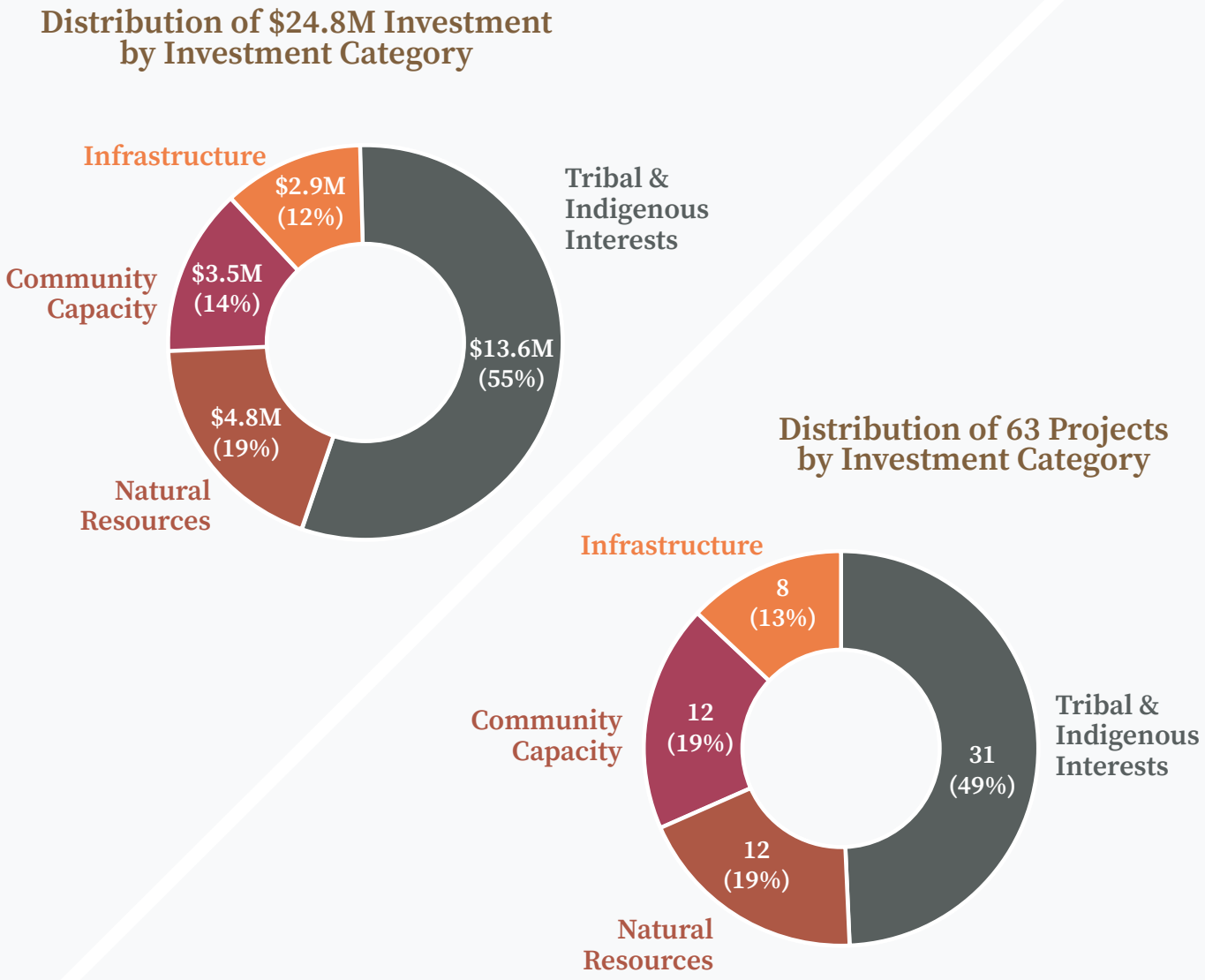
The region's modern economy has faced profound transitions. Marina Anderson captures the challenge faced by her generation: "Born and raised in Southeast Alaska, I was raised in the era when the logging industry was petering out and there were very fewer and fewer jobs. I felt like I was going to wait around for a non meaningful job." The decline of industrial-scale logging left economic voids in many communities, while fishing, tourism, and government employment provided limited alternatives for young people seeking to remain in their homelands. Marina continues, "fast forward to SASS and the youth mentorship programs... they are getting college degrees and returning and maybe working for the forest partnership crew at a career level."

Keith Perkins of USDA Rural Development, speaking from his dual vantage point as an Alaska Native Sitkan and longtime federal employee, adds important context: "In the Southeast Alaska region, for the 29 years I’ve been in this agency as the regional director, we have had an initiative for every sitting president; every president wants to accomplish something on the Tongass." This history of top-down federal initiatives, while well-intentioned, often failed to address the region's self-identified priorities or build on existing community strengths.

1.2 The SASS Initiative

SASS emerged from a convergence of local vision and federal willingness to try something different. On July 15, 2021, USDA announced this new approach to support a diverse economy, enhance community resilience, and conserve natural

Figure 1: SASS Investment Portfolio: Prioritizing Indigenous Priorities & Community Capacity



SASS demonstrated its commitment to Indigenous self-determination by allocating 55% of funding to Tribal and Indigenous Interests, exceeding this category's 49% share of projects. This higher average investment per Indigenous project (~$438K vs. overall average of ~$393K) reflects SASS's commitment to scaling Indigenous-led initiatives.

Investment ranges by category:

- Tribal & Indigenous Interests: $25K–$2.4M
- Natural Resources: $40K–$1M
- Community Capacity: $50K–$750K
- Infrastructure: $82K–$903K"

resources—committing approximately $25 million in financial and technical resources— in parallel with ending large-scale old growth timber sales on the Tongass National Forest and restoring the 2001 Roadless Rule.

The initiative's origins were surprisingly personal and grounded. As Keith Perkins recounts: "The deputy undersecretary of rural development, Justin Maxson asked me 'how do we make something happen up there?' Justin visited Prince of Wales Island, met in Juneau with regional partners, and we started honing in on what we could do to support the regional economy... this is how the initiative got rooted."

Lee House of the Sitka Conservation Society notes that regional leaders had laid important groundwork: "The Tongass Blueprint document was instrumental in getting it onto some desks in Washington to create a lever of change." This 2019 community-developed vision provided a foundation that SASS could build upon.

The selection of Regional Strengthening Partners marked a crucial decision. When asked to identify the top three regional entities to work with, Keith Perkins "didn't hesitate to say 'Southeast Conference, Tlingit & Haida, and Spruce Root'"—bringing together economic development, Indigenous leadership, and community finance and collective impact expertise.

The partnership between USDA agencies represented its own innovation. The Forest Service, Rural Development, and Natural Resources Conservation Service formed a "OneUSDA" team, pooling resources and authorities to support interwoven community priorities across sectors rather than siloed programmatic approaches.

1.3 SASS Program Design and Portfolio Overview

1.3.1 SASS Structure and Governance

SASS's structure departed in major ways from other federal funding approaches. The initiative operated through cooperative agreements with three Regional Strengthening Partners (RSPs), who would administer funds and coordinate implementation.

A key to this approach was its simplicity. Rather than creating new bureaucratic structures, SASS built on existing regional capacity. The RSPs brought deep relationships, cultural competence, and established trust that none of the federal agencies could replicate. They served as bridges between federal resources and community needs, translating broad goals into locally-relevant action.

Governance remained collaborative rather than hierarchical. Regular calls, conversational reporting, and shared decision-making replaced traditional oversight mechanisms. Federal partners participated as team members rather than directors, attending regional events and engaging in authentic dialogue about priorities and challenges.

1.3.2 Portfolio Overview

The response to SASS's open call for proposals was overwhelming. Keith Perkins describes: "The team decided to do an open window asking 'what is important to your community, region, Tribe?'—283 different proposals were submitted through this open window." This flood of ideas represented both pent-up demand for flexible funding and communities' readiness with solutions.

The ~$25 million investment wasn't new money but rather repurposed from existing budgets. As Barb Miranda (U.S. Forest Service) explains: "$25M did not come as a set aside but came out of the budgets… about $18.5M FS, $6M RD, $1.5M NRCS." This creative use of existing authorities enabled a flexibility that would show up when most people spoke about SASS.

The timeline was lightning quick by federal standards. Barb Miranda notes: "This happened in one fiscal year… the speed of light from the agency's perspective. It was remarkable." All funds were obligated by the end of 2022; federal processes could move at the speed of community need when trust replaced bureaucracy.

Funding flowed to four primary categories, with Tribal and Indigenous interests receiving the largest share at over 50%—exceeding the initial target. As Ralph Wolfe of Tlingit & Haida describes: "Tlingit & Haida had a lot of ideas brewing at the time including funding our Guardians network, and this rose up, along with food sovereignty and food security through community gardens, which felt especially important during COVID with communities running out of produce."

The portfolio ultimately encompassed about 60 projects, from youth stewardship programs to mariculture development, from watershed restoration to food sovereignty initiatives. Each reflected local priorities identified by communities themselves rather than federal prescriptions.

This structure—built on trust, responsive to community wisdom, and implemented through existing regional relationships—would go on to be SASS's main innovation in federal-community partnerships, enabling the outcomes documented throughout this evaluation.

02 Evaluation Approach & Methodology

This evaluation employs a portfolio-level analysis framework designed to examine the collective impact of the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) as a transformative initiative, rather than simply assessing individual projects in isolation.

2.1 Portfolio-Level Analysis Framework

This approach acknowledges that SASS represents a significant innovation in federal funding models—one that prioritizes place-based and community-driven decision-making, Indigenous co-management and leadership, and collaborative and adaptive governance. Evaluating such an initiative requires methodologies capable of capturing both tangible outcomes and deeper system evolutions.

Our portfolio-level analysis integrates three complementary methodologies to capture SASS's significant dimensions of change while accommodating the realities of available data across the initiative's diverse projects and Regional Strengthening Partners (RSPs).

- Systems Changes (structural, relational, transformative)
- Outcome Patterns (e.g. ED, ES, CC, IL, XC, see Appendix 1 for full explanation)
- Strategic Resource Insights (flexibility, leverage, sustainability)

2.2 Methodological Priorities and Rationale

2.2.1 Partnership Dynamics & Systems Change Assessment (Primary)

The primary analytical focus of this evaluation is understanding how SASS has transformed relationships, governance structures, power dynamics, decision-making processes, and mental models across Southeast Alaska. This methodological priority reflects the hypothesis that SASS's main impact lies not simply in the outcomes of individual funded projects, but in how it has changed the very systems within which natural resource management, economic development, and community capacity building occur.

Using an adapted version of the FSG Systems

Change framework[2], this method examines changes across three dimensions:

- **Structural Changes:** Changes in policies, resource flows, physical infrastructure, and institutional practices
- **Relational Changes:** Shifts in power dynamics, quality of connections, communication patterns, and collaboration approaches
- **Transformative Changes:** Evolutions in mental models, cultural narratives, assumptions, and values

[2] John Kania, Mark Kramer, Peter Senge, "The Water of Systems Change" (FSG, 2018): https://www.fsg.org/resource/water_of_systems_change/

The emphasis on Partnership Dynamics & Systems Change as the primary methodology responds directly to SASS's core innovation: reshaping how federal agencies, regional organizations, Tribes, and communities work together to advance shared priorities.

2.2.2 Outcome Patterns Harvest (Supporting)

While systems change provides the primary lens, identifying recurring patterns of positive outcomes across the SASS portfolio offers essential supporting evidence of impact. This method systematically identifies and documents cross-cutting patterns of achievement and success across economic, environmental, social, and governance domains.

Using a structured pattern identification approach, this method catalogs recurring themes, achievements, and impacts that emerge across multiple SASS-funded projects. The analysis focuses on cataloging patterns and on understanding:

- How patterns emerge, reinforce, and interact with each other
- How patterns are distributed across projects, geographies, and impact domains
- What enabling conditions and implementation approaches support positive outcomes
- How different patterns connect to systems level changes

This supporting methodology illustrated tangible achievements while contextualizing these outcomes within broader systems change.

2.2.3 Resource Allocation & Strategic Learning Analysis (Supporting)

The third methodological component examines how SASS investments were allocated and what strategic insights can be gained about effective resource deployment approaches. Rather than attempting definitive return-on-investment calculations (which would be premature given SASS's ongoing implementation), this method focuses on identifying:

- Investment patterns that drove success
- Leverage achievements and multiplier effects
- Strategic insights for maximizing positive outcomes
- Lessons for effective future funding models

This analysis offers evidence-based recommendations for optimizing future locally-driven federal funding, while acknowledging the limitations of assessing long-term returns at this stage of implementation.

2.3 Data Sources and Collection Approach

This evaluation employed a multi-source, interview-first data collection strategy that prioritized the perspectives of those most directly involved with SASS implementation while incorporating documentation where available:

2.3.1 Primary Data Sources

- **In-depth interviews with Regional Strengthening Partners:** Comprehensive interviews with leadership from SEC, Spruce Root, and T&H, using a structured protocol designed to capture systems changes, outcome patterns, and strategic insights
- **Federal partner interviews:** Conversations with USFS, USDA-RD, and USDA-NRCS representatives to understand the federal perspective on partnership evolution
- **Case study interviews:** Targeted interviews with project implementers for selected case studies, providing deeper insight into implementation experiences
- **SASS meeting attendance:** Participation in monthly partner meetings to observe partnership dynamics firsthand

2.3.2 Supporting Documentation

- **Project reports:** Available documentation from RSPs and project implementers on project implementation, outcomes, and impacts, including multi-year documentation where available, enabling longitudinal analysis of trajectories
- **RSP annual reports and strategic documents:** Organizational perspectives on SASS integration and impact

Figure 2 illustrates the evaluation's coverage of the SASS portfolio. From the total $24.8 million investment across approximately 60 projects, this evaluation analyzed 41 projects (69%) representing $19 million (77%) through detailed project reports.

Figure 2: Coverage of Evaluation Approach Across the SASS Portfolio

Interview Coverage

16 interviews conducted with:

- **6** RSP leaders
- **7** Case study implementers
- **2** Federal representatives
- **1** Communications lead

The analysis spans all four SASS investment categories, with particularly strong representation of Tribal and Indigenous Interests. Seven in-depth case studies provide narrative depth for 14 projects and 4 microgrants ($4.5 million), while 16 interviews with Regional Strengthening Partners, federal representatives, and project implementers offer diverse perspectives on systems change. This multi-layered approach—combining broad portfolio analysis with narrative exploration—enables both quantitative pattern identification and qualitative understanding of SASS's transformative impact.

Note on Project Counts: SASS documentation shows slight variations in total project numbers (59-63) depending on how consolidated projects are counted and which reporting period is referenced. This evaluation's analysis is based on the 41 projects with available documentation, representing approximately 69% of the portfolio regardless of the precise total count.

2.4 Integration Approach

Data from these sources was systematically collected, organized, and analyzed using:

- Standardized templates for consistent documentation
- Longitudinal synthesis for the subset of projects with multi-year documentation to illustrate sustained impacts
- Cross-method triangulation to validate findings
- Case study development to illustrate patterns and systems changes
- Iterative analysis with partner validation

2.5 Limitations and Considerations

Several limitations and considerations should be noted when interpreting this evaluation's findings:

- **Implementation timing:** Many SASS projects remain in implementation, limiting assessment of long-term impacts
- **Documentation variability:** The depth and availability of formal documentation varies significantly across RSPs and projects
- **Project diversity:** SASS projects vary widely in type, size, scope, and scale—from $15,000 microgrants to multi-million dollar initiatives—making it challenging to consolidate data or draw standardized comparisons across the portfolio
- **Attribution challenges:** Systems changes often result from multiple initiatives and contextual factors beyond SASS
- **Perspective balance:** While efforts were made to incorporate diverse viewpoints, some partner perspectives may be under represented, especially those projects which are just beginning implementation or which were not able to share project reports
- **Baseline data limitations:** Pre-SASS partnership dynamics and systems conditions were reconstructed retrospectively through interviews

These limitations were addressed through transparency about data sources, triangulation across methods, and an emphasis on contribution rather than attribution for systems-level changes.

Despite these constraints, the multi-method, portfolio-level approach provides robust insights into SASS's impact on Southeast Alaska's conservation and development landscape, while offering valuable lessons for future locally-driven federal funding initiatives.

03 Partnership Dynamics & Systems Changes

Through comprehensive interviews with nine key partners—including leadership from all three Regional Strengthening Partners, federal agency representatives, and program implementers—a consistent story emerged about SASS's impact. These voices, gathered from those who designed, implemented, and experienced SASS firsthand, reveal both the depth of systems change achieved and the challenges that remain.

This synthesis integrates insights from:

- **Regional Strengthening Partners:** Robert Venables and Dan Lesh (SEC), Alana Peterson and Marina Anderson (Spruce Root), Ralph Wolfe and Ray Paddock (T&H)
- **Federal Partners:** Barb Miranda (USFS), Keith Perkins (USDA-RD)
- **Communications Perspective:** Lee House (USFS and Sitka Conservation Society)

Note: *These interviews were conducted during a period of federal funding delays affecting multiple SASS partners. Additionally, subsequent to these interviews, USDA announced proposed changes to the 2001 Roadless Rule, which may have implications for future forest management in Southeast Alaska not reflected in participant responses.*

3.1 The Fundamental Transformation

Across all interviews, key partners converged on a singular idea for what SASS was about: evolving the federal funding paradigm. Robert Venables of Southeast Conference provided crucial context for understanding this: "If you're going to strengthen something, that something already has to exist. This wasn't USDA creating something from scratch—they saw structure and they saw an opportunity to strengthen that." This recognition of existing capacity—particularly the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) that provided one of SASS's foundations—marked a departure from typical federal approaches that impose new structures on communities. The shift represented more than procedural change. As Alana Peterson explained: "For the federal government to say that they want to support what our priorities are is such a unique way forward. Rather than the federal government saying what their programs are, they asked what we wanted and said

they would try to figure out how to fund it." This altered power dynamics, trust relationships, and assumptions about who possesses the knowledge to address local challenges.

Where traditional grants might take six months to a year to deploy, SASS moved at what Barb Miranda called "the speed of light"—with all $24.8M obligated by the end of 2022. Where typical federal programs dictate narrow uses, SASS trusted communities to identify their own needs. Where compliance usually dominates relationships, SASS fostered authentic partnership.

See Case Study 6.3 "Plot Twist: Jumping at the Opportunity to Build Southeast's Young Growth Workforce" to read how a Terra Verde forest inventory training exemplifies this speed—from identified need to deployed funds in one week, enabling local crews to gain skills previously outsourced to Lower 48 contractors.

> “THESE WORKING RELATIONSHIPS HAVE BEEN STRENGTHENED AND WILL ENDURE”

3.2 From Compliance to Collaboration

Through SASS, federal agencies evolved from distant “overseers” to engaged team members—a shift every interviewee noted with surprise and appreciation.

Consider how funding flowed: SASS operated with "no form, process, or lengthy criteria," as Barb Miranda described. Communities simply submitted ideas through a portal—"as little as one sentence to full proposals," she recalled. Keith Perkins explained the mechanism that enabled this flexibility: using "salary and expense budgets" created freedom with "no program sideboards besides aligning with the mission and essential regulations." This wasn't bureaucratic maneuvering—it was trust made tangible.

Alana Peterson noted it "felt like the first time that a federal agency was at the ground level and doing the work with us," while Marina Anderson described the shift from seeing the Forest Service as "federal overlords" to genuine partners. This wasn't limited to individual relationships. Alana Peterson described broader changes: "I have never experienced this level of ongoing collaboration with the USDA; SASS was different because the different divisions of USDA were encouraged to come together and engage the RSPs better... I’m on biweekly calls with the USDA now." The establishment of biweekly calls, conversational reporting, and federal attendance at regional events created what Robert Venables called "a middle ground of partnerships and respect, having processes and approaches that are so boringly normal that they will get overlooked by the ‘ping-pong’ politics of changing Administrations. These working relationships have been strengthened and will endure—and continue at a better level than before SASS."

3.3 Proving Community Competence

SASS demonstrated definitively that communities possess the knowledge and capability to direct federal resources effectively. The response was immediate: 283 project proposals came in through the simple portal USDA created— evidence of demand for flexible, responsive funding. As Robert Venables recounted, when “OneUSDA made a call for projects, the Regional Strengthening Partners talked amongst themselves and quickly and efficiently planned the partnership path forward in mere minutes. That seemed quite surprising to the folks from Washington DC."

Communities expressed "astonishment that federal funds could flow to them in a meaningful way" and

were "downright surprised that their dreams and projects could move forward" (Venables). The initiative proved that communities didn't need federal agencies to design programs—they needed access to resources and trust to implement their own solutions.

As Alana Peterson articulated: "Assuming that the federal government should create and design a funding opportunity is pretty backwards most times and a bad assumption. SASS has challenged this assumption and flipped it upside down to 'let the communities do this.' We can still do the compliance and steward the resources well." Ralph Wolfe captured the efficiency of this approach succinctly: "We did a real lot with very little money." He elaborated on the collaborative nature: "The relationships building is a big aspect of it." While Dan Lesh expressed humility alongside achievement: "We're really proud of the work and hopefully we're staying humble, it's not easy, it's not perfect, but it is a big step up from the typical." Dan also emphasized how SASS enabled strategic coordination across available funding: "SASS was the most flexible option, and allowed us to guide grantees to the right funding pool."

3.4 Transformative Changes

3.4.1 Indigenous Leadership

The integration of Indigenous leadership emerged as both a significant achievement and an area requiring continued attention. Having T&H as a Regional Strengthening Partner represented, in Alana Peterson's words, "a major way that SASS shifted things to have more of an Indigenous leadership approach." The commitment to Indigenous priorities was built into SASS's structure, with over 50% of funding directed to Tribal and Indigenous interests—exceeding the original goal.

Ray Paddock described this as moving toward a self-determination model, where funding flows more directly to Tribal control: "This approach is the best approach, it gave us the opportunity to address issues and should be happening across the board." The Forest Service's transformation was particularly notable to some interviewees, with Ralph Wolfe observing a shift in the agency from a "round hole square peg approach" to "more open communication" and actively "asking for input all the time" on Indigenous knowledge systems.

However, partners consistently noted the journey toward full Indigenous self-determination remains incomplete. Marina Anderson acknowledged that while "Indigenous knowledge was seen as valid knowledge," Tribes were "a little more listened to" rather than holding full decision authority. The challenge of engaging all Southeast Tribes points to the need for what Alana Peterson called being "more deliberate for SASS 2.0 in engaging Tribes."

3.4.2 The Collaboration Imperative

SASS initiated a shift from isolated federal funding efforts to embrace and grow collaborative approaches across Southeast Alaska. Organizations that previously competed for scarce resources

See Case Studies: Each of the seven case studies included in Section 6 demonstrates the principle of community competence—from youth in Kake designing culturally-grounded stewardship programs (Section 6.1) to fishermen creating innovative quota access models (Section 6.6).

> THIS APPROACH IS THE BEST APPROACH, IT GAVE US THE OPPORTUNITY TO ADDRESS ISSUES AND SHOULD BE HAPPENING ACROSS THE BOARD

began seeing partnership as essential to success. The monthly "watershed therapy group" referenced in case studies exemplifies this, as does the new alliances forged both by Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust and OceansAlaska, with "all future growth focused on collaboration, which is really opening up possibilities for these organizations as this ethos takes hold, as they see it is in the best interest of their respective missions" (Dan Lesh).

This collaborative evolution occurred at multiple levels. The three RSPs developed new working relationships, with Alana Peterson noting she now has "a standing meeting with Robert biweekly not for SASS but because of SASS." And federal agencies achieved higher levels of coordination through the OneUSDA approach.

3.4.3 Storytelling as Vital Tool

SASS recognized that community sustainability requires more than changed procedures—it requires changed narratives. Marina Anderson, who helped coordinate SASS implementation through the Sustainable Southeast Partnership, identified storytelling as uniquely central to this federal initiative: "The big focus on storytelling was powerful as well. I haven't received federal funding before where storytelling was so important. People want to know what money is being spent on; it helps get people involved. Storytelling was a great tool of leverage and brought people together on projects." This emphasis on narrative served multiple functions. Stories created accountability by showing "what money is being spent on," built community engagement by helping "get people involved," and perhaps most importantly, shifted the dynamic with federal partners. As Anderson explained, they were "taking success stories back to DC instead of complaints to show that it was working"—a reversal of the traditional relationship where communities primarily brought problems to federal attention.

Lee House, serving as SASS's dedicated storytelling specialist through a partnership between USFS and Sitka Conservation Society, embodied this commitment to narrative. While his role focused on "sharing highlights and stories of SASS impact," the very existence of a federally-funded storytelling position signaled how seriously SASS took the power of narrative to drive systems change. Stories became more than communication tools—they became instruments of change, proving to skeptical audiences that community-led federal funding could work. By investing in storytelling infrastructure alongside physical infrastructure, SASS acknowledged that lasting change happens not just through policy shifts but through the stories communities tell about themselves, their capabilities, and their futures.

3.5 The Numbers Behind these Changes

The systems changes documented above—from structural shifts in funding mechanisms to transformed relationships between federal agencies and communities—represent alterations in how conservation and development work happens in Southeast Alaska. But these are not merely analytical observations imposed by evaluators. Throughout the interviews, we systematically gathered quantitative ratings from interviewees to empirically validate these findings. Their numbers tell a story that both confirms the depth of change and reveals where challenges persist. What emerges is evidence that those who designed, implemented, and experienced SASS firsthand recognized its transformative impact—while also providing assessments of where future initiatives could improve.

The ratings paint a picture of an initiative that succeeded in some areas while encountering challenges in others. Most striking is the contrast between what SASS enabled (flexibility, new mental models, environmental stewardship) and what proved harder to shift (economic development at scale, full Indigenous authority, sustained federal coordination).

3.5.1 SASS Funding Model Flexibility

When asked to rate SASS's flexibility, interviewees delivered a resounding endorsement: the model earned an average of 4.4 out of 5 for adapting to community needs and 4.1 out of 5 for responding to Indigenous priorities. These aren't just numbers—they represent a shift in how federal funding can work.

One-third of respondents gave the maximum rating of 5, describing very high adaptability. As one person noted, traditional funding forces communities to adapt to programs, but SASS reversed this—"funding is frequently a static program that doesn't adapt to community needs, but SASS did the opposite."

Even those who rated flexibility lower (3-3.5) acknowledged SASS's improvements while noting realistic constraints. The one-time nature of funding and initial project selection processes created some limitations. Yet overall, SASS proved federal funding can be genuinely responsive to local priorities.

> “FUNDING IS FREQUENTLY A STATIC PROGRAM THAT DOESN’T ADAPT TO COMMUNITY NEEDS, BUT SASS DID THE OPPOSITE”

3.5.2 Collaboration Effectiveness: A Tale of Two Timeframes

The collaboration ratings reveal both SASS's achievements and its vulnerabilities. Regional Strengthening Partners rated their mutual collaboration at 3.7 out of 5—a solid "good" that improved from pre-SASS baselines but left room for growth. Federal agency collaboration showed a more complex pattern, starting strong but declining significantly after 2024.

This temporal pattern tells an important story about sustainability. During active implementation with committed leadership, federal agencies achieved high levels of coordination—the "OneUSDA" approach earned ratings as high as 5. But political transitions and staffing changes caused this collaboration to erode, with post-2024 ratings dropping to 2.5-3.0. Collaborative approaches can transform federal-community relationships, but they remain vulnerable to political cycles without institutional safeguards.

3.5.3 Impact Levels on Ten Domains

From partners' assessment of SASS's impact across ten different domains, the results cluster into three distinct tiers.

The highest-rated impacts—all above 4.0—share a common thread: they represent shifts in relationships and thinking rather than just programmatic outcomes. Yes, SASS funded projects; and it also transformed how people work together (partnership dynamics), think about what's possible (mental models), and approach land management (environmental stewardship). Communities gained real decision-making power over federal resources, marking a shift from traditional grant recipient roles.

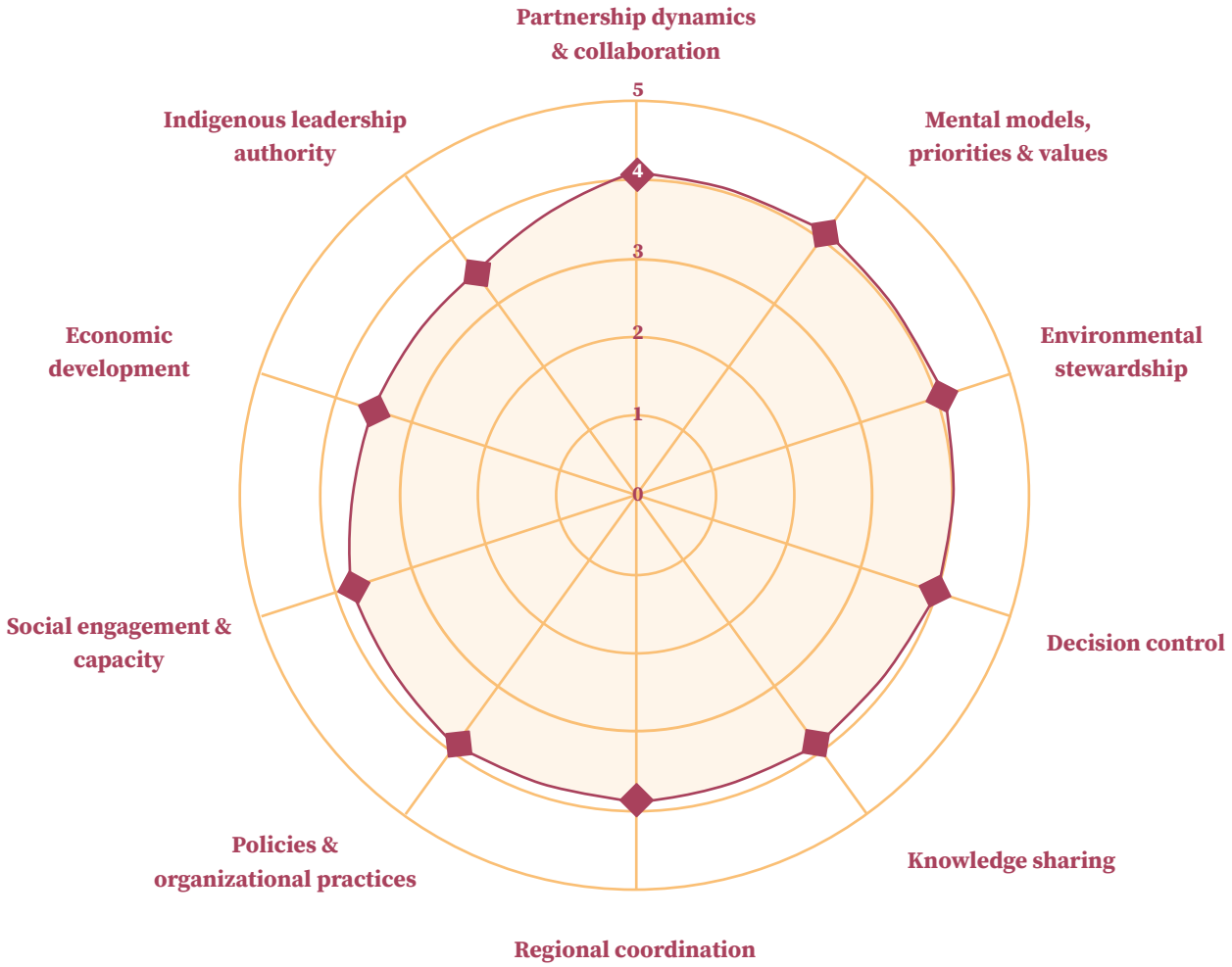
The middle tier of impacts (3.8-3.9) represents significant but not quite transformative changes. Knowledge began flowing more freely between communities and agencies. Regional coordination improved markedly. New policies and practices emerged, though some reverted with political changes. Organizations grew stronger, though capacity gaps persist.

The lower tier—though still positive at 3.5—reveals where deeper structural change remains needed. Economic development impacts are emerging but haven't yet reached transformative scale. While Indigenous participation and voice increased substantially, integration of full Indigenous leadership authority in federally-designed initiatives remains a work in progress, highlighting the difference between inclusion and true self-determination.

Pattern Insight: The highest-rated impacts share a common thread—they represent changes in relationships and thinking rather than just programmatic outcomes. SASS transformed how people work together, think about possibilities, and approach land management.

Table 1 and Figure 3: Average Ratings Across Impact Domains

Impact Domain	Average Impact Rating (Out of 5)	Interpretation (Tier)
Partnership dynamics & collaboration	4.1	Transformative
Mental models, priorities & values	4.1	Transformative
Environmental stewardship	4.1	Transformative
Decision control	4.0	Transformative
Knowledge sharing	3.9	Significant
Regional coordination	3.9	Significant
Policies & organizational practices	3.9	Significant
Social engagement & capacity	3.8	Significant
Economic development	3.5	Moderate
Indigenous leadership authority	3.5	Moderate



> THIS IS THREE-DIMENSIONAL CHESS OF CAPACITY BUILDING AND IMPACT, LIKE WEAVING THREADS INTO A SWEATER

3.5.4 Replicability: A Model Ready to Scale

One encouraging finding is interviewees' strong belief in SASS's replicability. With average ratings above 4.0 for both other Alaska regions and other federal agencies, respondents see SASS not as a one-time experiment but as a proven model ready for broader application.

The key insight is that replicability depends more on commitment than on unique local conditions. The consensus crystalized around key replication requirements:

1. **Existing Networks with Collective Visions:** Building on, rather than replacing, regional structures
2. **Political Will:** As Dan Lesh summarized, it's "easy to do, if there is a will to do it"
3. **Flexible and Patient Mindsets and Capital:** Robert Venables' metaphor of "planting oak tree seeds" captures the long-term vision required: "We're planting oak tree seeds and might never see the full growth—and that's okay. In our instant gratification society, this is three-dimensional chess of capacity building and impact, like weaving threads into a sweater."
4. **Trust in Local Knowledge:** Federal agencies must genuinely believe communities know their own needs

Keith Perkins offered perhaps the most succinct formula for replication, where communities say: "give us funding and stay out of our way"—not as abandonment but as recognition that communities possess the wisdom to direct resources effectively.

3.6 Tensions & Challenges

While celebrating achievements, interviewees provided honest assessments of limitations:

Economic Development Impact: Consistently rated lower (2-4 out of 5) than other impact areas. Marina Anderson called it "tricky," while Ralph Wolfe noted "not a lot" of job creation through T&H projects. This suggests systems change doesn't automatically translate to immediate economic outputs.

Political Vulnerability: The contrast between collaboration ratings during active SASS implementation (4-5) versus post-2024 (2-3) reveals the fragility of collaborative approaches without institutional safeguards. Ray Paddock's observation that impacts "could have been a 5 if it stayed" highlights how political transitions can impact strategies. And Marina Anderson noted: "USDA secretary Vilsack said it wasn't a one time thing... but now SASS is coming to an end and we don't know where our next meal is coming from."

Reimbursement Challenges: Keith Perkins candidly acknowledged: "We haven't succeeded at this," referring to internal reimbursement processes and administrative systems that created burdens for partners despite SASS's adaptive goals. "Regarding the RSPs, we love what they have been able to do but they still need to be paid for what they have done."

3.8 Section Conclusion: Building "Boringly Normal" Partnerships

The convergence of perspectives reveals SASS as more than a funding mechanism—it represents a new model for federal-community partnership based on trust, respect for local knowledge, and recognition of existing capacity. While challenges remain, particularly in sustaining collaborative approaches through political transitions, SASS proved that federal funding works when it trusts communities to identify and implement their own solutions.

The evolution went beyond program names or funding mechanisms. As Alana Peterson reflected: "by the end, we don't care about calling it SASS... this is more about the way we work." Robert Venables' vision of partnerships "so boringly normal that they will get overlooked by the ping-pong politics" has become one of SASS's achievements. When partnerships become ordinary, when trust becomes standard, when communities directing federal resources becomes normal—that's when lasting change takes root.

> "IN THE END, WE DON'T CARE ABOUT CALLING IT SASS... THIS IS MORE ABOUT THE WAY WE WORK"

04 OUTCOME PATTERNS

While the previous section documented how SASS transformed partnerships and power dynamics, this analysis reveals the tangible outcomes that emerged from those changed relationships. By systematically examining 32 project reports representing 41 SASS-funded initiatives and approximately $19 million in investments, patterns emerge about what happens when federal agencies trust communities to lead.

4.1 Understanding the Outcome Pattern Analysis

The following analysis identifies 31 distinct outcome patterns—recurring positive changes that appeared across multiple projects. These patterns reveal not just what individual projects accomplished, but how SASS as a whole created ripple effects across Southeast Alaska. By coding each project for specific pattern types, we can see which approaches proved most universal, which gained significant traction, and which represent emerging innovations that point toward future possibilities.

This pattern-based approach moves beyond simple success metrics to reveal the DNA of transformation—the essential elements that, when combined, created lasting change across economic, environmental, cultural, and social domains. The patterns tell us not just that SASS worked, but how it worked and why certain approaches proved more transformative than others.

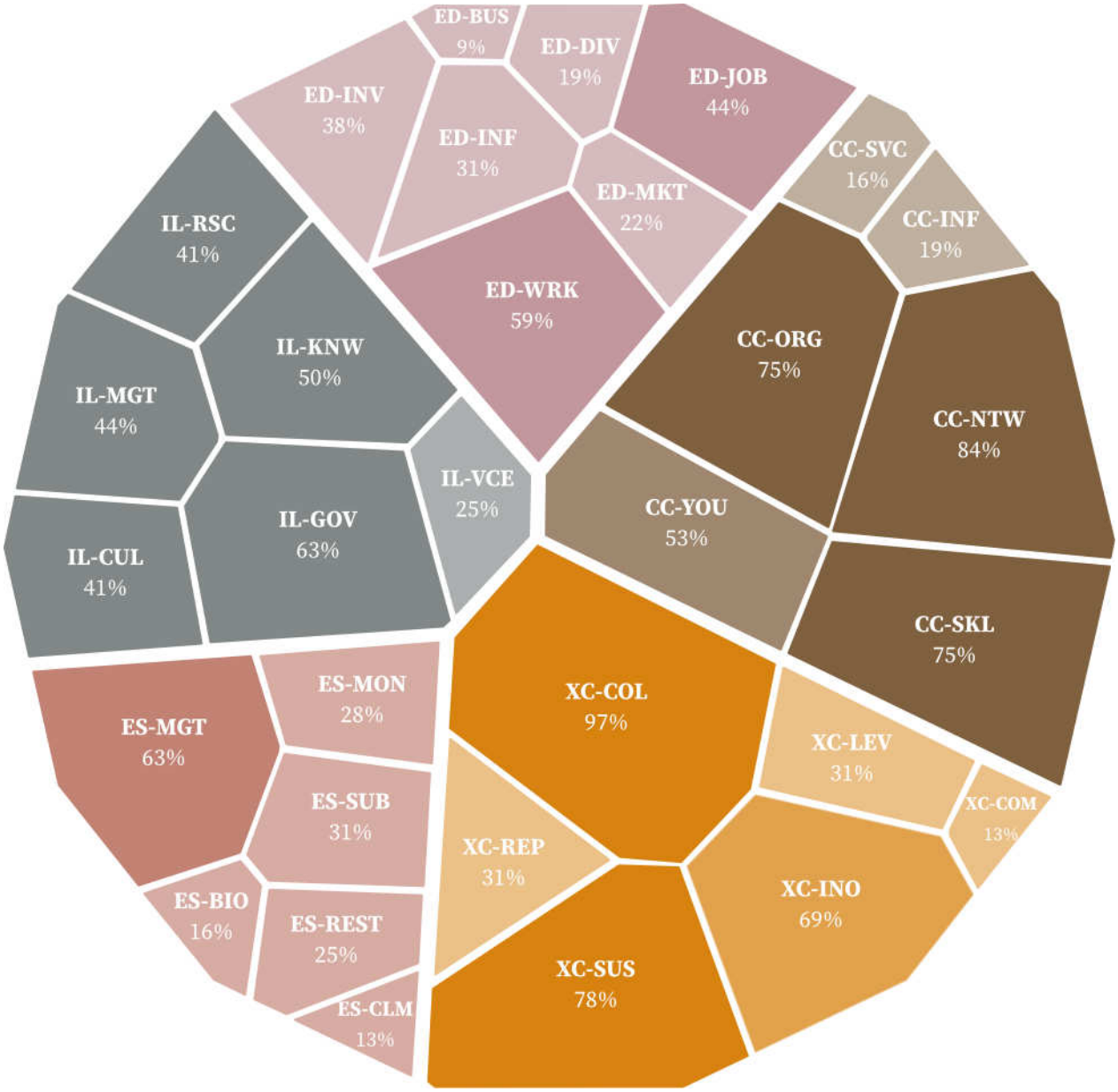
4.1.1 Pattern Frequency Across Full Portfolio

Figure 4 visualizes 31 distinct outcome patterns identified across the SASS portfolio, revealing which approaches and transformations appeared most frequently. In this treemap, cell size represents how often each pattern occurred across the 32 analyzed reports, while color indicates the pattern's domain—Cross-Cutting, Community Capacity, Indigenous Leadership, Economic Development, or Environmental Stewardship. The

shading intensity within each domain shows pattern maturity: darker shades represent established patterns (≥75% frequency), medium shades indicate growing adoption (40-74%), and lighter shades reveal emerging innovations (<40%). The visualization reveals SASS's architecture. The largest cells—collaboration mechanisms (XC-COL) at 97% and network building (CC-NTW) at 84%—demonstrate the universal strategies that enabled SASS's impact. These near-universal patterns, appearing in three-quarters or more of all projects, form the essential infrastructure for transformation. Mid-sized cells represent patterns with significant traction, such as youth engagement and Indigenous governance, while smaller cells indicate emerging areas like climate resilience and strategic communication that may expand in future initiatives.

The dominance of Cross-Cutting and Community Capacity patterns reflects SASS's strategic emphasis on building foundational capacities and relationships necessary for long-term change. This visual evidence confirms that SASS invested not just in activities, but in the human and organizational capacity and infrastructure required for sustained community-centered impact. For those seeking exact frequencies and detailed pattern definitions, see Table A-1 in Appendix 1.

Figure 4: SASS Outcome Patterns: Frequency Across Impact Domains



Domains:

- Cross-Cutting (**XC**)
- Community Capacity (**CC**)
- Indigenous Leadership (**IL**)
- Economic Development (**ED**)
- Environmental Stewardship (**ES**)

Frequency Gradients:

- **Established (≥75%)**
- **Growing (40-74%)**
- **Emerging (<40%)**

Figure 4 Explained

Figure 4 visualizes 31 distinct outcome patterns identified across the SASS portfolio. Cell size represents pattern frequency (larger = more common), while colors indicate impact domains.

Shading intensity shows pattern maturity: darker shades represent established patterns forming SASS's foundation, while lighter shades indicate emerging innovations. The dominance of collaboration (XC-COL, 97%) and network building (CC-NTW, 84%) reveals SASS's core transformation mechanisms.

Pattern codes follow the format [Domain]-[Type]. For example, XC-COL represents Cross-Cutting Collaboration. The size of each cell indicates how frequently that pattern appeared across SASS project reports analyzed for this evaluation. See pattern definitions below or Appendix 1 for complete descriptions.

Pattern Domain Definitions:

- **XC** = Cross-Cutting (collaboration, sustainability, innovation)
- **CC** = Community Capacity (networks, skills, youth)
- **IL** = Indigenous Leadership (governance, knowledge, cultural practices)
- **ED** = Economic Development (jobs, workforce, infrastructure)
- **ES** = Environmental Stewardship (restoration, monitoring, management)

See Appendix 1 for complete pattern definitions

Pattern Examples

Established: Collaboration, Networks, Organizational Capacity

Growing: Youth Engagement, Indigenous Governance, Innovation

Emerging: Climate Resilience, Leverage Strategies, Business Development

Table 2: Outcome Pattern Domain Distribution Across Report Portfolio

Impact Domain	Total Domain Occurrences	Average per Report	Domain Presence	Key Insights
Cross-Cutting (XC)	117 instances	3.7 per report	100% (32/32 reports)	Collaboration near-universal; sustainability & innovation dominant
Community Capacity (CC)	112 instances	3.5 per report	94% (30/32 reports)	Networks & organizational strength critical; youth engagement growing
Indigenous Leadership (IL)	88 instances	2.8 per report	88% (28/32 reports)	Governance & knowledge integration leading; resource control emerging
Economic Development (ED)	83 instances	2.6 per report	81% (26/32 reports)	Workforce development focus; infrastructure & leverage important
Environmental Stewardship (ES)	61 instances	1.9 per report	69% (22/32 reports)	Management improvements lead; restoration active; climate emerging

Pattern Insight: The highest-rated impacts share a common thread—they represent changes in relationships and thinking rather than just programmatic outcomes. SASS transformed how people work together, think about possibilities, and approach land management.

See Case Study 6.4 "Pooling Resources: From Local Stream Restoration to Statewide Coalition Building" to read how restoration practitioners statewide who once competed for the same grants now gather to share challenges, solutions, and even crews.

4.1.2 Pattern Domain Distribution

Table 2 aggregates the pattern data to show the relative strength of each domain across the SASS portfolio. By counting total pattern domain occurrences and calculating averages per project report, this analysis reveals which types of impacts were most prevalent. "Total Pattern Domain Occurrences" counts every instance a pattern appears, including multiple occurrences within the same project. The "Domain Presence" assessment considers the breadth of presence (what percentage of project reports showed any patterns from this domain)

This domain-level view helps identify SASS's primary impact areas and reveals the initiative's multifaceted approach. Domains with higher averages per project report indicate areas where SASS investments generated multiple, reinforcing types of positive change.

4.2 Key Pattern Insights

4.2.1 (Near) Universal Collaboration

Collaboration (XC-COL) appears in almost every single project report—a 97% occurrence rate. Only one infrastructure project lacked explicit collaboration patterns. This isn't merely a statistical curiosity; it represents a core mechanism of SASS.

Unlike traditional federal funding that often reinforces competitive dynamics through win-lose grant competitions, SASS catalyzed a shift from scarcity-based thinking to abundance-based collaboration. Organizations that previously competed for limited resources began seeing partnership as essential to success.

4.2.4 Sustainability Indicators: Building for the Long Term

The pattern analysis provides evidence that SASS investments were designed for lasting impact rather than temporary interventions. With 78% of reports demonstrating explicit sustainability patterns and 81% building networks, SASS prioritized enduring viability over short-term outputs.

Sustainability manifests through multiple reinforcing mechanisms. Nearly half (47%) of reports demonstrated leverage strategies, attracting additional resources that multiplied SASS's initial investment. These weren't just dollar-for-dollar matches but strategic alignments that brought new partners and funding streams into Southeast Alaska. The Alaska Youth Stewards program, for instance, established federal employment pathways that will continue placing local youth in natural resource careers long after SASS funding ends.

Network building, present in 81% of reports, creates perhaps an important sustainability mechanism: relationships that persist beyond funding cycles. When the Sustainable Southeast Partnership's network grew from 45 to over 130 partners, it strengthened a self-reinforcing system where collaboration became the norm rather than the exception. These networks share knowledge, coordinate funding, and provide mutual support during challenging times.

The emphasis on organizational strengthening (75%) ensures that communities have the institutional capacity to sustain initiatives. Rather than creating dependency on external funding, SASS helped organizations develop revenue-generating assets, professional certifications, and technical capabilities that enable self-sufficiency.

4.2.5 Combinations for Systems Change

The pattern combinations revealed in our analysis provide markers of systems-level transformation rather than programmatic outputs. Three pattern combinations particularly demonstrate SASS's impact:

Indigenous Governance + Traditional Knowledge = Power Shift

With 66% of analyzed projects advancing Indigenous governance and 56% integrating traditional knowledge, SASS facilitated a shift in who makes decisions about lands and resources in Southeast Alaska. This is about more than including Indigenous voices in existing processes; it's about recognizing Indigenous peoples as primary decision-makers and knowledge holders. When Tribal organizations set restoration priorities on federal lands and youth learn from elders while teaching federal scientists, it represents a reversal of colonial power dynamics.

Workforce Development + Youth Engagement = Generational Change

The combination of workforce development patterns (50%) with youth engagement (44%) reveals SASS's investment in generational work. Rather than simply creating temporary jobs, SASS built pathways from first employment to professional careers. When Alexis Copsey became "the first USDA Forest Service hire out of Kake," it represented more than individual success—it demonstrated that rural Indigenous youth can envision and achieve careers managing their traditional territories. These patterns ensure that the next generation won't just inherit systems; they'll lead them.

Innovation + Sustainability = Lasting Improvements

With 63% of reports demonstrating innovation and 78% building sustainability mechanisms, SASS proved that new approaches can become permanent improvements. Innovation without sustainability yields interesting pilots that fade away; sustainability without innovation perpetuates status quo. SASS's combination of both created changes that endure: Alaska's first successful oyster hatchery, community-controlled fisheries access, Indigenous-led forest management enterprises. These are more than just new programs—they're new systems that alter how conservation and development happen in Southeast Alaska.

4.3 Section Conclusion: Patterns as Pathways

This pattern analysis reveals SASS as coordinated systems change rather than a collection of projects, with near-universal concentration on collaboration and capacity building. The patterns show SASS understood that lasting environmental stewardship requires empowered communities, strong Indigenous governance, and strong relationships.

Pattern Evolution Insight: The distribution of patterns we analyzed suggests a healthy portfolio—strong foundations are nearly universal, substantial progress appears across multiple domains, and new innovations are beginning to emerge. This progression from established to emerging patterns mirrors how sustained systems change occurs: first building relational and organizational capacity and infrastructure, then expanding into new territories of impact.

05 RESOURCE ALLOCATION ANALYSIS

Continuing the analysis of 41 SASS projects representing approximately $19 million in allocated investments (through 32 project reports), this section examines not just where SASS funds were allocated, but how the mechanism of allocation itself—rooted in trust, adaptability, and local decision-making—created conditions for leverage, sustainability, and systems change.

5.1 Investment Patterns

5.1.1 Funding Allocation Across Categories

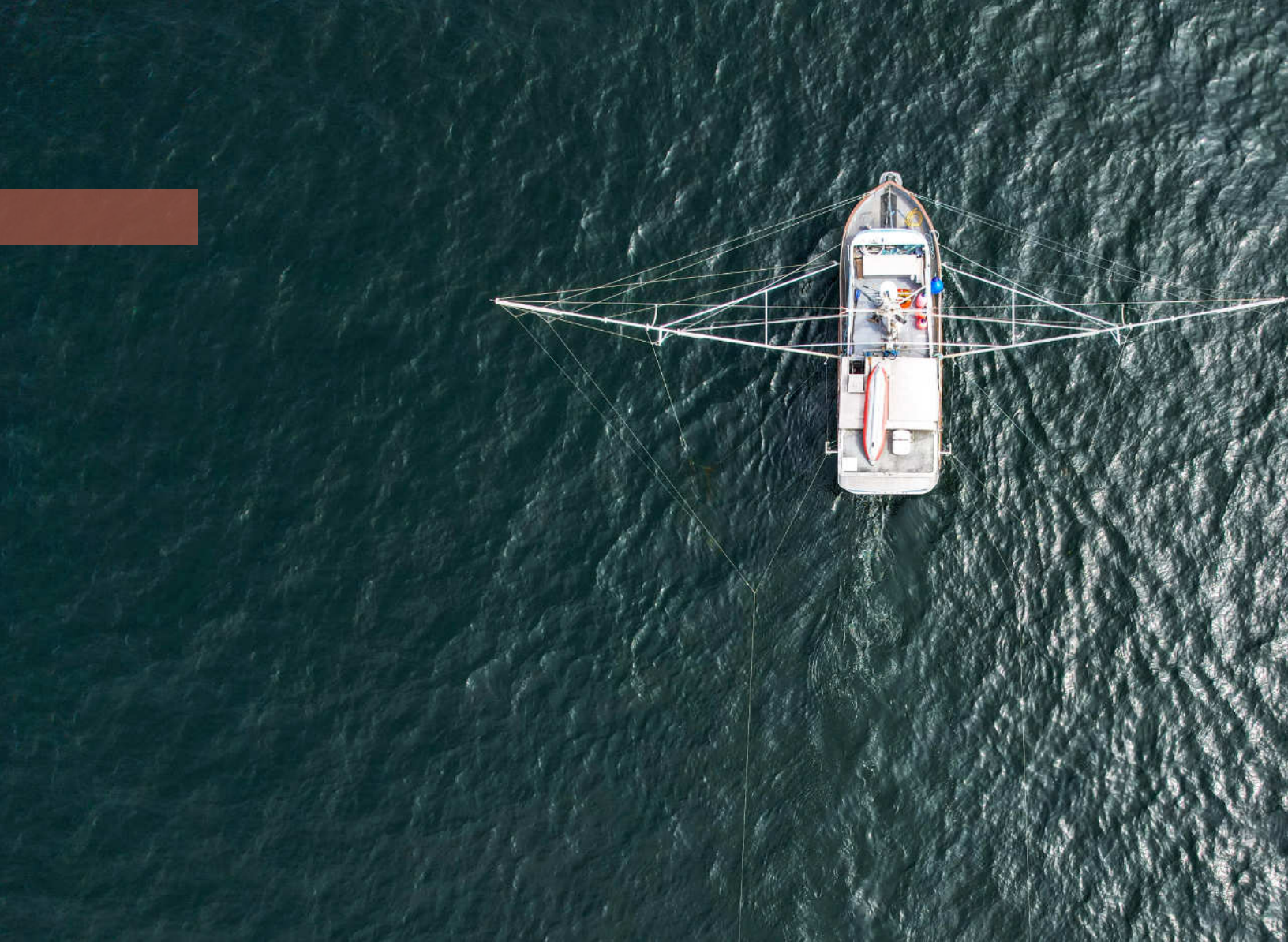
The portion of SASS's $24.8 million initiative that were analyzed through project reports represents approximately $19 million of the allocated portfolio (~77% of the total) and demonstrates a balanced yet strategic distribution across four investment categories:

- **Tribal and Indigenous Interests:** 16 projects (39% of projects analyzed) totaling approximately $8.9 million
- **Natural Resources:** 10 projects (24% of projects analyzed) totaling approximately $4.6 million
- **Community Capacity:** 10 projects (24% of projects analyzed) totaling approximately $3.3 million
- **Infrastructure:** 5 projects (12% of projects analyzed) totaling approximately $2.1 million

This distribution reveals SASS's intentional prioritization of Indigenous leadership and community capacity—together representing 63% of analyzed investments. Unlike traditional federal natural resource funding that typically emphasizes infrastructure and direct environmental interventions, SASS also invested in people, relationships, and capacity building.

5.1.2 Investment Scale Patterns

The portfolio encompasses a range of investment sizes, from $15,000 microgrants to $2.4 million multi-year initiatives. This diversity wasn't accidental—it reflected SASS's core innovation of



matching funding scale to community need rather than forcing communities to fit predetermined program sizes. Three distinct investment tiers emerged:

Microgrants and Small Investments ($15,000-$60,000): Representing 15% of projects analyzed but demonstrating outsized impact through speed and precision. The Terra Verde forest inventory training exemplifies this approach—$15,000 deployed within one week enabled two communities to build technical capacity previously outsourced to Lower 48 contractors.

Mid-Scale Investments ($100,000-$500,000): The portfolio's backbone, these investments balanced ambition with manageable scope. Projects like Alaska Youth Stewards in Kake ($120,000) created sustainable programs that became models for replication.

Large-Scale Investments ($500,000+): Large-scale initiatives like SAWC's watershed coalition ($710,000 combined across four projects) and ASFT's fisheries access program ($805,000 across four projects) prompted regional coordination and movements.

5.1.3 Regional Economic Circulation

A critical pattern that emerged from the project report analysis was SASS's emphasis on keeping investments within Southeast Alaska communities. Unlike traditional federal contracts that often flow to outside entities, SASS investments consistently prioritized local hiring, regional contractors, and community-based implementation.

This regional focus manifests in multiple ways across the portfolio:

Local Workforce Development: Projects repeatedly emphasized hiring from within communities. The Terra Verde forest inventory training exemplifies this approach—rather than relying on contractors from the Lower 48, SASS funding enabled local crews to develop professional forestry skills. Similarly, Alaska Youth Stewards programs hired youth from their own communities, with wages staying local to support families and economies. The SEC quantitative tracking project undertaken by Rain Coast Data estimates 164 jobs were created on an annualized basis from 2022 to 2024.

Regional Capacity Building Over External Contractors: The Klawock Indigenous Stewards Forest Partnership specifically noted their commitment to "localize the work model.. .instead of outsourcing to a company from the lower 48." This pattern appears throughout the portfolio, with communities building internal capacity rather than depending on external expertise.

Economic Multiplier Documentation: The SEC quantitative tracking project undertaken by Rain Coast Data analyzed 59 projects and provides concrete evidence of regional circulation effects, documenting that $13.4 million in SASS spending generated $19.8 million in total economic activity—a 1.48x multiplier effect within the region, with 87% of spending occurring in Southeast Alaska.

Community-Based Implementation: From Hoonah Indian Association managing their own greenhouse to Organized Village of Kake implementing fisheries science programs, SASS consistently funded communities to implement their own solutions rather than hiring external organizations.

This regional circulation approach created ripple effects beyond direct project implementation. SASS funds paid local wages, purchased regional materials, and allowed contracting with Southeast Alaska businesses, leading to economic benefits compounding within communities rather than leaking out to urban centers or Lower 48 firms. This represents a change from traditional federal contracting practices and helps explain why SASS investments generated such strong community buy-in and sustainability.

5.2 Transformation Scores by Category

Analysis of transformation patterns across investment types revealed interesting patterns, though these findings must be interpreted carefully given variations in documentation depth.

Based on available project reports:

- **Community Capacity:** 100% achieved high transformation
- **Tribal and Indigenous Interests:** 58% achieved high transformation
- **Natural Resources:** 63% achieved high transformation
- **Infrastructure:** 75% achieved high transformation

Transformation was measured through the depth of systems change across structural, relational, and mental model dimensions.[3]

Important caveat: Transformation assessment reflect what could be documented through available reports rather than necessarily indicating actual impact levels. Projects with less detailed reporting may have achieved significant transformation that wasn't captured in written documentation.

What the documented evidence does reveal is that Community Capacity investments consistently generated rich documentation of systems change—perhaps because capacity building naturally involves reflection, learning, and narrative development. These projects shared characteristics observable across all high-scoring initiatives regardless of category: they developed local leadership, built lasting partnerships, transferred decision-making power to communities, and created self-sustaining models.

The lesson isn't that certain categories of investments were less impactful, but rather that transformation takes many forms—some more easily captured in some reports than others.

See Case Studies: Sections 6.1-6.7 provide deeper narrative evidence across all investment types.

5.2.1 Speed (and Patience) as Strategic Advantage

One of SASS's innovations was deployment speed. Traditional federal funding typically requires 6-9 months (or longer) from application to award. SASS demonstrated alternatives in terms of quick deployment or slowing down as needed:

- **Microgrants deployed:** As quickly as 1 week
- **Standard projects initiated:** 4-6 weeks average
- **Projects needing capacity development before initiation:** 12+ months

When Terra Verde identified an immediate training opportunity, Spruce Root's ability to respond within days rather than months meant the difference between building local capacity and losing the opportunity to outside contractors. As one partner noted, this represented "the speed of trust" in action. On the other end of the spectrum, SASS has offered significant patience in deploying funds to projects needing capacity development before initiation, recognizing that many communities want to address personnel or other capacity needs to ensure project success.

5.2.2 Success Factors and Enabling Conditions

Across all high-performing investments, consistent success factors emerged:

Flexibility Over Compliance: Every project report scoring 4+ on transformation emphasized SASS's flexibility as crucial. The ability to fund typically ineligible expenses (equipment, food, backbone coordination) and pivot resources when circumstances changed enabled holistic approaches impossible under traditional grants.

Multi-Year Commitments: Multi-year funding enabled relationship building, iterative learning, and gradual capacity development.

[3] **Understanding Transformation Scoring:** Transformation assessment reflect the depth of systems-level change achieved by each project, measured across three dimensions: structural changes (new policies, resource flows, institutional practices), relational changes (shifted power dynamics, strengthened partnerships, new collaboration patterns), and transformative changes (mental model shifts, cultural narrative evolution, changed assumptions about what's possible). Projects scoring 4-5 demonstrated major shifts in how communities, organizations, and federal agencies relate to each other and approach their work.

Compound Effect: Youth trained by Alaska Youth Stewards becoming crew leaders who train the next generation who then become federal employees managing their ancestral lands is a compound effect of one investment multiplying across generations (See Case Studies 6.1 and 6.2).

Trust-Based Relationships: Unanimous 5/5 ratings for funding partner relationships in case studies point to trust as the foundational enabling condition. "Conversational reporting" replaced extensive documentation requirements, freeing project energy for implementation rather than compliance.

Local Leadership: Projects with strong local champions achieved higher transformation scores. If communities identified their own priorities rather than responding to federal RFPs, ownership and sustainability increased dramatically.

Starting Small Where Needed: With a $200,000 pool for microgrants, Southeast Conference has been able to, as Dan Lesh described, "support projects before they are ready for a lot of funds, and focus on capacity development which is sorely needed."

5.3 Leverage, Assets, and Compound Returns

SASS investments demonstrated an ability to attract additional resources, though leverage ratios varied by investment type and available data:

- **Overall portfolio average:** 2:1 to 3:1 (conservative estimate)
- **Microgrants:** Often achieved 3:1 despite small size
- **Regional economic multiplier effect:** Documented at 1.48X ($19.8M impact from $13.4M spending)

The first two ratios likely underestimate true leverage, as they primarily capture direct financial matches rather than in-kind contributions, volunteer hours, or induced economic activity and were calculated from with available relevant data which was inconsistent across the portfolio.

Beyond financial leverage, SASS enabled investments in community assets that generate ongoing returns:

Financial Assets: ASFT's $650,000 quota investment generates lease revenue sustaining programs while creating debt-free fishing pathways and the initial SASS investment drew commitments from multiple foundations totaling $3.8 million.

Knowledge Assets: Seventeen trained forest inventory workers now bid on professional contracts, keeping expertise and income local rather than flowing to outside firms.

Partnership Assets: SASS funding attracted University of Alaska Southeast and Alaska Sea Grant as permanent partners for OceansAlaska.

Network Assets: SAWC's evolution from 7 to 12+ Tribal partnerships created momentum. Youth programs connecting across communities built peer support systems. The Sustainable

Southeast Partnership's growth created self-reinforcing collaboration infrastructure.

5.4 Strategic Insights for Future Investments

The analysis of project reports reveals principles for maximizing return on investment:

Multi-Year Commitments Matter: Projects with multi-year funding showed markedly higher sustainability than single-year investments. Time enables relationship building, iterative learning, and gradual capacity development.

Asset Building Over Activity Funding: Investments in revenue-generating assets, professional certifications, and network infrastructure created self-sustaining changes rather than temporary programs.

Portfolio Approach Multiplies Impact: SASS funded complementary projects that reinforced each other—youth programs feeding into forest partnerships, restoration crews sharing training—and the whole exceeded the sum of parts.

5.5 Section Conclusion: Trust Generates Returns

SASS's $24.8 million investment didn't just fund 63 projects—it sparked a change in how conservation, development, and governance happen across Southeast Alaska. When federal agencies invest with trust rather than control, communities generate returns that far exceed traditional program outcomes. The variations in leverage ratios, transformation scores, and sustainability strategies mask a consistent truth: communities know their needs and, given resources and flexibility, will innovate solutions that no federal program could design. The question for future resource allocation isn't how to replicate SASS's specific investments, but how to replicate its trust in community wisdom.

06 Case Studies:

SASS in Action

The following seven case studies bring SASS's transformative impact to life through the voices and experiences of those who implemented projects on the ground. Selected from 59 total SASS initiatives, these cases represent 14 funded projects—approximately 24% of the portfolio—and four microgrants and illustrate the breadth of SASS's reach across investment categories, implementation approaches, and community contexts.

Each case study was chosen to illuminate different dimensions of SASS's innovation while collectively demonstrating the initiative's systems-level impact. From youth stewarding ancestral lands in Kake to statewide watershed coalitions finding common cause, from microgrants deployed within weeks to million-dollar investments in food sovereignty, these stories reveal how adaptable, community-driven federal funding can lead to lasting change.

The 14 projects featured in these case studies span all four SASS investment categories—4 Community Capacity projects (plus four microgrants that fit in the Community Capacity category), 5 Natural Resources projects, 4 Tribal and Indigenous Interests projects, and 1 Infrastructure project. Together, they represent $4.5 million in SASS investments, or 18.2% of the total $24.8 million portfolio. They range from $15,000 microgrants that leveraged outsized impacts to $1 million investments. Some focus on single communities; others connect the entire region or state. Every single case study interviewee rated their experience working with SASS funding partners as 5 out of 5—"very easy."

What unites these diverse initiatives is not just their success—though the outcomes are impressive—but how they achieved it. Through our three analytical lenses, each case reveals:

- **Systems changes** that altered how decisions are made, resources flow, and communities relate to federal agencies
- **Outcome patterns** that recur across economic, environmental, cultural, and capacity-building domains
- **Strategic insights** about how thoughtful resource allocation can generate lasting returns

In the pages that follow, you'll hear from Eloise Peabbles, watching Kake teenagers deliver salmon to elders who raised them. From Gabe Sjoberg, witnessing youth from across Southeast Alaska choose connection over isolation. From Bob Christensen, deploying training resources for community forest partnerships in a very speedy way. From Rob Cadmus, turning a lawsuit crisis into an opportunity to strengthen regional partnerships. From Eric Wyatt, bringing world-class expertise to Alaska's waters to grow a new blue economy. From Linda Behnken, creating pathways for young fishermen to afford their dreams. From Ian Johnson, creating opportunities to strengthen food sovereignty, from greenhouse towers to berry-lined trails.

These are the stories of people who have shown up to lean into SASS as a tool for community flourishing. Their experiences—heavily illustrated through their own words—reveal what SASS accomplished and how the relationships between federal agencies and the communities they serve grew and changed.

7 Case Studies:

6.1

Fish, Berries, and Reciprocity

Organized Village of Kake

$120,000

Tribal & Indigenous Interests

Page 42

6.2

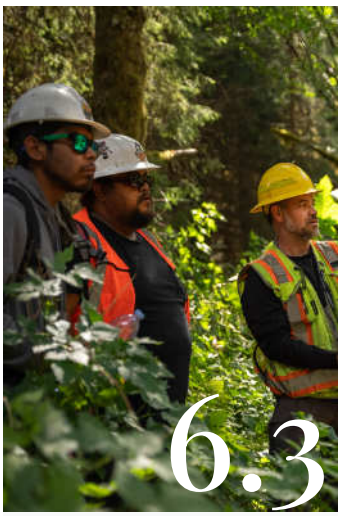
Putting up Their Hands

Tlingit & Haida

$750,000

Tribal & Indigenous Interests

Page 50



6.3

Plot Twist

Shana Sheet, HIA, & OVK

~$30,000

Community Capacity

Page 58

Pooling Resources

$710,000

14 PROJECTS + 4 MICROGRANTS

SASS in Action

6.4

Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition

Natural Resources & Community Capacity

Page 64

6.5

Seeds of Opportunity

OceansAlaska & Alaska Oyster Cooperative

$507,050

Natural Resources & Infrastructure

Page 70

6.6

More Anchored in Community

Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust

$805,480

Community Capacity

Page 76

6.7

Time to Sow & See it Grow

Hoonah Indian Association

$1,569,999

Multiple Categories

Page 82

$4.5M INVESTED | 22% OF PORTFOLIO

HOW TO READ THESE CASE STUDIES

In addition to through the voices of the project leads, each case study also illustrates SASS's impact through three analytical lenses:

Systems Changes examine how SASS transformed structures, relationships, and mental models. These narratives reveal shifts in power dynamics, resource flows, and assumptions about federal-community partnerships.

Outcome Patterns identify recurring positive impacts across the portfolio. The call-out boxes use standardized codes to track patterns across five domains (see Appendix 1 for full code book):

- **Economic Development (ED):** Jobs, businesses, markets, infrastructure
- **Environmental Stewardship (ES):** Restoration, monitoring, management
- **Community Capacity (CC):** Skills, organizations, networks, youth
- **Indigenous Leadership (IL):** Governance, knowledge, cultural practices
- **Cross-Cutting Themes (XC):** Collaboration, innovation, sustainability

Strategic Resource Insights analyze how SASS investments generated returns through flexibility, leverage, and sustainability mechanisms. These insights reveal what made certain funding approaches effective. These insights are included in call-out boxes.

Note about Supporting Projects: Many case studies include information about Supporting Projects funded through USDA's Coordination, Navigation, and Visioning investments via Spruce Root. These projects—primarily Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP) catalyst positions—provided essential backbone support for the success of the primary initiatives featured in each case. While these investments were included in the overall SASS portfolio totals as part of Spruce Root's larger allocation, they are listed separately here to illuminate how SASS's multi-layered approach strengthened communities through both direct project funding and regional coordination capacity. The Supporting Project amounts are not included in the Strategic Resource Insights calculations for each case study, which focus on the direct project investments and their specific returns. Some supporting projects, like the SSP Youth Stewardship Catalyst, appear in multiple case studies where they played instrumental roles both regionally and in specific communities. Not all case studies include supporting projects, as some initiatives operated independently of this catalyst network.

6.1

Fish, Berries, and Reciprocity: Youth Stewards of Kéex̲’ Kwaan

Partner: Organized Village of Kake

Location: Kake, Alaska

Interviewee: Eloise Peabbles

Projects	Funder	Award Amount	Investment Category
Alaska Youth Stewards	USFS	$120,000	Tribal & Indigenous Interests
Supporting Project: SSP Youth Stewardship Catalyst	USDA Coordination, Navigation, Visioning via Spruce Root	$126,000 over 3 yrs	Community Capacity

This is the first of two case studies exploring the Alaska Youth Stewards program—this one examines community impacts in Kake, and the next story illustrates how SASS enabled these local programs to connect across Southeast Alaska.

"We pulled up to the drive-down dock in town, and all of these elders came down with their coolers, watching these five teens unload 186 sockeye from the ice box into the coolers of these elders they love." Eloise Peabbles passionately describes this moment from the Alaska Youth Stewards' proxy fishing trip. "Fish is life in Southeast. We were all so tired after camping, but seeing that connection—it was dope." This single scene captures what SASS funding has made possible in Kake: teenagers employed and paid by their Tribe—the Organized Village of Kake, using funds from the U.S. Forest Service—to practice their birthright of stewarding ancestral homelands while feeding their elders.

A Decade of Youth Work, A Few Years of Stability

For over ten years, various iterations of youth programs—YCC, TRAYLS, and now Alaska Youth Stewards—have operated in Kake, the heart of K̲éex̲' Kwaan territory. Until SASS, funding was piecemeal, uncertain, and subject to year-to-year fluctuations. When USFS Wrangell District Ranger Tory Houser secured SASS funding for AYS, things changed. "SASS funding has become the foundation and is our only year-round funding," explains Eloise, who coordinates the program for the Organized Village of Kake. "It pays for the youth engagement and pays for my time. I can't believe this is my job—I feel so lucky."

Each summer, four to five Kake teenagers spend 9-10 weeks, working 30-35 hours per week, engaged in work that traditional federal workforce programs rarely encompass: harvesting and processing traditional foods, conducting stream monitoring, maintaining culturally important sites, and—crucially—getting paid to learn from their elders while giving back to their community. By recognizing these activities as legitimate natural resource management training, SASS enabled youth to develop both technical skills and place-based knowledge essential for careers stewarding Southeast Alaska's lands and waters. The wages are competitive, too—demonstrating SASS's commitment to valuing youths' time and dedication to this meaningful work.

This local success story now connects to a broader movement, as the Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska has taken on leadership of AYS programs across Southeast Alaska including employing a SSP Youth Stewardship Catalyst (read more in the next case study), also partially funded through SASS (with additional funding coming from The National Forest Foundation and other USFS programs). Building on models like Kake's, Tlingit & Haida is creating regional capacity and pathways for Indigenous youth leadership, connecting crews across communities and expanding opportunities for the next generation of environmental stewards.

"The Joy of SASS is the Flexibility"

Originally, SASS funding was meant to supplement other grants, expanding the AYS program from five to 10 youth. But when other funding fell through and logistical barriers emerged, the program pivoted seamlessly. "The joy of SASS is the flexibility," Eloise emphasizes. "It provides the

Tribe more ability to make decisions and autonomy for spending the funds."

This agility makes daily operations more responsive to community priorities. When elders need help at memorial services, the crew provides manual labor. When beach asparagus comes into season, they harvest it. Every week, they deliver fresh traditional foods—beach greens, blueberries, salmon berries, Hudson Bay tea, seaweed—to elders or the senior center (community housing for the elderly). In 2024 alone, the crew donated over 100 collective gallons of traditional foods to elders, plus those 186 sockeye.

Beyond subsistence activities, the crew has collected over 700 pounds of marine debris from ancestral sites and conducted sophisticated vegetation mapping for ecological research. They've also stepped up to assume responsibility for maintaining Grave Island—work that was once done by adult crews until funding ran out. The AYS crew keep the island accessible for families visiting and caring for their loved ones who have passed.

"Teenagers like to buy things, and this job grants them autonomy with their own income while they give back to people who have helped them," Eloise notes. "They're getting paid to do things that resonate with the community using traditional skills and traditional foods.

Knowledge Flows Both Ways

"Indigeneity is just how it is here," Eloise explains. "It's less so integrated and more so inseparable... The default is: this is an Indigenous world." This worldview shapes every interaction, especially when USFS partners visit Kake to share technical skills. Eloise has even posted community guidelines in the bunkhouse where visiting federal

staff stay—practical wisdom like "don't tailgate," "help elders with groceries down stairs," and, "realize this will always be Lingít Aaní."

When USFS scientist Eric Castro taught the crew to identify rare and hard-to-find salamander eggs—something he'd been searching for unsuccessfully for five years—he warned the crew not to be disappointed if they weren't able to locate any. The teens immediately knew where to find them. "We know the spot and we'll take you there," they said, and they did, within a twenty-minute drive, and a five-minute search.

New partnerships have deepened this knowledge exchange. In 2024, the program connected with Rural Alaskan Students in One-Health Research (RASOR), offering opportunities where the crew conducted scientific research on crab populations while also creating ways to earn college credits for their work and attendance at conferences like the WhaleFest Symposium in Sitka. As Alexis Copsey, one of the youth researchers discovered, "I hadn't known all the different crabs on the beaches I have been walking on my whole life!"

Good People, Good Community

The impacts run deeper than job skills. "I'm literally teaching life skills to these teenagers," Eloise reflects. "How to communicate, how to be a team, social-emotional wellbeing... If at the end of the day they know how to use a clinometer, great. But if they know how to hold their teammates—it builds good people, it builds good community."

Continued on p. 37

Youth as Experts

When asked to describe how easy it was to work with their SASS funding partner, Eloise doesn't hesitate: "They really met us where we were at." This trust has initiated changes in how federal agencies engage with the Tribe:

Structural Changes:

SASS funding flows directly support Tribal decision-making and priority-setting. The Organized Village of Kake determines how to use resources based on community needs, rather than federal prescriptions. The program's growth—from piecemeal funding to stable year-round support, from a single coordinator to dual leadership positions—demonstrates how flexible funding can transform program infrastructure.

Relational Changes:

USFS staff have shifted from one-time trainers to multi-year mentors and even an employer of the crew coordinator position, with a first Kake USFS hire. "Commit to being a mentor if you come to Kake, in a multi-year way," Eloise tells partners. The agency now provides boats, housing, and vehicles to support the program—recognizing that investment in relationships yields better outcomes than transactional training. In a historic first, 2024 saw all Southeast Alaska AYS crews gather on Prince of Wales Island for shared training, building regional Indigenous youth networks—the first such gathering in AYS history, made possible by SASS investments.

Transformative Changes:

The narrative about expertise as unidirectional has shifted. These aren't youth only obtaining education and skill-building to enter the workforce; they're already knowledge holders with tangible insights to offer, while weaving intangible ripples and lasting impacts into the fabric of the community. There has been a shift from "youth need jobs" to "youth are current conservation leaders whose traditional knowledge enhances federal land management". As Eloise explains, the program embodies a core community value: "We care for ourselves by caring for our land and our waters." Reciprocity extends throughout the program: federal scientists teach stream monitoring techniques while learning about and how to respect traditional harvest sites; youth gain professional skills while teaching visitors how to care for their homelands and waters, their community, and which berries make the best jam. Eloise makes sure to coach partners before coming to Kake or offering a training: "You have so much to learn from these kids. They've lived here their whole lives. If you see this as a knowledge exchange, it will benefit you."

Josiah Jackson, now in his fourth and final year with AYS, exemplifies this growth, and is someone with whom Eloise looks forward to maintaining a relationship with for years to come. The relationships formed—between youth, between generations, between the community and federal agencies—promise to outlast any funding cycle. Even USFS staff from Washington, D.C., who came to teach about invasive knotweed, left having learned about thimbleberries and salmon berries they'd never seen before.

The program has evolved to deepen these relationships and create concrete career pathways. In 2024, SASS funding enabled the creation of a crew leader position, with Alexis Copsey becoming the first USDA Forest Service hire from Kake—a milestone that program reports note "speaks to a growing relationship between the Forest Service and the community of Kake." This achievement represents more than an individual success; it demonstrates how SASS is creating genuine career pathways that keep talent in rural communities while building local capacity for land management. The additional leadership structure allows for more nuanced mentorship and facilitates a progression from crew member to crew leader to potentially permanent federal positions rooted in the community.

Relationships Beyond the Grant Cycle

The program connects youth to expanding opportunities that build their futures. Through SASS support, crew members attend the Southeast Environmental Conference, American Indian Science and Engineering Society (AISES) national gatherings, WhaleFest symposiums, and Youth Organizer summits hosted by Alaska Youth for Environmental Action. These connections expose youth to career paths in natural resources, scientific research, and Indigenous leadership while building a network of peers across Southeast Alaska who share their commitment to stewarding their homelands. Some graduates move into positions with the Tribal natural resource department and the Kéex̲' Kwaan Community Forest Partnership or pursue further education. All carry forward the lesson that caring for the land means caring for each other.

With SASS funding entering its final year, uncertainty looms. But the foundations laid run deep. "SASS funding has made it possible to form the relationships, and I hope they persist," Eloise says. "The value of relationships is going to last." When asked what wouldn't have happened without SASS, the answer is stark: year-round coordination, consistent youth engagement, competitive wages that honor the value of this work, and an investment in cultural revitalization that comes from paying youth to learn from elders while practicing subsistence traditions. "They are getting paid to do things that resonate with the community using traditional skills and traditional foods," Eloise reminds us. SASS understood this and funded accordingly—flexibly, trustingly, sustainably.

Today, as five teenagers prepare for another summer of harvesting, monitoring, and serving, they step into a program that SASS transformed from year-to-year survival to multi-year stability with expanding career pathways. They'll pull nets full of sockeye, process berries with elders, and clear trails to traditional sites. And when they deliver those salmon to waiting elders at the dock, they'll be practicing what SASS invested in: Indigenous stewardship as both ancestral responsibility and future career path, sustained by trust and reciprocity.

"It's really the connections and relationships that have made the program what it is," Eloise concludes. "SASS understood the importance of relationships and connections, and it just elevates it in a way that the teens deserve." ■

See the following case study: "Putting up their Hands: The Alaska Youth Stewarding Southeast Together" for the story of how SASS supported the growth of the community-based AYS programs into a regional movement.

Outcome Patterns

- **IL-KNW:** Traditional knowledge integration (youth learning from elders, teaching scientists about salamander locations)
- **IL-CUL:** Cultural practice strengthening (Culture Camp leadership, Tlingit road signs, subsistence practices)
- **CC-YOU:** Youth engagement/development (4-5 youth employed annually, career pathways created)
- **CC-SKL:** Community skills enhancement (WFA certification, scientific research methods, professional development)
- **CC-NTW:** Network/relationship building (connections across Southeast communities, conference participation)
- **ES-MON:** Monitoring and data collection (stream surveys, vegetation mapping)
- **XC-SUS:** Sustainability models (year-round funding creating program stability)
- **XC-COL:** Collaboration mechanisms (multi-agency coordination, regional AYS network)
- **ED-JOB:** Job creation (competitive wages for youth, first USFS hire from Kake)
- **ED-WRK:** Workforce development (clear pathway from participant → leader → federal employee)

Strategic Resource Insights

- **Investment:** $120,000 over 3 years
- **Leverage:** 2:1 by Year 3 (USFS boats/equipment/staff time, RASOR academic credits, conference scholarships, permanent USFS position)
- **Key Innovation:** Multi-year commitment enabled relationship building vs. transactional training and pipeline to place-based federal employment
- **Sustainability Strategy:** Three-pronged approach: Building local capacity for future Tribal and federal employment; academic integration (dual credit programs); community ownership (elder food programs, Culture Camp integration)


asgaalooshii
aawsán Deiyi

6.2

Putting up Their Hands: Alaska Youth Stewarding Southeast Together

Partner: Central Council of the Tlingit and Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska (T&H)

Location: Regional Southeast Alaska **Interviewee: Gabe Sjoberg**

Projects	Funder	Award Amount	Investment Category
Alaska Youth Stewards	USFS	$750,000	Tribal & Indigenous Interests
Supporting Project: SSP Youth Stewardship Catalyst	USDA Coordination, Navigation, Visioning via Spruce Root	$126,000 over 3 yrs	Community Capacity

This is the second of two case studies exploring the Alaska Youth Stewards program—the previous story reveals community impacts in Kake, and this one examines how SASS helped weave local efforts into a regional network.

"Looking at a table and seeing a kid from Hoonah, a kid from Kake, a kid from Angoon, a kid from Prince of Wales... in those moments I'm like, this is the bigger thing we're trying to accomplish as a regional program." Gabe Sjoberg describes a scene from the 2025 Alaska Youth Stewards all-crew gathering in Glacier Bay, traditional territory of the Hoonah people. What she's witnessing as Youth Stewardship Coordinator to Tlingit & Haida and Regional Catalyst for SSP—Indigenous teenagers from across Southeast Alaska exchanging social handles, sharing dances, joking about swapping crew members—represents something amazing: youth putting up their hands to heal their lands and rebuild relationships between communities.

Jump Start

"Every year there's so much hustle for funding in different ways," Gabe explains, describing the exhausting fundraising cycle facing workforce development programs. For decades, youth conservation programs operated in Southeast Alaska communities like scattered islands—each competing for the same scarce funding, rarely communicating. Youth Conservation Corps in Angoon. TRAYLS in Hoonah and Prince of Wales. Each program reflected its community's unique relationship with the land.

When SASS resources arrived through a partnership between Tlingit & Haida and the Forest Service, it provided what Gabe calls "the jump start the program needed to become a regional program." This wove local efforts into a regional network of Indigenous youth guardians, connected across communities while rooted in place. Now Alaska Youth Stewards operates in four communities—Angoon, Hoonah, Kake, and Prince of Wales (serving multiple villages)—with a pilot program launched in Yakutat in 2025. Their collective impact in 2024 alone included clearing thousands of pounds of marine debris from ancestral beaches, maintaining dozens of traditional and recreation sites, conducting sophisticated vegetation mapping, and completing stream surveys that added previously undocumented salmon habitat to official protection catalogs. As documented in Kake in the previous case study, youth also spend their summers harvesting traditional foods for elders and get paid to practice their birthright of stewarding their lands.

"No Exchange for Time Together"

The program's impact is measurable: in 2024, crews cleared over 3,807 pounds of marine debris, maintained 10.05 miles of trails, harvested 918 gallons of traditional foods for elders, and engaged over 176 community members. And the program has reshaped relationships and futures, crystallized through what have become irreplaceable gatherings—the all-crew trainings that SASS made possible. "We could bring everybody to Juneau, that would be cheaper," Gabe notes, "but that's not where the work is being done."

Instead, the 2024 training brought all crews to Prince of Wales Island, where they camped at Eagle's Nest campground outside Klawock. Beyond wilderness first aid certification and project work, something deeper emerged. At a community

potluck addressing landslides—one of the island's pressing concerns—the crews became part of the broader community conversation. They were doing more than completing a training; they were demonstrating their role as young environmental leaders.

The 2025 gathering at Glacier Bay carried even deeper significance. "People meeting family members they've never met… having time with family, or even visiting graves," Gabe reflects. “There is no exchange for time together.” In the Xunaa Shuaá Hít (Xunaa Ancestor’s House), with the healing totem standing witness, youth from across the region drummed, sang, and danced together. The National Park Service and Hoonah Indian Association's efforts to address historical displacement created a powerful backdrop—imperfect but meaningful progress that the youth could witness and be part of. "Historic harms have taught people 'each of us on our own,'" Gabe explains. But here were teenagers choosing connection over isolation, demonstrating what she calls "lateral kindness" even amid healthy inter-community competition for which crew can restore the most land.

"Take These Leaders' Jobs"

The statistics tell of success: four established crews, working 30-35 hours per week for 9-10 weeks each summer, with competitive wages that reflect the value of their work. Leaders returning for their seventh season, crew members in their fourth year, three of four crews with zero new leaders in 2025—demonstrating program stability.

"My dream is for youth to put me out of a job and take these leaders' jobs," she says, describing graduates who now work with the Kéex̲' Kwaan Community Forest Partnership, Hoonah Native Forest Partnership, and Klawock Indigenous Stewards Forest Partnership (KISFP). In 2024 alone, three Hoonah AYS alumni joined the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership crew, while former crew members from POW and Kake moved into positions with their local forest partnerships. One former participant even became a POW crew leader through Sealaska's internship program—returning to reconnect with family while leading the next generation. One youth, unprompted, wrote to the Forest Service seeking career information. The connections multiply: Alaska Youth Stewards working with adult Guardian crews, testing the SIGN (Southeast Indigenous Guardians Network) app for beach cleanups, presenting at conferences, pursuing degrees in natural resource management.

"One of the few groups in the world doing a workforce development program like we are with Indigenous youth," Gabe notes, connecting with Canadian programs but finding few U.S. models. What makes AYS unique isn't just the technical skills—using clinometers, conducting stream monitoring, identifying invasive species. It's the integration of cultural knowledge, community service, and professional development within a framework of Indigenous self-determination.

Salmon is Why

The returning salmon on Prince of Wales Island answer a frequently asked question. "A lot of the crews ask 'why are we doing this work?'" Gabe acknowledges. "Some of it, when it's on a long-term timeline, feels intangible—hard to connect to something in front of me."

But on Prince of Wales, where sockeye runs had plummeted, the answer is now swimming upstream. The AYS crew partners with KISFP on salmon stream restoration—placing logs, creating pools, removing barriers. In 2024, the POW crew surveyed and restored over a mile of critical sockeye spawning habitat within the Klawock Lake Watershed and Upper Steelhead Creek, while building six structures including bridges to protect the restored areas. "We're seeing the rebound of salmon coming up those streams," Gabe reports. Not the historic numbers yet, but after just a few years of work, salmon are returning to streams where they'd nearly vanished.

When teenagers see fish in streams their work helped restore, climate change and ecosystem degradation stop being distant threats. They become specific problems with specific solutions—solutions these youth are directly implementing The multiyear timeline that once felt so vague suddenly makes sense when you can count returning salmon. For communities whose economies and food security center on salmon, these returning fish validate the work and the model. When youth can point to salmon in a restored stream and say "we did that," the question of "why" is answered.

No Boundaries in Ecosystems

"SASS has not had laborious reporting requirements," Gabe emphasizes, describing a partnership built on mutual respect. To be effective, programs like AYS need room to respond to community rhythms and priorities. When Glacier Bay planning took a year instead of months, SASS adapted. When programs needed funds for "staff time, travel, and supplies"—the unglamorous but essential costs many grants won't cover—SASS understood. When opportunities emerged for youth to attend AISES conferences or participate in the Southeast Tribal Environmental Forum, the funding could pivot to support these connections.

“We need the type of money that SASS is if we are really going to make a difference in improving salmon runs,” says Gabe.

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From Islands to Archipelago

SASS investments generated shifts in how Southeast Alaska approaches youth development and environmental stewardship:

Structural Changes:

Before SASS, youth conservation programs survived year-to-year through "a quilt of funds sewn together every summer." SASS created what Gabe calls "backbone funding"—not replacing all other sources but providing the stability to think beyond survival. This enabled impactful changes: the first-ever all-crew gatherings (Prince of Wales 2024, Glacier Bay 2025), formalized monthly team calls including Forest Service partners, and new pathways from youth programs to adult careers. AYS alumni aren't just finding jobs—they're becoming the next generation of natural resource professionals. In 2024 alone, three Hoonah alumni joined the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership, while POW and Kake graduates entered positions with their local forest partnerships. The Yakutat pilot program launched in 2024 with T&H program support. The program's growth is evidenced by concrete metrics: 105 days of work on Forest Service lands in 2024 alone, with youth practicing 153+ technical skills and 54+ cultural/Indigenous life skills. Funding flowed through Tlingit & Haida to communities. "We're looking for hundreds of thousands of dollars to fund AYS," Gabe explains, describing how T&H's regional fundraising capacity allows communities to focus more on programming rather than perpetual grant-writing. Even the Forest Service's separate investment in AYS came partly because SASS demonstrated the model's value.

Relational Changes:

"They are not an absentee partner," Gabe emphasizes about the Forest Service's evolution from funder to collaborator. Monthly calls include federal representatives as team members, not overseers. Local Forest Service staff provide bunkhouses, vehicles, and mentorship "at every level." And connections grew between communities. "Lateral kindness" now flourishes. Hoonah crews mentor Yakutat's pilot program. Youth exchange dances between communities. Information flows faster through teenager networks than official channels. "Everyone is exchanging socials at the end of the week," Gabe notes—digital connections reinforcing cultural ones. The relationship extends vertically too: Alaska Youth Stewards alumni joining adult Guardian crews, testing the SIGN app, becoming the first Forest Service hire from Kake. Generations connect through land-based work.

Transformative Changes:

SASS enabled a story of abundance and interconnection. When Gabe watches youth from four communities sharing a table at Glacier Bay, she sees healing: "We're breaking down those barriers." The mental model of federal funding transformed too—from restrictive grants requiring "how many pounds of this or miles of that" to relationship-centered investment in whatever communities need. Youth transformed from seasonal workers to recognized knowledge holders and future guardians; youth who once saw summer employment now envision careers in forestry. More and more people are understanding that this is Indigenous land requiring Indigenous stewardship.

With fewer limitations than many other workforce development funding, AYS has been able to work on land surrounding communities to restore salmon habitat, land that is managed by a patchwork of land managers such as local and regional Native corporations and the Forest Service. “There is no such thing as boundaries in ecosystems,” Gabe points out.

"There's a lot of trust between us," Gabe reflects, describing a funding relationship that mirrors the reciprocal relationships the program builds between youth and elders, between communities, between generations. The Forest Service representatives join monthly AYS calls as partners. Local Forest Service staff recognize that investment in youth is investment in the future of land stewardship.

Guardians Rising

"Come see it,” Gabe invites everyone to experience AYS. “Come see what we’re doing. The more people who see it, the more ripple effects." What visitors discover: teenagers choosing to return season after season. “It’s buggy, it’s rainy, they don’t get showers, and they are putting up their hands to be a part of it.”

Youth teaching Ph.D. scientists where to find rare species. Communities that once competed now strategize together. Generations—youth, current leaders, adult crews, elders—investing their time and knowledge in career pathways that keep talent home.

Tlingit & Haida envisions closer alignment between Alaska Youth Stewards and the Southeast Indigenous Guardians Network, recognizing the strength of what already exists: a powerful regional network of young Indigenous people. Young people who understand their role as guardians of land and culture, who've built relationships across real and imaginary boundaries, who've shown that "protecting, healing, and getting land back" begins with putting up their hands.

"When you see it in action, you get it," Gabe declares, her week at Glacier Bay still fresh. As the crews went their separate ways, their phones buzzed with shared memes, their techniques cross-pollinated through group chats, their friendships flourished. The regional network SASS enabled doesn't just create jobs for youth and improve salmon runs; it's reweaving social fabric. These youth see that caring for the land means caring for each other. The future of Southeast Alaska rests in young hands—already raised, already working, already leading.

Outcome Patterns

- **CC-NTW:** Network/relationship building (first-ever all-crew gatherings, "lateral kindness")
- **CC-YOU:** Youth engagement/development (55+ youth involved, 17 post-season opportunities offered)
- **IL-GOV:** Governance and decision authority (T&H leading regional program)
- **IL-KNW:** Traditional knowledge integration (54+ cultural skills practiced, elders engaged)
- **IL-CUL:** Cultural practice strengthening (ancestral graves tended, cultural use surveys on USFS lands)
- **ED-WRK:** Workforce development (30-35 hours/week, 9-10 weeks, competitive wages)
- **ES-SUB:** Subsistence resource protection (918 gallons traditional foods harvested/distributed)
- **ES-MGT:** Resource management (10.05 miles trails maintained, 16 campsites restored)
- **CC-SKL:** Skills enhancement (124 hours safety training, wilderness first aid certification)
- **XC-COL:** Collaboration (multi-crew coordination, monthly partner calls)
- **XC-INO:** Innovation (mapping competition, digital storytelling, AISES conference presentations)
- **XC-REP:** Replication potential (model expanding to Yakutat; other communities requesting to join)
- **ES-REST:** Ecological restoration (salmon returning to restored streams on POW)

Strategic Resource Insights

- **Investment:** $750,000 providing "backbone funding" for regional coordination
- **Leverage:** Multiple funding partners (Sealaska, NFF, Ocean Conservancy) + USFS in-kind support (bunkhouses, vehicles, mentorship "at every level")
- **Multiplier Effects:**
  - Leveraged additional Forest Service investment in AYS
  - 55+ youth → 23 crew positions → professional forest careers
  - 4 communities → regional network → statewide influence
  - Individual skills → crew capacity → community workforce
- **Key Innovation:** Regional coordination through T&H connecting communities and reducing individual program fundraising burden
- **Sustainability Model:**
  - Career pathway development (alumni becoming leaders/ professionals) - Institutionalized annual trainings and protocols
  - T&H's fundraising capacity
  - Multi-year program stability (since 2015, with leaders in 7th season)

See previous case study: "Fish, Berries, and Reciprocity: Youth Stewards of Keex' Kwáan" for a look at how AYS programs impact individual communities.

6.3

Plot Twist: Jumping at the Opportunity to Build Southeast's Young Growth Workforce

Partners: Shaan Sheet, Inc., Hoonah Indian Association, Organized Village of Kake

Interviewee: Bob Christensen

Location: Multiple Locations in Southeast Alaska (Prince of Wales Island, Kake, Hoonah)

Projects	Funder	Award Amount	Investment Category
Inventory Training for Community Forest Partnerships	USDA Community Forest Partnerships via Spruce Root	$30,000 across two $15,000 microgrants	Community Capacity
Supporting Project: SSP Community Catalysts for Craig, Hoonah, and Kake, and SSP Regional Community Forests Partnership Catalyst	USDA Coordination, Navigation, Visioning via Spruce Root	$336,000 across 4 annual $42,000 sub-awards for 2 years	Community Capacity

"A week earlier, Terra Verde mentioned they'd like to expand their forest inventory training. A week later, we had the money. That's unheard of." Bob Christensen—Regional Catalyst for Community and Sustainable Forestry with the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP)—still sounds amazed describing the phone call that would evolve how Southeast Alaska develops its forest workforce. He had spoken with Shannon Stevens—Deputy Director of SSP and employee of Spruce Root, one of the Regional Strengthening Partners for SASS. There would be no lengthy applications, no bureaucratic maze—just a conversation that unlocked a $15k SASS microgrant and launched 11 more community members into the next level of their professional forestry careers within weeks.

Southeast Alaska's Forest Transition

For decades, Southeast Alaska has been navigating an economic transition—from an old-growth timber economy to a sustainable young-growth forest future. These young stands, dense with hemlock and spruce crowding for light, need skilled hands to thin and tend them. Without management, they grow into dark, tangled thickets where little thrives beneath the canopy—no berry bushes for bears and humans, no light reaching streams where salmon spawn, no diverse understory supporting deer and small mammals. The 2016 Tongass Forest Plan revision identified comprehensive young-growth inventory as critical for this transition, recognizing that these forests need active stewardship to become the productive, biodiverse ecosystems that have sustained Southeast communities for millennia. Yet by 2023, the inventory effort was only 70% complete and running out of funding. More critically, while outside contractors flew in crews from the Lower 48, local Tribal communities—despite forest knowledge developed since time immemorial, understanding how to read the land for the best berry patches, the healthiest salmon streams, the trees that would grow strong and straight—lacked access to technical training that could transform them from observers to leaders in their own landscape's future.

Rooted in the Region

An earlier conversation between Bob and Brian Kleinhenz of Terra Verde revealed an opportunity. Terra Verde had been successfully trained and employed five members of the Klawock Indigenous Stewards Forest Partnership (KISFP) crew (hosted by Shaan Seet, Inc.) on Prince of Wales Island to conduct forest inventory work—this training had also been funded through $15,000 in an earlier SASS microgrant from Spruce Root. The crews enjoyed the work, the data quality was excellent, and Terra Verde wanted to expand this model to other community forest programs.

"Usually it would take six to nine months just to hear back whether we got the money," Bob emphasizes. "Because SASS was so rooted in the region and informed by local partners, it could rapidly spend and see results on the ground." This wasn't only about speed—it was about trust. Spruce Root understood the opportunity instantly, approved funding without lengthy justifications, and managed reporting through a simple phone conversation instead of "obtuse templates."

The microgrants funded Terra Verde trainers to work directly with the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership (HNFP) and Keex' Kwáan Community Forest Partnership (KKCFP), teaching crews to conduct professional forest inventory using clinometers, GPS units, and data collection devices. For many crew members, learning to use a clinometer to measure tree heights was entirely new—transforming how they could quantify the forests they had known all their lives. But the real transformation would run much deeper than technical skills.

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From Recipients to Partners

"I was nervous about Terra Verde and whether they'd be okay with the quality of the work," Bob admits. "But we clearly made progress. They're happy with the results." The results represent important growth in how forestry work happens in Southeast Alaska:

Structural Changes:

New contracting pathways opened as Terra Verde transitioned from training provider to employer. The Forest Service, witnessing this success, began directly contracting with the community forest crew in Kake for trail maintenance—"because they know a contractor has successfully hired the crew to complete a job," says Bob.

Relational Changes:

The old hierarchy—outside experts teaching local workers—evolved into reciprocal partnership. "The instructors themselves are getting educated by the local people about how they see the forest, how they use it," Bob notes. Knowledge flowed both directions, enriching data quality with generational wisdom about salmon streams and wildlife habitat.

Transformative Changes:

The narrative shifted: community forest programs matured from training recipients to capable contractors. "These crews are getting closer to being self-sustaining," Bob observes. Young Alaska Native people now see professional forestry as a viable career path in their home communities.

"Localizing the Work Model"

By fall 2023, the three-part training model—classroom instruction, field mentorship, and supported transition to independent work—was transforming lives across two communities. In Hoonah, a 17-year-old Alaska Youth Stewards alumnus joined the adult crew, entering the workforce directly and finding a viable technical career without leaving home. This wasn't an isolated case: three of the five HNFP crew members were AYS alumni, demonstrating a clear pipeline from youth environmental education to professional forestry careers. The SASS funds provided Southeast the opportunity to localize the work model for this type of work, instead of outsourcing to a company from the lower 48.

The numbers tell one story of success:

- 17 crew members professionally trained with KISFP (6), KKCFP (6), and HNFP (5)
- 100+ forest plots of high-quality inventory data collected

The story runs deeper. As crews gained experience, they began supporting each other across sites. The KKCFP crew in Kake, HNFP crew in Hoonah, the KISFP crew on Prince of Wales Island, trained in the same protocols, could now share techniques, troubleshoot challenges together, and even coordinate on larger contracts—transforming what might have been isolated training into a regional network of skilled practitioners. And crews from all three forest partnerships are now better equipped to explore winter employment opportunities with crews in the Lower 48.

Deploying Resources at the Speed of Trust

When asked what wouldn't have happened without SASS, Bob is clear: "It would've happened much later, if at all. We had to act fast." The contrast with traditional federal funding or philanthropy—"six to nine months just to hear back"—couldn't be starker.

Now trained crews in Kake, Hoonah, and on Prince of Wales Island continue to conduct inventory work, with plans to expand for next season. Their success has sparked interest in advanced skills: carbon inventory, stand examinations, pre-harvest cruising. The regional young-growth inventory nears completion not through outside contractors, but through local expertise.

This case reveals what becomes possible when federal funding truly trusts local wisdom. By empowering regional partners to identify opportunities and deploy resources at the speed of trust rather than bureaucracy, SASS transformed a modest investment into lasting workforce development, economic opportunity, and systemic change. As Southeast Alaska continues its forest transition, these crews stand ready—as professionals shaping their homeland's future.

"We need another round of SASS that is even more efficient and aligned with communities. SASS has been essential to give this region a chance to adapt to the young growth transition and diversified economy of the future," Bob reflects. In weeks, not years. Through trust, not templates. With communities leading. ■

Outcome Patterns

- **ED-WRK:** Workforce skills development (17 crew members trained in forest inventory)
- **XC-INO:** Innovation approaches (rapid microgrant deployment—"a week later, we had the money")
- **XC-COL:** Collaboration mechanisms (The KKCFP and HNFP crews have been able to support one another in this work)
- **XC-SUS:** Sustainability models (Training opened potential opportunities for crews to seek contract employment in the Lower 48 during winter months)
- **IL-RSC:** Control over resources (local crews becoming contractors vs. outside firms)
- **IL-MGT:** Management of lands/resources (Communities now directly control forest inventory processes previously outsourced to Lower 48 contractors)
- **CC-SKL:** Community skills enhancement (local crews able to complete advanced inventory work)
- **CC-YOU:** Youth engagement/development (3 of the 5 HNFP crew members were AYS alumni)
- **ES-MON:** Monitoring and data collection (forest plots inventoried)

Strategic Resource Insights

- **Investment:** ~$30,000 across two $15,000 microgrants
- **Speed Factor:**
  - One week from identified need to funding—"that's unheard of"
  - Rather than waiting 6-9 months for outside contractors, communities could deploy trained local crews immediately
- **Leverage:** Enabled direct Forest Service contracting with trained crews
- **ROI:** Prevented outsourcing to Lower 48 contractors, kept money local
- **Sustainability:**
  - Initial investment generated ongoing contracts
  - Cross-community mutual support between crews creates resilience
  - Potential Lower 48 winter contracts diversify income opportunities

6.4

Pooling Resources: From Local Stream Restoration to Statewide Coalition Building

Partner: Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition **Interviewee: Rob Cadmus**

Location: Statewide & Multiple Locations (e.g. Hoonah, Ketchikan, Kake, Kosciusko Island, Prince of Wales Island)

Projects	Funder	Award Amount	Investment Category
Engaging Tribal and Community Partners in Salmon Habitat Restoration in the Margaret Creek Watershed	USFS	$80,000	Natural Resources
Skanaxheen Restoration Project and Kake Area Restoration Opportunities	USFS	$505,000	Natural Resources
Trout Creek Restoration Project and Training for Tribal Work Crew	USFS	$40,000	Natural Resources
Watershed Restoration Workshop and Capacity Exchange	NRCS	$85,000	Community Capacity
Supporting Project: SSP Community Catalysts for Craig, Hoonah, and SSP Regional Community Forests Partnership Catalyst	USDA Coordination, Navigation, Visioning via Spruce Root	$378,000 across 3 $42,000 sub-awards for 3 yrs	Community Capacity

"I had hired a four-person crew from Angoon, and then I didn't have any work for them." Rob Cadmus, Executive Director of the Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition (SAWC), recounts the moment a threatened lawsuit from Wilderness Watch halted restoration work in Cube Cove—90 culverts blocking salmon passage, a 100-foot creosote-laden bridge over a pristine coho river, all waiting for remediation in what had become designated wilderness. With SASS funding, what could have been a season-ending disaster became an opportunity. "We sent the Angoon guys to do work in the community forests of Hoonah and then to Kake," Rob explains. "I could not have done that with any other funding source."

Beyond the Glory of Stream Projects

"What gets the glory is doing the stream project," Rob observes, "but it takes a lot of work to get to that point." For over a decade, SAWC has orchestrated the complex dance of stream restoration across Southeast Alaska—from data collection on iPads synced to ArcOnline field maps, through permitting mazes and logistics puzzles, to the moment when a carefully felled 18-inch hemlock crashes into position, creating the perfect scour pool for salmon fry. Before SASS, this work proceeded project by project, grant by grant—40 different grants with 50 different pots of money at one point, each with its own boundaries and restrictions. "We don't have an off season," Rob explains. "The winter is setting up the field season: permitting, funding, logistics, how will we get there, do we need a boat, do we have a cabin, what equipment do we need." This year-round orchestration of details makes restoration possible, but SASS funding transformed how that orchestration could happen.

When SASS emerged with "no bounds put on it," as Rob describes, it was "significantly different" from traditional federal funding. "Our four SASS projects really fit the bill: benefit the environment, people, and build the capacity to keep doing this into the future," he notes. With $500,000 of SAWC's mitigation funds leveraged against SASS investments, three major restoration projects moved forward simultaneously in Kake, Prince of Wales, and Ketchikan. By 2024, SAWC's partnerships had expanded to seven communities across Southeast Alaska, with crews conducting in-stream restoration at 12 stream reaches, treating young-growth forest at 5 sites, and assessing 177 stream crossing structures for fish passage.

From Competition to Group Therapy

An unexpected outcome emerged from SAWC's watershed workshops, funded through SASS via NRCS. First, a Southeast regional gathering was held in 2023 with 131 attendees and then Alaska's first statewide watershed gathering in 2024 with 88 in-person participants and 33 virtual participants. What began as presentations on restoration techniques and climate adaptation evolved into something more. "We jokingly call it the watershed therapy group," Rob laughs, describing the monthly gatherings of statewide watershed coalitions from Kenai to Copper River that emerged afterward. "We didn't even know each other before the statewide workshop."

These organizations—Southeast Alaska Watershed Coalition, Kenai Watershed Forum, Tanana Valley Watershed Association, and Copper River Watershed Project—previously isolated in their regional silos and competing for the same limited funding pools, now strategize together about "how to exist and achieve our shared mission better." The implications have the potential to ripple outward: joint funding proposals, shared crews, institutional changes in how restoration work happens statewide.

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More Habitat, More Fish, More Money

When asked to rate how easy it was to work with their SASS funding partner, Rob doesn't hesitate: "They really met us where we were at." This trust has led to big shifts in how federal agencies engage with Tribal communities and regional organizations:

Structural Changes:

SASS funding created new pathways for Tribal organizations to directly employ restoration crews, bolstered fledgling partnerships like KISFP, and enabled the first-ever statewide gathering of restoration organizations in April 2024. The funding structure itself—with its great adaptability—allowed resources to flow where needed rather than where grant restrictions dictated. New infrastructure emerged: stabilized and kickstarted forest partnerships, year-round program coordination, and regional training networks that didn't exist before.

Relational Changes:

Crews that had worked in isolation now train and work with each other across communities—HNFP helping Angoon's Kootznoowoo crew, Ketchikan crews assisting Klawock teams. The 2024 spring training—funded by SASS through NRCS—brought together over 40 people from 6 different crews for the first time. The Forest Service shifted from directive oversight to collaborative partnership. "People from the Forest Service understand the forest partnerships can benefit them, not just a mandate from above," Rob notes. Federal-Tribal relationships evolved from consultation to co-management, with Tribes setting priorities on Forest Service lands. The monthly "therapy group" meetings transformed competitor organizations into collaborators.

Transformative Changes:

"The goals of SASS are something everyone should be able to get on board with: stewarding the environment and creating jobs," Rob reflects. This simple statement masks a shift in mental models. Conservation no longer means locking up resources but actively managing them through local expertise. Federal funding transformed from restrictive grants to flexible investments in community capacity. Narratives shifted: "You restore more salmon habitat, you make more fish. You catch more fish, you make more money," Rob explains. "The region is heading down a path that makes sense to the region and the Forest Service has been aligned with this through SASS." By 2024, the sustainability of the model was evident as partners actively secured diverse funding sources for 2025 continuation, including NFWF awards, invasive species grants, and other federal programs.

Outcome Patterns

- **XC-COL:** Collaboration mechanisms (statewide "watershed therapy group")
- **XC-INO:** Partnership approaches ("working and camping alongside" partnership model between USFS and Tribes)
- **IL-GOV:** Governance and decision authority (Tribes moved beyond management to true co-leadership)
- **IL-MGT:** Management of lands/resources (Tribes setting restoration priorities on USFS managed land)
- **ES-REST:** Ecological restoration (12 stream reaches, 177 crossings assessed)
- **CC-NTW:** Network building (7 community partnerships across Southeast)
- **CC-SKL:** Community skills enhancement (90+ people trained over 3 years)
- **CC-YOU:** Youth engagement (Alaska Youth Stewards joining professional crews)
- **ED-JOB:** Job creation (local restoration crews employed year-round)

Strategic Resource Insights

- **Investment:** $710,000 across 4 projects (including $85K NRCS for convenings)
- **Leverage:** $1.5M+ total (including $500K SAWC mitigation funds, NFWF awards, invasive species funding)
- **Leverage Ratio:** 1:2+ by Year 3 (increasing from 1:1 in Year 1); multi-year commitments enabled long-term planning
- **Flexibility Factor:** Crews could pivot between communities when lawsuit halted work
- **Systems Innovation:** First statewide watershed gathering catalyzed ongoing collaboration; regional training bringing 40+ people from 6 crews together transformed isolated projects into regional movement
- **Sustainability:** Partners actively secured diverse funding sources for 2025 continuation

Sovereignty in the Stream

"Most of them were born with a chainsaw in their hand," Rob notes of the local crews, but SASS enabled something more than employment—restoration work became an expression of sovereignty.

"Klawock Indigenous Stewards Forest Partnership (KISFP) existed before the SASS grant but barely," Rob explains. "SASS really established KISFP as real."

The funding allowed them to invest in capacity, formalize their steering committee, and create stability where before "they were not on solid ground." Meanwhile in Ketchikan, while the work isn't yet a formal forest partnership, Rob notes it's "just as productive" and "on the way to grow to a formal partnership," demonstrating how SASS investments catalyze institutional development at different paces across different communities.

"What I see as a stream restoration project, the community may see as workforce development or Tribal sovereignty," Rob explains. "The community says, 'We're gonna do the work on Forest Service property. We're gonna tell them what we want to see done with this land.'" This isn't consultation or input—it's Indigenous communities directly shaping their ancestral territories through restoration that benefits "salmon and people," with SAWC providing technical expertise while Tribes lead implementation.

A Game-Changer

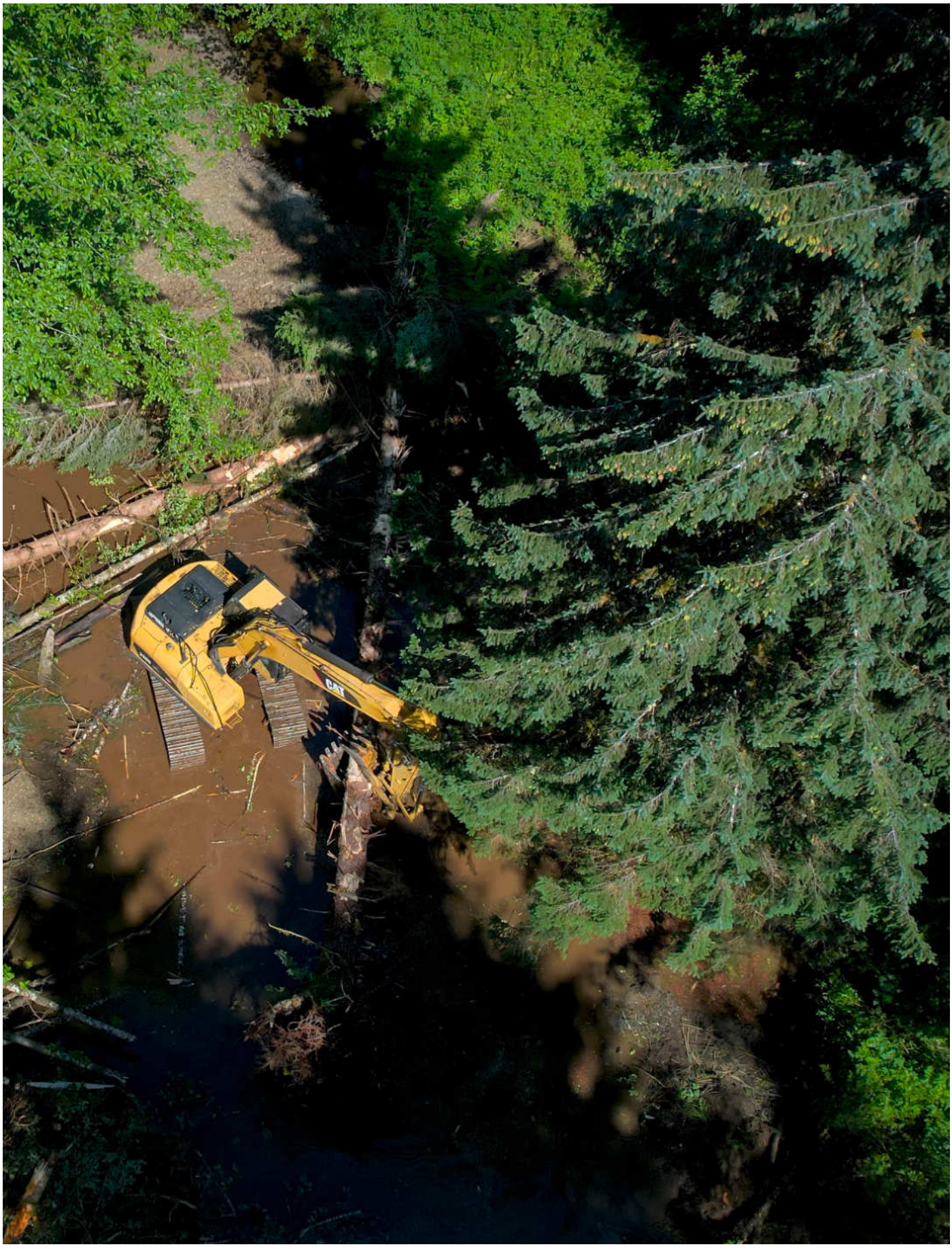
"What SAWC is doing is putting these ideas into action and we're not going back on that once SASS ends," Rob states with conviction. "This is the future of the Tongass National Forest. This is a game-changer for the region."

Already, the Forest Service relies on SAWC and its partners when their own funding freezes—"They don't even have a credit card to buy a cup of coffee," Rob notes of recent federal budget constraints. But relationships built through SASS endure beyond budget cycles. Alaska Youth Stewards graduates are joining the professional forest partnership crews. The statewide "therapy group" is planning more foundational and institutional reforms. And SAWC continues to support new and enhanced existing Tribal watershed stewardship programs in seven communities across Southeast Alaska.

When asked for his elevator pitch, Rob—admittedly running on fumes after a long day—distills SASS to its essence: "SASS gave me the opportunity to think about how best to accomplish my mission… rather than how best to check the boxes of a grant."

In streams across Southeast Alaska, salmon navigate new pools created by precisely placed logs. In offices from Ketchikan to Kenai, restoration practitioners navigate new partnerships created by precisely deployed trust. Both changes—physical and systemic—flow from the same source: federal funding that understands sometimes the best way to restore a landscape is to remove the barriers and let local expertise find its course.

"I'm really proud of getting stuff done on the ground," Rob concludes, "and employing locals to do it." That simple statement represents wider impacts: this work has not only restored streams, but also restored relationships between communities and their homelands, between agencies and Tribes, between organizations now pooling resources together toward a common, flourishing future. This is restoration and therapy; for the land and for all who depend upon it. ■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6.5

Seeds of Opportunity: Growing Alaska's New, Blue Economy

Partners: OceansAlaska & Alaska Oyster Cooperative

Location: Ketchikan & Naukati Bay

Interviewee: Eric Wyatt

Projects	Funder	Award Amount	Investment Category
Shellfish Hatchery Research and Training Program (OceansAlaska)	USDA-RD via SEC	$425,250	Natural Resources
Aquatic Farmers' Offloading Pier and Packing Facility Planning (Alaska Oyster Cooperative)	USDA-RD via SEC	$81,800	Infrastructure

"We would not have been able to hire this expert to come to Alaska repeatedly without SASS," Eric Wyatt reflects on the growth of Southeast Alaska's shellfish industry. The volunteer board member of OceansAlaska speaks with the seasoned perspective of someone who has weathered the industry's storms. Now, thanks to SASS funding, world-class hatchery expertise has flowed into Alaskan communities, with teenagers from Metlakatla learning to cultivate oysters alongside seasoned farmers, and recent high school graduates buying their first aquatic farms.

An Orphan Industry

For years, Alaska's shellfish industry existed in a precarious state—dependent on seed shipped from Hawaii or Washington, vulnerable to disruptions or simple shipping delays. Previous attempts at establishing local hatchery capacity had failed, heavy on spreadsheets and business models but light on the biological realities of raising oysters in Alaska's cold waters. OceansAlaska itself had struggled through multiple iterations—from aquarium concept to mariculture attempts—unable to achieve production without the right expertise. "There was a lot of modeling based on what's going on down south," Eric explains, "and our environment is just not the same—cold water, limited growing season, substantial challenges. We were an orphan industry."

Enter SASS funding in 2022, which enabled OceansAlaska to do what federal grants rarely allow: everything necessary to make a hatchery work. "With SASS funds OceansAlaska had the ability to do everything from buy supplies to pay for hatchery tech labor," Eric recalls. They bought equipment, paid technicians, covered expert travel, even purchased a new ramp to get down to the barge. "Can't cross most of these lines with most funding," says Eric.

Over three years of SASS support, OceansAlaska has hosted intensive workshops bringing together a wide range of participants: Alaska Native youth still in high school, university researchers, federal agency staff, commercial shellfish farmers, and curious community members—all learning from top-notch experts like Provan Crump, an Australian hatchery troubleshooter whose experience spans from Prince Rupert, British Columbia, to Hawaii.

Rain Gear and a Willingness

"Participants don't need prior knowledge, just rain gear and a willingness to learn," says Eric. The workshops follow a hands-on model that demystifies shellfish cultivation. They engage with the full cycle: growing their understanding of oyster biology, operating specialized equipment, monitoring water quality, and troubleshooting the countless challenges of aquatic farming.

In spring 2024, OceansAlaska achieved their best production run yet. "The numbers aren't huge," Eric admits, "but, you know, the engine is running well now. Now, we can worry about making it bigger."

This technical success has led to further connections. Participants have transitioned into positions with Alaska Department of Fish and Game. The Metlakatla high school science class now grows oysters for community events and elder meals—introducing shellfish farming to a community which now wants more.

The "Let's do it" Approach

A recent high school graduate, after working part-time on an oyster farm for two years, is now purchasing a retiring farmer's operation with his father. "He used to work on a different farm which is part of the Alaska Oyster Cooperative," Eric explains, mentioning the cooperative he is a board member of. This young entrepreneur represents the future SASS investments are enabling—keeping the next generation employed and invested in their home communities.

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"This is Hard Dollars"

SASS investment has evolved how Alaska's shellfish industry operates:

Structural Changes:

Physical infrastructure emerged where only plans or studies were funded before. In addition to the infrastructure purchased by OceansAlaska to improve its hatchery, the Alaska Oyster Cooperative also used SASS funds to transform state-leased land into an operational site, complete with rock pad and preparations for a shipping container-based processing facility. Five commercial farms formed this cooperative, pooling resources including a separate SASS investment to build shared processing infrastructure on newly developed land in Naukati Bay, on Prince of Wales Island. "There's a lot of these soft dollar type things—pay for another feasibility—but this is hard dollars at work," Eric emphasizes. "We're bringing value into a community permanently." The Alaska Oyster Cooperative formalized as the region's first mariculture cooperative, securing a 10-year state lease that transformed 0.61 acres of upland into future processing infrastructure—proving that 'hard dollars' could create permanent community assets. This infrastructure enables consolidated operations, necessary food safety certifications, and eventually direct sales to the public. "There wouldn't have been a site without SASS," Eric states simply.

Relational Changes:

Old patterns of isolated struggle gave way to collective action. OceansAlaska evolved from trying to do everything alone to becoming a connector linking farmers, researchers, and educators. The workshops created unlikely alliances: federal scientists learning from teenage harvesters, farmers sharing techniques instead of guarding secrets, university programs building curriculum around local expertise. By 2024, University of Alaska Southeast and Alaska Sea Grant emerged as co-hosts, signaling institutional commitment. Even relationships with distant experts transformed—Provan Crump became available for video troubleshooting between visits, creating ongoing mentorship rather than one-time training. For the Alaska Oyster Cooperative, five competing farms became collaborators, pooling resources for shared infrastructure. Monthly individual struggles with generators and remote processing gave way to collective planning for grid-connected facilities.

Transformative Changes:

The narrative shifted from "shellfish rearing can't work in Alaska like it does down south" to "how do we make it bigger?" SASS provided repeated access to world-class expertise, the bridge funding that kept programs alive until larger institutional support arrived, and critically, the time to show a shellfish hatchery can work in Alaska. "Travel from Prince Rupert to Ketchikan is ridiculously expensive," Eric notes, but SASS made repeated visits possible. At the same time, the work to engage a diverse set of community members has challenged assumptions about who can do this work—you do not have to have a degree, but you do need to have attention to detail.

Outcome Patterns

- **ED-BUS:** New business development (young farmer purchasing operation)
- **ED-INF:** Infrastructure development (both hatchery improvements AND cooperative processing facility)
- **ED-MKT:** Market access (serving tourists, restaurants, local consumption)
- **ED-WRK:** Workforce skills development (hatchery training for diverse participants)
- **XC-INO:** Innovation approaches (bringing expertise to Alaska)
- **XC-LEV:** Leverage strategies (attracted UAS FishTech and Sea Grant partnerships; AOC attracted SEC Mariculture Cluster funding)
- **XC-COL:** Collaboration (multi-agency partnership now normal)
- **XC-SUS:** Sustainability (UAS permanent adoption confirmed)
- **CC-YOU:** Youth engagement (Metlakatla high school class, Ketchikan NOSB team)

Strategic Resource Insights

- **Investment:** $454,250 (OceansAlaska) + $81,800 (Alaska Oyster Cooperative) = $536,050
- **Leverage Achievement:** Estimated 2:1+ leverage ratio with NOAA, TNC, and Sea Grant investments
- **Flexibility Factor:** Could purchase equipment, pay technicians, cover expert travel
- **Ecosystem Approach:** SASS invested across the value chain—from hatchery capacity to cooperative infrastructure—creating mutually reinforcing developments
- **Multiplication Model:** 2024 introduced train-the-trainer approach for exponential capacity building
- **ROI Indicator:** Best production run in 2024, institutional adoption by university
- **Sustainability Model:** Infrastructure investment, revenue-generating production, university supporting hatchery

"There aren't very many opportunities in rural Southeast communities," Eric notes, but shellfish farming is changing that equation. Eric, himself a third-generation salmon troller, has sold his fishing boat to invest in oysters.

The partnerships SASS enabled extend far beyond individual success stories. "Our approach has been: let's do it," Eric explains, describing how OceansAlaska's hands-on success has attracted collaborators more effectively than any proposal or plan.

Now the University of Alaska Southeast's Fisheries Technology Program and Alaska Sea Grant have become full partners—which pairs nicely with the addition of more federal money through the U.S. Economic Development Administration's $49M investment in Southeast Conference's Alaska Mariculture Cluster. "UAS FishTech and Alaska Sea Grant became partners in the hatchery program and are wanting to take it over, and move the hatchery from Ketchikan to Sitka" Eric reports, seeing this institutional adoption as success rather than competition. "Our goal as a nonprofit isn't to perpetuate ourselves—it's to make certain things happen."

New, Blue Economy

"These two mariculture projects were dissimilar from many of the other SASS projects," Eric acknowledges, thinking of SASS's more terrestrial focus, "but we were still welcome." That welcome has enabled innovators in the industry to experiment and succeed. SASS invested across the entire value chain. While OceansAlaska built biological capacity to produce seed, the Alaska Oyster Cooperative developed infrastructure to process and market the harvest. These complementary investments—totaling $536,050—created an ecosystem where young farmers could envision careers. A recent graduate buys a farm knowing that training exists at OceansAlaska, processing infrastructure is developing through the cooperative, and a community of practice surrounds them. No single investment could have created this ecosystem; SASS's flexible, trust-based approach allowed each piece to develop in concert. Today, as OceansAlaska pivots from primary trainer and hatchery to industry facilitator, the seeds planted by SASS funding are sprouting across Southeast Alaska. Geoduck trials expand species diversity. Graduate students conduct research on local farms. The Ketchikan Ocean Bowl team visits for hatchery tours. The members of the Alaska Oyster Cooperative have the makings of a dedicated, shared processing facility and future community gathering space. Each connection strengthens the emerging network of people who see Alaska's cold, clean waters not as barriers to mariculture but as competitive advantages in a warming world.

"In terms of long-term economic prosperity, this has a long-term impact," Eric reflects. "It's not a one-and-done thing—it's still going on." Eric sees this future as "very sustainable and environmentally positive"—an insurance policy against climate disruption, food insecurity, and economic vulnerability. The shellfish industry SASS helped establish offers renewable, sustainable opportunities. The recent high school graduate buying his first oyster farm embodies this future. SASS's approach has proven that with the right partners, community training, and infrastructure and techniques right-sized to Alaska's waters, underwater farms can provide predictable harvests from the sea for generations of Alaskans who choose to stay home.

The engine of a new, blue economy is running smoothly now.

6.6

More Anchored in Community: Untangling Capital Barriers for Southeast's Fishermen

Partner: Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust **Location: Regional & Sitka** **Interviewee: Linda Behnken**

Projects	Funder	Award Amount	Investment Category
Commercial Fishing Crew Apprentice Program	USDA-RD via SEC	$50,000	Community Capacity
Local Fish Fund	USDA-RD via SEC	$650,000	Community Capacity
Regional Fisheries Assessment	USFS via Spruce Root	$90,480	Community Capacity
ASFT Financial and Operations Capacity Microgrant	USDA-RD via SEC	$15,000	Community Capacity
Supporting Project: SSP Regional Rural Economic Development Catalyst	USDA Coordination, Navigation, Visioning via Spruce Root	$42,000	Community Capacity

"It's akin to buying a hotel instead of a starter home." Linda Behnken's analogy captures the impossible math facing young Alaskans who dream of fishing commercially. With halibut quota and some fishing permits reaching six figures, the industry that once welcomed anyone with "a boat, some gear, and a sense of adventure" had become accessible only to those with ready access to capital, deep pockets or family fishing connections. But through SASS funding's unprecedented flexibility, the Alaska Sustainable Fisheries Trust (ASFT) is rewriting this equation—not by changing the rules, but by creating new pathways to ownership that honor both tradition and innovation.

When Fish Leave Home

"Fisheries are an economic force for Southeast Alaska and the largest private sector employer in the state," Linda explains, her voice carrying both pride and concern. Yet paradoxically, much of this economic engine's value leaves the communities that depend on it. Fish caught by out-of-state permit holders, seafood shipped south for processing, local residents priced out of their ancestral fisheries—the patterns repeat across Southeast Alaska's harbors.

The statistics tell a stark story: the average age of Alaska's commercial fishermen has risen to 50, up nearly 10 years since 1980. In rural and Indigenous communities, the exodus is even more pronounced. "Those are often not the people who live in our rural Indigenous communities," Linda notes of who can access today's capital-intensive fisheries. Young people face more than financial barriers, they also face existential risks—like climate change increasing resource volatility while debt loads force dangerous decisions. "They have to fish in bad weather or be gone longer or take more risk," Linda explains, describing how financial pressure translates to physical danger on the water.

From Idea to Infrastructure

When SASS funding arrived at ASFT through Southeast Conference, it found an organization with vision but limited capacity to execute. "We had a number of these initiatives in mind or started, but there was not a lot of capacity to grow them," Linda reflects. Previous attempts at addressing fisheries access had proceeded piecemeal—a small loan here, a training program there, each constrained by traditional funding silos.

SASS changed the equation. "They have been really supportive and flexible," she emphasizes, describing how Southeast Conference administered the funds. When opportunities emerged—like microgrants for expanded work or partnerships with unexpected collaborators—SASS could respond. "Talk to them ahead of time about what we're thinking, see if that's a good fit," Linda explains. No lengthy applications, no bureaucratic delays—just strategic deployment of resources where they could catalyze lasting change.

SASS investments leveraged ASFT's resources and attracted additional funding, enabling three interconnected strategies: a quota bank providing affordable access to fishing privileges, support for establishing a regional Community Quota Entity to expand access further, and the Young Fishermen's Initiative preparing the next generation for success on the water.

Safe Harbor for New Fishermen

"We've had 130 people go through our crew apprentice training programs, over half of them are women," Linda shares with evident pride. This single statistic represents a revolution in an industry where safety concerns have historically excluded many women from participating. "There's a lot of women who wanted to figure out how to get into fishing but were worried about it being a safe place to be out on a boat," she explains.

The training goes beyond technical skills. Participants learn safety protocols, hydraulics, knot-tying techniques, and boat handling skills. But more basically, they learn their place in a system of stewardship. "Taking care of the resource, your role in leadership and stewardship," Linda emphasizes. Skippers receive training too—learning to host young people, tolerate mistakes, and foster growth rather than just fill crew positions.

The ripple effects extend far beyond individual careers. Program graduates have gone on to purchase permits and boats, enter fisheries management and policy roles, and perhaps most importantly, become "lifelong ambassadors" for sustainable fishing. "Even if they don't fish again, fish on their plate will always have a different meaning," Linda notes. In communities facing workforce shortages, the program creates a pool of trained crew ready to substitute when needed, strengthening the entire industry's resilience.

Quota as Community Asset

ASFT's innovative work includes how fishing access itself functions. Through the quota bank, ASFT purchases and holds fishing privileges—particularly sablefish quota—then leases them to local fishermen at affordable rates. "They don't have to come up with money upfront," Linda explains. "We assign them the quota to fish, they pay a fee back to the trust... but are able to keep over half of what they make from catching the fish."

But individual access represents just one piece of the strategy. Working with Sealaska, Central Council Tlingit & Haida, and Spruce Root, ASFT helped catalyze creation of a regional Community Quota Entity (CQE)—a structure allowing communities under 1,500 people and off the road system to collectively purchase and manage fishing privileges. While ASFT as a nonprofit can only buy limited "A" shares, the CQE can access the 90% of the quota held as regular shares, dramatically expanding the pool of fishing opportunities that can be anchored in communities.

The Local Fish Fund adds another dimension, providing low-cost loans with innovative terms: participate in conservation leadership initiatives and get a 1% interest rate reduction; make payments based on fishing income rather than fixed schedules; build equity quickly enough to refinance with traditional lenders. "Every funder wants you to show that you'll be sustainable," Linda observes, but few will invest in revenue-generating assets. SASS understood this need.

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A Sea Change in Systems

SASS investments generated sea changes in how Southeast Alaska's fisheries economy operates:

Structural Changes:

New financial infrastructure emerged where only barriers existed before. The quota bank evolved from a concept to holding over 70,000 pounds of sablefish quota and about 500 pounds of precious halibut quota. A three-tiered access system has been created: 1) Direct quota leasing, 2) Low-cost loans with conservation incentives, and 3) Regional CQE for collective ownership. The regional CQE structure, while not directly SASS-funded, developed from partnerships SASS strengthened. Revenue streams from leased quota now sustain programs beyond any grant cycle. "As long as the fisheries keep going," Linda notes, "that helps sustain the work moving forward."

Relational Changes:

Competition gave way to collaboration across boundaries. "We've had new collaborations, for example, at the ... Board of Fisheries we worked closely with T&H on troll fishery issues... we wouldn't have had this connection prior to SASS," Linda reflects. The SSP retreats attended by most SASS recipients reveal the depth of relationship growth to Linda: "Complete engagement and commitment by all participants, an openness to work together, across all kinds of potential things that are dividing people in other parts of this country." Federal agencies shifted from distant funders to engaged partners. Young fishermen connected with policymakers. Tribal governments found common cause with conservation organizations. Partners are no longer competing for limited grants but building shared community assets. "Our world needs more SASS initiatives," Linda concludes simply.

Transformative Changes:

The narrative about who belongs in fishing is changing. When teenage girls from rural communities see women captains succeeding, when Indigenous youth learn they can access fisheries without massive debt, when recent graduates can purchase quota through innovative financing—the mental model shifts from fishing as inherited privilege to fishing as an accessible profession. The old story of "graying fleets" and disappearing access gives way to one of renewal and return. Over 50% women trainees represents a shift in who is seen as belonging in fishing. As Linda puts it, success means seeing "fish caught by people who live here in Southeast Alaska, fish landed in Southeast communities... with the stewardship voice of the people who live here guiding it all."

Outcome Patterns

- **ED-JOB:** Job creation (38+ direct crew positions placed, with 6 boats actively harvesting quota)
- **ED-MKT:** Market access improvements (quota bank providing affordable fishing access)
- **CC-SKL:** Skills enhancement & CC-YOU: Youth engagement (130 trained, over half women, creating pipeline for industry renewal)
- **IL-VCE:** Voice in regional institutions (Board of Fisheries collaboration with T&H)
- **IL-RSC:** Resource control (not just voice but actual quota ownership returning to communities)
- **XC-COL:** Collaboration mechanisms (monthly SSP meetings, Board of Fisheries coordination)
- **XC-SUS:** Sustainability models (revenue from quota leasing sustains programs)
- **ED-INV:** Investment attraction (leveraged creation of regional CQE)

Strategic Resource Insights

- **Investment:** $805,480 across 4 projects
- **80/20 Investment Strategy:**
  80.7% ($650,000) → Revenue-generating assets (quota)
  11.2% ($90,480) → Knowledge infrastructure (assessment)
  6.2% ($50,000) → Human capital (training)
  1.9% ($15,000) → Organizational capacity (microgrant)
- **Compound Returns:** $650,000 quota investment → Lease revenue begins funding operations → Revenue + credibility attracts $3.8M pending requested investment
- **Asset Building:** 70,000 lbs sablefish + 500 lbs halibut quota generating ongoing revenue
- **Innovation:** Low-cost loans with conservation incentives (1% rate reduction)
- **Multiplier:** Enabling regional CQE to access more of the quota market

Mountain Top to Continental Shelf

"It's a salmon forest," Linda explains, invoking ASFT's SeaBank concept. "We wouldn't have salmon in the ocean if we didn't take care of habitat in the forest... everything that lives in the Tongass or swims in the sea here is dependent on the other." This systems-wide understanding—that forest partnerships and fisheries access, youth programs and quota banks, energy transitions and processing infrastructure all connect—represents SASS's deepest gift.

"Before SASS, we had a number of these initiatives in mind or started, but there was not a lot of capacity to grow them. SASS allowed us to take them and grow them to a level where they are sustainable... going from an idea to a scalable program," says Linda, describing SASS's contribution.

A young person in Southeast Alaska can now envision a different path to fishing—one that doesn't require a hotel-sized loan or family wealth. They can train on a safe boat, lease affordable quota, build equity through conservation leadership, and eventually own their place in the fleet. They can deliver fish to local processors, strengthening their community's food security. They can participate in management decisions, their voices strengthened by collective ownership. They can succeed, grow grey, and steward the next generation after them with care, sharing, and a sense of abundance.

"How do you help endow communities with revenue streams and assets that are mission aligned?" Linda asks, identifying the question SASS helped answer. Through investment in productive assets that generate both income and opportunity rather than through charity or subsidization. Not by changing the rules of the game, but by ensuring everyone can afford to play.

Things are starting to look different now in Southeast Alaska's harbors—younger, more accessible, more anchored in community. "We still have a lot of work to do to reach our vision of thriving, locally accessible, community-based fisheries," says Linda, "but thanks to the SASS investment in our collective work, we are now on course."

6.7

Time to Sow and See it Grow: Weaving Food Sovereignty for Hoonah

Partner: Hoonah Indian Association **Location: Hoonah** **Interviewee: Ian Johnson**

Projects	Funder	Award Amount	Investment Category
Hoonah Legacy Roads to Trails Project	USFS via Spruce Root	$1,000,000	Natural Resources
Snow Pack Monitoring and Deer Strategy	USFS	$374,999	Tribal & Indigenous Interests
Sustaining Local Accredited Fisheries Science Education	USFS via Spruce Root	$180,000	Tribal & Indigenous Interests
Xunaa Community Market Microgrant	USDA-RD via SEC	$15,000	Community Capacity
Supporitng Project: SSP Hoonah Community Catalyst	USDA Coordination, Navigation, Visioning via Spruce Root	$126,000 over 3 yrs	Community Capacity

"Two heads of romaine for $3. Bundle of bok choy—$3.99. Big bundle of lemon basil—$3." Ian Johnson recites the prices at the Xunaa Community Market with satisfaction. Just three years after COVID laid bare Hoonah's food vulnerability—when bare market shelves became the norm—the community is sowing the seeds of a different future. While the impressive 30x60 foot greenhouse that now anchors this transformation wasn't built with SASS funds, it's SASS's "backbone funding" and dedicated, hard work by the Hoonah Indian Association (HIA) that has woven together the infrastructure, knowledge systems, and pathways making food sovereignty possible in this community of 800.

Laying the Foundation

"We created these dreams of what we wanted to do, but it's taken a lot of work to get them off the ground," reflects Ian, who serves as both HIA's Environmental Department lead and Hoonah's Community Catalyst for the Sustainable Southeast Partnership (SSP). In this dual role—part of a network of change-makers spread across Southeast Alaska who connect resources, people, and ideas—Ian has spent nearly a decade nurturing Hoonah's food sovereignty vision.

Some of the work towards this dream began in 2016. When five community members—elders to high school students—traveled to Prince of Wales Island to study greenhouses, they returned "fired up," but funding for the infrastructure proved elusive. Moby, a mobile greenhouse, visited in 2017 as a demonstration project, engaging students like Ted Elliott who, at 12, began a journey that would lead him through Ian's department and into Tribal construction work—still connected to the land-based work that shaped him.

Then COVID arrived. "The writing was already on the wall and then the elephant was in the room—COVID shattered our supply chains and the shelves were bare—we needed better food security," Ian explains. "It was just a stark reminder." When $18 cabbage became reality, the urgency crystallized. A 2022 SSP funding tour brought philanthropists who immediately grasped the community's vision, unlocking initial greenhouse funding. By 2024, nine different funders had contributed to construction of a heated facility capable of year-round production, with 90 hydroponic towers that can grow 4,680 heads of lettuce, leafy greens, or herbs simultaneously, plus 100 vine crops on the other side. But infrastructure alone isn't enough. That's where SASS entered the story.

Sown Dreams

"The beauty of SASS funding is the backbone funding over five years. It's not turn and burn," Ian emphasizes. This patient capital has enabled HIA to weave together seemingly disparate initiatives into a coherent vision of community self-determination and food sovereignty.

The most direct food security investments came through a Southeast Conference microgrant which established the farmers market infrastructure: point-of-sale systems compatible with SNAP benefits, business licensing, vendor recruitment, signage, and branding for what would become the Xunaa Community Market. Another microgrant supported Tlingit potato cultivation work with Ecotrust—a project that has flourished beyond expectations. In 2024, HIA planted about 4 gallons of seed potato into their garden. By harvest time in mid-September, the yield was bountiful. K-5 students joined for the harvest and beyond the 5 gallons kept for the next season's seed, the rest of the potatoes were shared with elders at the Senior Center and sent home with every student—food sovereignty as intergenerational celebration.

A broader impact of SASS lies in how it enabled HIA to connect these food initiatives to broader work. Consider the federal subsistence advocacy efforts, where SASS funds support youth learning about policy. And the project with Rural Alaska Students in One-Health Research (RASOR) students who study hydroponic growing using the greenhouse's equipment—botany lessons that directly connect to food production. Or the Legacy

Roads to Trails project, which received funding to develop recreation infrastructure. These trails don't just provide recreation; they're being actively enhanced as food production sites. With Hoonah residents yearning for more options for local berry picking, HIA partnered with the City of Hoonah and the Alaska Villages Initiative to enhance blueberry habitat along the Historic Spasski Trail by pruning back competing shrubs, thinning the canopy, and planting additional blueberry bushes. The trail development includes sophisticated planning and technology to identify prime growing areas. These enhanced blueberry patches turn trails into productive food landscapes that serve both recreation and subsistence needs.

Even the weather stations deployed at 800 and 1,500 feet serve food security by providing novel climate data essential for understanding growing and hunting conditions, water supply for the hydroelectric system, and even landslide risks.

"Five out of five," Ian rates working with SASS funding partners, praising their flexibility and responsiveness. When the Forest Service funding was "the only thing I knew I could count on" during federal budget uncertainty, SASS provided stability. When community planning for trails took two years instead of one, SASS adapted. When the greenhouse construction delayed the farmers market launch, the microgrant flexed to accommodate the timeline. SSP provided startup funding for utilities. This flexibility was crucial for navigating the complexity of food sovereignty work.

"There're a lot of partners involved—leveraging that network has been really important," Ian notes. The City partners on trail development that enhances food access. Federal and state agencies gather around the deer management table, addressing competition from outside hunters that threatens subsistence harvests. But Ian understands these tables require more than presence—they need accurate information. Ian advocates for fellow hunters to accurately report their harvest data, by sharing that good, local data helps federal and state managers make decisions that best reflect

Hoonah's needs—such as recent efforts to shorten the season for out-of-town hunters.

Growing Good People, Growing Good Community

The first week of the farmers market featured only HIA—"just us so far"—but they're actively recruiting and aim to grow to ten vendors. The vision extends beyond simple commerce: "This is for local people selling to local people—not tourism focused. It's a regular outlet for local entrepreneurs to sell local things to local people." The greenhouse's capacity to "more than meet Hoonah's need" means developing new markets and relationships—potentially selling local produce at fair prices to people in surrounding communities.

"We're setting ourselves up really well with local youth—stopping the outflow from our community, stopping the brain drain," Ian articulates a vision where food production, land stewardship, and economic opportunity converge—creating diverse opportunities for young people to stay and thrive in Hoonah.

The Alaska Youth Stewards—supported by SASS through various funding streams—exemplify this convergence. Program participants from Ted Elliott's generation now study fisheries management and federal subsistence policy, join the Hoonah Native Forest Partnership (HNFP), or conduct hydroponic experiments in the greenhouse. HNPF alone employs 6 crew members—half under age 21—who work across everything from stream restoration to documenting miles of previously unmapped coho salmon habitat, expanding the community's understanding of its food resources.

"We're creating opportunities around land stewardship topics, integrating culture and land stewardship, and having traditional values guide us there," Ian explains. Growing and sharing food is a pathway to growing the next generation of stewards who understand that tending greenhouse towers, monitoring stream temperatures, building trails to berry patches, and advocating in federal policy processes all connect to the same goal: a thriving, self-determined community.

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A Sense of Abundance

SASS resources have supported various new approaches to how Hoonah attends to food security and food sovereignty:

Structural Changes:

Beyond the physical infrastructure of market stalls and trail networks, SASS has enabled new institutional arrangements. The Xunaa Community Market operates as its own entity under Tribal ownership and its point-of-sale system with SNAP compatibility ensures food access and equity for all community members. Good Neighbor Authority agreements give HIA genuine autonomy in deploying federal funds. Weather stations provide community-controlled climate data. These aren't just projects but new frameworks for community-led development that Ian, as an SSP community catalyst, can share across the regional network.

Relational Changes:

"It was really easy to get people engaged on local recreation development—102 responses was our highest survey response rate ever," Ian notes, describing how SASS projects have activated community participation. The city council now co-funds trail work. Federal and state managers sit at the table with community members discussing deer management—"We're not always solving all the problems, but at least we're all in one space talking about them." Youth gaining technical skills through college-level courses also connect with elders through subsistence activities and immerse themselves in traditional knowledge systems.

Transformative Changes:

"Recreation in general is very, very difficult to fund... we wouldn't be developing any recreation opportunities or doing deer-related work without SASS," Ian reflects. But now Hoonah envisions "a 20-mile trail network that we can all just jump on—and it'll all be locally built, part of our local job economy." The weather stations aim to "help us prevent public health emergencies from landslides—to avoid that type of catastrophe in our community." The greenhouse will provide the community with year-round produce at Juneau prices. Youth see their futures in their homeland rather than elsewhere. Food security expands from emergency response to community celebration. These aren't just projects but holistic frameworks for community-led development that Ian, as an SSP community catalyst, can share across the regional network.

Outcome Patterns

- **CC-INF:** Community infrastructure (farmers market, enhanced berry trails)
- **CC-YOU:** Youth development (AYS learning hydroponic growing, policy advocacy)
- **CC-NTW:** Network/relationship building (Multi-jurisdictional partnership model in HNFP and also for trail route planning)
- **CC-SVC:** Service delivery improvements (SNAP EBT compatibility improving food access)
- **IL-CUL:** Cultural practice strengthening (Tlingit potato cultivation)
- **ES-SUB:** Subsistence resource protection (deer management advocacy)
- **XC-SUS:** Sustainability models (greenhouse feeding community at Juneau prices)

Strategic Resource Insights

- **Investment:** $1,569,999 across 4 projects (largest case study investment)
- **"Backbone Funding":** 5-year commitment enabling patient, integrated approach
- **Systems Thinking:** Multi-pronged approach to building food security
- **Leverage:** SASS stability amplified through 9 greenhouse funders

Time to Grow

Today, as the biweekly Xunaa Community Market has started its first season, there's more being harvested in Hoonah than just produce. These projects by HIA demonstrate what becomes possible when federal funding truly trusts communities to advance their own solutions. The romaine that sells for $3—grown 100 feet away rather than barged from Seattle—represents food security. The Tribal employee who grew it represents economic sovereignty. The youth who learned hydroponic techniques, shared with elders, and studied federal resource policy represent the next generation of leaders. The trails being carved to berry patches represent cultural continuity. The weather information collected at 1,500 feet represents climate resilience and data sovereignty. The potatoes shared by K-5 students with their families represent food as community joy.

"It took a lot of learning on our side to bring these dreams to reality," Ian admits. Some infrastructure came from other sources. Some connections seem indirect. But SASS understood something essential: community thriving isn't just supported project by project but through patient investment in the interconnected systems that sustain communities. As Ian puts it, capturing the community-guided principle at the heart of HIA: "It's all founded on integrating local knowledge into the work."

From $18 a head of cabbage to $3. From bare shelves to 4,680 heads of leafy greens growing year-round. From youth exodus to career pathways in food and land stewardship. From isolated projects to integrated systems. Hoonah is growing food in a way that celebrates its sovereignty—with backbone funding that understands sown dreams take time to grow.

07 EMERGENT LEARNING

This evaluation reveals patterns that transcend individual projects or partnerships. These meta-learnings, distilled from interviews, case studies, and portfolio analysis, illuminate why SASS succeeded where other federal funding efforts can fall short—and provide the foundation for the recommendations that follow.

7.1 Trust + Flexibility = Transformation

A significant finding is the correlation between trust-based relationships and transformative outcomes. Every case study participant rated their funding partnership 5 out of 5—not because paperwork was efficient, but because trust replaced compliance as the operating principle. This trust manifested through concrete mechanisms: responsive reporting that emphasized dialogue and learning over extensive documentation, one-week microgrant deployment versus nine-month application cycles, and the ability to pivot resources when lawsuits halted work or opportunities emerged. Lee House captured how SASS changed federal staff perspectives: "When I would speak with federal agencies, people would be going above and beyond before, but now the relationship building was part of their jobs, working in this relational way, SASS created this expectation within the agencies."

The flexibility this trust enabled wasn't merely administrative convenience—it unlocked innovation. When communities could fund traditionally ineligible but essential expenses (food for gatherings, backbone coordination, equipment), holistic solutions emerged. When Terra Verde identified an immediate training need, Spruce Root responded within days. When greenhouse timelines extended in Hoonah, connected initiatives adjusted accordingly. This responsiveness allowed communities to work at an appropriate pace for them, honoring that transformation takes time while seizing time-sensitive opportunities. Marina Anderson captured the potential of this approach: "If all federal funding was like this, we might really be able to get done what we want done."

7.2 Relationships as Infrastructure

SASS revealed that the most important infrastructure isn't physical—it's relational. The monthly calls where former competitors became collaborators, the biweekly check-ins that made federal-community partnership routine, the youth networks connecting across communities—these relationships proved more valuable than any single project output.

This relational infrastructure manifested at every level. Federal partners became team members rather than overseers. Regional Strengthening Partners developed standing meetings that outlasted SASS requirements. Communities that historically competed began sharing crews, techniques, and dreams. Indigenous knowledge holders and federal scientists began to see each other as partners in shared stewardship rather than adversaries in jurisdictional battles.

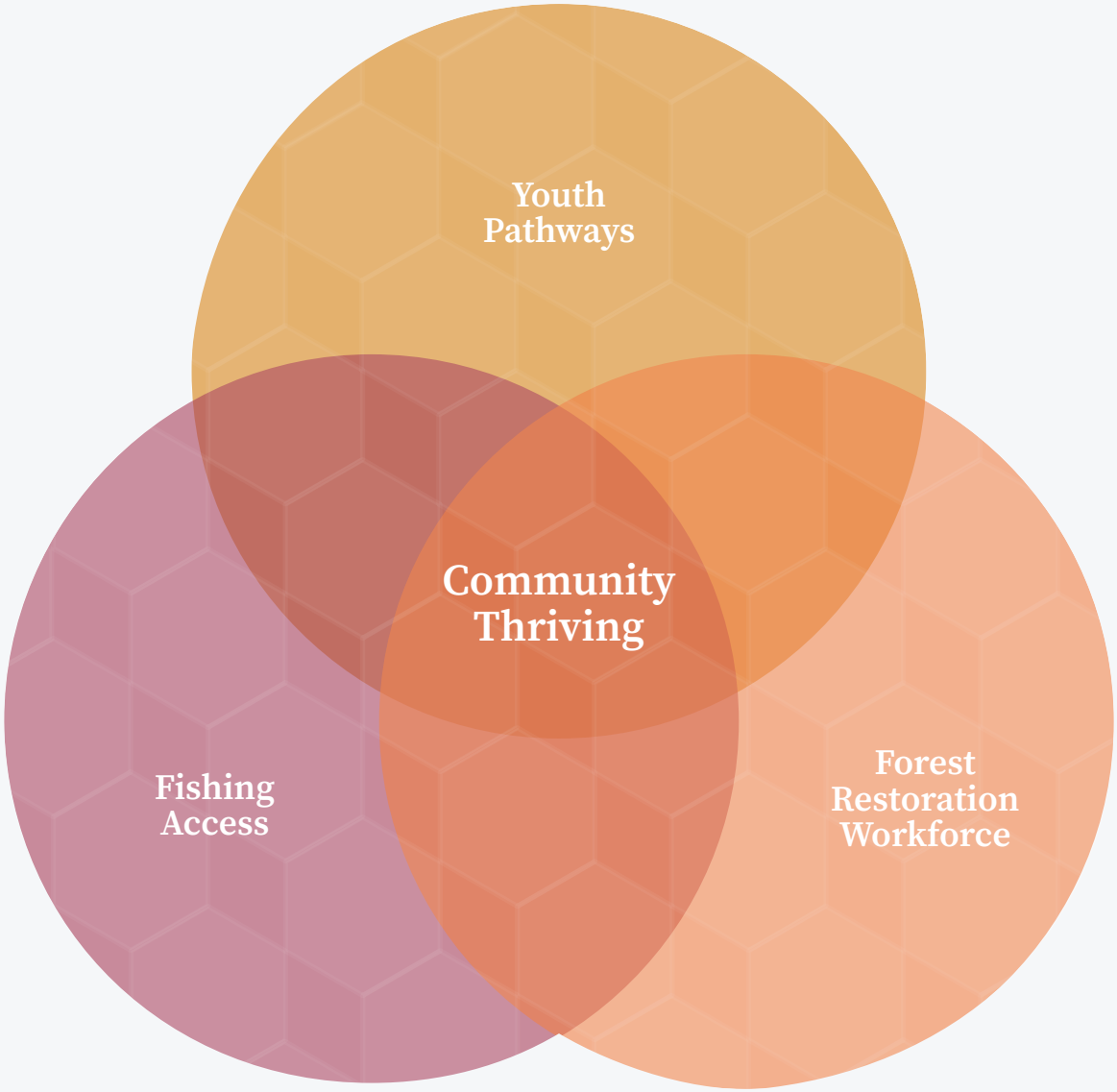
When SASS invested in convening, coordination, and connection, the returns multiplied exponentially. Every gathering sparked new collaborations. Every relationship deepened trust. Every connection strengthened the web of mutual support that makes community impacts sustainable.

7.3 Community Assets Create Compound Returns

Unlike typical grants that fund activities, SASS enabled investment in assets—and the returns compounded in ways that linear project funding never could. The pattern repeated across domains:

- **Financial Assets:** ASFT's quota bank generates ongoing revenue while creating pathways to fishing careers less weighed down with debt

Figure 5: The Compound Effect: Interwoven Returns



SASS investments create interconnected cycles of benefit. Forest example: youth trained in stewardship become forest workers who earn wages to support fishing families. Fishing access keeps cultural practices alive, inspiring the next generation to stay home. Forest capacity building creates local careers that strengthen all sectors while restoring critical salmon habitat. In Southeast Alaska's communities, each investment ripples through every other, creating compound returns across generations. These three examples represent the broader web of SASS investments in food sovereignty, Indigenous interests, and environmental stewardship—all of which strengthen and sustain each other. Like the traditional weavings of Southeast Alaska, these investments intertwine to create something stronger than individual threads.

> “IF ALL FEDERAL FUNDING WAS LIKE THIS, WE MIGHT REALLY BE ABLE TO GET DONE WHAT WE WANT DONE”

- **Knowledge Assets:** Trained forest inventory crews can now bid on professional con tracts previously held by outside firms
- **Physical Assets:** Greenhouses feed communities while teaching youth both traditional knowledge and modern hydroponics
- **Network Assets:** The Sustainable Southeast Partnership grew from 45 to 130+ partners, creating self-reinforcing collaboration

This asset-building approach reflects Indigenous wisdom about seven-generation thinking and the interconnected nature of life in Southeast Alaska. In these communities, boundaries between economic, cultural, and environmental systems are artificial—everything flows together like the tides that connect the islands.

Figure 5 illustrates how SASS investments created an interconnected web of regenerating benefits. A youth trained through Alaska Youth Stewards might become a forest crew leader, whose wages allow their family to maintain fishing traditions, strengthening cultural practices that keep the next generation rooted in place. Each investment ripples outward, touching and strengthening every other part of the community fabric. Unlike grants that fund isolated activities, SASS recognized that investing in one area—whether youth, fishing access, or workforce development—inevitably strengthens all others.

7.4 From Consultation to Community-Led Creation

"I heard President Peterson (T&H) say: usually it is the tail wagging the dog with federal funding and now it is finally the dog wagging the tail," shared Lee House, remembering President Peterson's powerful metaphor. This quote and this evaluation reveals both an achievement of SASS and an unfinished journey for the federal government: centering Indigenous leadership and community wisdom. Where SASS succeeded in these regards, important impacts followed. Youth earning wages to practice traditional subsistence. Tribes setting restoration priorities on federal lands. Over 50% of funding flowing to Indigenous priorities.

Yet the journey from consultation to true community-led creation remains incomplete. Having Tlingit & Haida as a Regional Strengthening Partner marked progress, but full realization of Indigenous authority over resources currently managed by federal agencies—self-determination and direct management over homelands and waters, rather than participation in crafting and applying policies and strategies—awaits. The lesson is clear: transformation accelerates where Indigenous peoples lead rather than advise, direct rather than influence, control rather than access.

The path forward requires moving beyond "a seat at the table" to recognizing that, in Southeast Alaska, it has always been an Indigenous table. As Ray Paddock explained: "We were sitting at the table with them and giving them the answers for what we need." Federal agencies and other partners are the guests who must learn appropriate protocols, reciprocity, and respect for the Indigenous peoples who have thrived on these lands for millennia.

7.5 Section Conclusion: Lessons as Foundation

These patterns—trust enabling flexibility, relationships as infrastructure, assets generating compound returns, and Indigenous leadership driving change—represent wisdom from three years of community-driven experimentation in how federal investment can catalyze genuine change.

The question now isn't whether these lessons can be applied elsewhere—the 4+ out of 5 replicability ratings confirm they can. Will federal agencies, communities, and regions have the will to embrace what SASS proved possible: that communities know their own needs, that trust generates better returns than control, that patient investment in relationships and assets creates lasting impact. These lessons lay the foundation for the recommendations that follow—what Southeast Alaska discovered when federal funding trusted local wisdom.

> “USUALLY IT IS THE TAIL WAGGING THE DOG WITH FEDERAL FUNDING AND NOW IT IS FINALLY THE DOG WAGGING THE TAIL”

08 FUTURE DIRECTIONS & RECOMMENDATIONS

The insights that follow emerge not from external analysis but from the wisdom of those who designed, implemented, and lived SASS. Across months of conversations—from coordinators watching teenagers deliver salmon to elders, to federal partners reimagining their roles, to Tribal leaders asserting stewardship rights in new ways—patterns emerged about what worked, what remains unfinished, and what could come next. The recommendations in this section weave together these voices: the hope of community organizers, the experience of Regional Strengthening Partners, and the perspectives of federal staff. They mainly spoke of relationships transformed, of funds deployed and of power shared, of addressing immediate needs with seventh-generation vision. What follows attempts to honor their collective wisdom about how to sustain, deepen, and spread the impacts that SASS began.

8.1 Systems Change Opportunities

SASS has demonstrated that federal funding can move from "power over" to "power with" communities—but the journey toward "power to" communities remains incomplete. The initiative revealed three levels of systems change opportunities that mirror the iceberg model of transformation:

- **Conditions (Surface Level):** While SASS successfully changed funding mechanisms and reporting requirements, future initiatives must institutionalize these changes beyond individual champions. This means embedding flexibility into policy, creating permanent pathways for rapid fund deployment, and evolving reporting systems that prioritize meaningful accountability over lengthy paperwork—streamlined enough to reduce burden while robust enough to capture real outcomes and support continuous improvement.

- **Capacity (Mid Level):** SASS built local capacity, but federal agencies themselves need parallel transformation. Future initiatives should expand the catalyst model beyond the OneUSDA leadership team, embedding facilitatory leadership throughout agencies. This requires sustained investment in federal staff development—not just training on new procedures, but thorough engagement with values of humility, partnership, and community expertise.
- **Culture (Deep Level):** The deepest opportunity lies in completing the shift from federal agencies as directors to federal agencies as facilitators. This cultural evolution requires centering humility as a core value—recognizing that communities don't need more experts but rather partners and resources. It means being willing to experiment, fail, learn, and adapt alongside communities rather than imposing predetermined solutions.

8.2 Replication and Scaling Potential

The SASS model's replicability depends less on specific mechanisms than on commitments. Successful replication requires:

Foundational Elements:

- Political will to trust communities over bureaucratic processes
- Existing regional networks to build upon rather than replace
- Long-term commitment transcending political cycles
- Willingness to measure transformation, not just outputs

Scaling Strategies:

- Start with relationship mapping and strengthening (6-12 months minimum)
- Invest in conveners and connectors who weave networks
- Create feedback loops that inform continuous adaptation
- Document and share learning in accessible, story-based formats
- Build coalitions of federal champions across agencies

Critical Success Factors:

- Regional facilitators with established trust and relationships
- Federal staff with both authority and commitment to partnership
- Multi-year funding horizons (3-5 years minimum)
- Evaluation approaches that capture relationship quality and power shifts

> “The new ways people are relating and getting work done to move projects forward will persist well beyond when the funding runs out”

8.3 Policy and Practice Recommendations

8.3.1 For Federal Funders:

Be Devoted to Sustainable Outcomes: Move beyond project-based thinking to invest in community assets and ownership. Fund revenue-generating infrastructure, support network building, and prioritize interventions that communities can sustain independently.

Foster "Walking the Path Together": Replace oversight with accompaniment. Attend regional gatherings, join monthly calls as team members, celebrate successes and problem-solve challenges together. Presence signals partnership. Walk the path together.

Prioritize Transparency: Share power by sharing information. Share information with the public about what projects happening in their communities. Be clear about constraints while maximizing flexibility within them. When challenges arise—funding freezes, policy changes—communicate early and honestly.

Invest in Interconnected Pipelines: Recognize that youth development, workforce training, infrastructure, and governance are not separate initiatives but interwoven systems. Fund the connections between them.

Ask Questions, Don't Prescribe Solutions: Replace RFPs that predetermine outcomes with open calls that ask communities to identify priorities. Trust that communities understand their own needs better than distant agencies.

Attend to Structure While Retaining Flexibility: Create frameworks that provide meaningful accountability without rigidity. Develop reporting systems that capture outcomes and learning rather than just activities, while enabling pivoting within broad goals. Support partners in building their reporting capacity through templates, training, and feedback loops that improve practice over time.

8.3 Policy and Practice Recommendations (continued)

8.3.2 For Federally-Funded Organizations:

Be Ready for Change: Federal funding remains vulnerable to political shifts, as seen with recent funding freezes and policy reversals. Build diverse funding portfolios, maintain reserves, and create contingency plans while advocating for sustained federal partnership.

Center Cultural Values in All Programs: Whether building workforce capacity or restoring watersheds, root initiatives in local cultural values and knowledge systems. Cultural alignment matters as much as technical skills.

Embrace the Facilitator Role: Like federal agencies learning to facilitate rather than direct, funded organizations will be more affective if they facilitate community leadership rather than implementing external solutions.

Build Learning Networks: Actively connect with other funded organizations. Share challenges openly. The "watershed therapy group" model demonstrates how former competitors can become collaborators when scarcity thinking shifts to abundance.

Document Transformation, Not Only Activities: Build robust reporting practices that capture stories of relationship changes, power shifts, and mental model evolution alongside concrete outcomes. Invest in evaluation capacity that demonstrates both accountability and systems-level impact. These narratives and data together matter more than activity counts alone for understanding true impact and improving practice.

Cultivate Next Generation Leadership: Every program should include pathways for emerging leaders and youth. Today's program participant should become tomorrow's program director.

8.4 A Path Forward for Southeast Alaska

Throughout interviews, case studies, and project reports, Southeast Alaska's leaders and practitioners consistently identified both tremendous achievements and unfinished work. Their collective vision for fully realizing SASS's transformative potential includes:

Immediate Priorities:

- Secure bridge funding to maintain momentum during federal transitions
- Formalize the collaborative networks that emerged organically
- Document and share successful models for replication
- Strengthen Indigenous governance roles in all initiatives

Medium-Term Goals:

- Establish permanent regional funding mechanisms building on SASS investments
- Create additional, formal pathways from youth programs to professional careers
- Develop regional markets for products from SASS-supported enterprises
- Build climate resilience strategies incorporating traditional knowledge

Long-Term Vision:

- Southeast Alaska as a global model for Indigenous-led sustainable development
- Federal agencies as true partners rather than overseers
- Thriving communities with youth choosing to stay home
- Landscapes and seascapes managed through braided knowledge systems (e.g. integrated traditional, technical, scientific systems)

The path forward requires maintaining what Robert Venables called the "boringly normal"—relationships and processes so embedded they transcend political cycles. It requires recognizing that the question isn't whether communities can manage federal resources effectively—SASS has definitively proven they can—but whether federal agencies can sustain the humility to let them. Keith Perkins captured the community sentiment for Southeast: "give us funding and stay out of our way." Not as abandonment but to recognize that communities understand their own needs and will innovate durable solutions for Southeast Alaska better than programs designed in Washington, DC. "We've shown you get what your money's worth and it's what the communities want," said Ralph Wolfe, echoed by Ray Paddock: "This approach is the best approach."

"All this happened so quickly, some amazing things happened," reflected Barb Miranda, describing SASS as "a rewiring of how agencies do business." This rewiring is not a destination but a journey even as, in Alana Peterson's words, "by the end, we don't care about calling it SASS—this is more about the way we work." The initiative has become embedded in practice. And Lee House captures the lasting impact: "SASS was an acronym and a moment, but the new ways people are relating and getting work done to move projects forward will persist well beyond when the funding runs out."

As Dan Lesh succinctly stated, replicating SASS is "easy to do, if there is a will to do it." The challenge moving forward isn't technical but elemental: will federal agencies maintain the will to share power, trust community wisdom, and facilitate rather than direct? Will funded organizations resist the pull back toward competition and isolation? Will all partners maintain focus on sustainable community futures rather than short-term outputs?

Southeast Alaska showed what's possible when, as Marina Anderson poetically described, communities see "this water not as a division but a connector"—when an entire region operates as "one community" working toward shared flourishing.

SASS has illuminated a path open to those with the will to walk it together. ■

Appendix 1: Methodology Details

This appendix provides comprehensive information on the methodological approach used for the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy (SASS) evaluation, including analytical frameworks, data collection procedures, and analysis techniques.

Analytical Framework Specifications

Partnership Dynamics & Systems Change Assessment

The Systems Change Assessment employed an adapted version of the FSG Systems Change framework, examining transformations across three interconnected levels:

Structural Change Analysis Framework:

- Policies and Regulations: Changes in formal rules, policies, and regulatory approaches
- Resource Flows: Transformations in how money, people, and resources are allocated
- Physical Infrastructure: New physical structures and platforms developed through SASS
- Institutional Practices: Modifications to organizational procedures and protocols

Relational Change Analysis Framework:

- Power Dynamics: Shifts in decision authority, influence, and voice
- Quality of Connections: Changes in trust, communication, and relationship strength
- Communication Patterns: New mechanisms and approaches for information sharing
- Collaboration Approaches: Transformed methods for working across organizational boundaries

Transformative Change Analysis Framework:

- Mental Models: Shifts in underlying assumptions and thought patterns
- Cultural Narratives: Evolved stories and framings about development and conservation
- Value Systems: Changed priorities and judgments about what matters
- Assumptions: Modified taken-for-granted beliefs about roles and relationships
- Participation vs. Authority: Evolution from representation to decision power
- Knowledge Integration: Incorporation of Indigenous knowledge systems
- Cultural Approach Adoption: Integration of Indigenous ways of working
- Self-Determination Advances: Progress toward Indigenous autonomy and control

Collective Portfolio Outcome Pattern Harvest

The Pattern Harvest used a comprehensive pattern codebook organized across five domains, with specific codes within each:

Economic Development Patterns (ED):

- ED-JOB: Job creation and retention
- ED-BUS: New business development
- ED-MKT: Market access improvements
- ED-DIV: Economic diversification
- ED-INF: Infrastructure development
- ED-WRK: Workforce skills development
- ED-INV: Investment attraction/leverage

Environmental Stewardship Patterns (ES):

- ES-REST: Ecological restoration
- ES-MON: Monitoring and data collection

- ES-MGT: Resource management improvements
- ES-CLM: Climate resilience strategies
- ES-BIO: Biodiversity conservation
- ES-SUB: Subsistence resource protection

Community Capacity Patterns (CC):

- CC-ORG: Organizational strength/development
- CC-SKL: Community skills enhancement
- CC-INF: Community infrastructure
- CC-YOU: Youth engagement/development
- CC-SVC: Service delivery improvements
- CC-NTW: Network/relationship building

Indigenous Leadership Patterns (IL):

- IL-GOV: Governance and decision authority
- IL-KNW: Traditional knowledge integration
- IL-CUL: Cultural practice strengthening
- IL-RSC: Control over resources
- IL-VCE: Voice in regional institutions
- IL-MGT: Management of lands/resources

Cross-Cutting Patterns (XC):

- XC-COL: Collaboration mechanisms
- XC-INO: Innovation approaches
- XC-SUS: Sustainability models
- XC-LEV: Leverage strategies
- XC-REP: Replication potential
- XC-COM: Communication/storytelling

For each identified pattern, the analysis included:

- Pattern description
- Supporting evidence (with source references)
- Strength assessment (1-3 scale)
- Geographic scope
- Pattern relationships and co-occurrences

Table A-1: Pattern Frequency Across Full Portfolio (32 Reports for 41 Projects)

Pattern Code	Pattern Description	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
Cross-Cutting (XC) Patterns				
XC-COL	Collaboration mechanisms	31/32	97%	Universal SASS characteristic
XC-SUS	Sustainability models	25/32	78%	Long-term viability emphasis
XC-INO	Innovation approaches	22/32	69%	New approaches prevalent
XC-LEV	Leverage strategies	10/32	31%	Multiplier effect focus
XC-REP	Replication potential	10/32	31%	Scalable models emerging
XC-COM	Communication/storytelling	4/32	13%	Growing narrative focus

Pattern Code	Pattern Description	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
Community Capacity (CC) Patterns				
CC-NTW	Network/ relationship building	27/32	84%	Critical for sustainability
CC-ORG	Organizational strength/ development	24/32	75%	Capacity building focus
CC-SKL	Community skills enhancement	24/32	75%	Technical capacity growth
CC-YOU	Youth engagement/ development	17/32	53%	Next generation focus
CC-INF	Community infrastructure	6/32	19%	Physical community assets created
CC-SVC	Service delivery improvements	5/32	16%	Enhanced community services
Indigenous Leadership (IL)				
IL-GOV	Governance and decision authority	20/32	63%	Major transformation driver
IL-KNW	Traditional knowledge integration	16/32	50%	Indigenous knowledge valued
IL-MGT	Management of lands/resources	14/32	44%	Growing stewardship role
IL-CUL	Cultural practice strengthening	13/32	41%	Cultural revitalization
IL-RSC	Control over resources	13/32	41%	Resource sovereignty advancing
IL-VCE	Voice in regional institutions	8/32	25%	Institutional representation

Pattern Code	Pattern Description	Frequency	Percentage	Interpretation
Economic Development (ED)				
ED-WRK	Workforce skills development	19/32	59%	Skills & employment priority
ED-JOB	Job creation and retention	14/32	44%	Direct employment impact
ED-INV	Investment attraction/ leverage	12/32	38%	Funding multiplication
ED-INF	Infrastructure development	10/32	31%	Physical economic assets
ED-MKT	Market access improvements	7/32	22%	Market connectivity
ED-DIV	Economic diversification	6/32	19%	New economic sectors
ED-BUS	New business development	3/32	9%	Entrepreneurship support
Environmental Stewardship (ES)				
ES-MGT	Resource management improvements	20/32	63%	Better stewardship practices
ES-SUB	Subsistence resource protection	10/32	31%	Traditional use protection
ES-MON	Monitoring and data collection	9/32	28%	Science-based approaches
ES-REST	Ecological restoration	8/32	25%	Active restoration work
ES-BIO	Biodiversity conservation	5/32	16%	Species/habitat focus
ES-CLM	Climate resilience strategies	4/32	13%	Climate adaptation emerging

Resource Allocation & Strategic Learning Analysis

The Resource Allocation Analysis employed several analytical frameworks:

Investment Classification Matrix:

- Primary funding category (4 SASS categories)
- Project size tier (small/medium/large)
- Geographic scope (local/sub-regional/regional)
- Implementation timeframe (short/medium/long term)

Effectiveness Pattern Identification Framework:

- Investment type classifications
- Preliminary outcome metrics
- Success factors and enabling conditions
- Implementation challenges and solutions
- Replication potential assessment

Leverage Strategy Analysis Framework:

- Funding leverage ratio calculation
- Leverage mechanism categorization
- Sustainable funding model identification
- Resource multiplier effect documentation

Investment Return Patterns:

- Investment size (low/medium/high) assessment
- Return magnitude (limited/moderate/significant) assessment
- Success factor identification for each category combination

Interview Protocol and Participant List

Interview Protocols

Three tailored interview protocols were developed to gather consistent information while accommodating different perspectives:

Regional Strengthening Partner Interview Protocol:

- Background & Implementation (5 questions)
- Partnership Dynamics (5 questions)
- Indigenous Leadership & Cultural Shifts (4 questions)
- Investment & Impact (5 questions with rating scales)
- Lessons & Future Directions (4 questions)
- Closing (2 questions)

Case Study Interview Protocol:

- Project Context & Development (5 questions)
- Partnership Dynamics & Collaboration (5 questions)
- Resource Use & Strategic Approach (5 questions)
- Outcomes & Impacts (5 questions)
- Lessons & Replication Potential (6 questions)
- Closing (3 questions)

Federal Partner Interview Protocol:

- Program Design & Implementation (5 questions)
- Partnership Evolution (5 questions)
- Systems Change Assessment (5 questions)
- Impact Assessment (5 questions)
- Lessons & Future Directions (5 questions)

All protocols included a mix of open-ended questions and rating scales to enable both qualitative insights and quantitative comparison.

Participant List

Note: Specific participant names are listed in the final report; the following represents the participant categories.

Regional Strengthening Partners:

- Southeast Conference leadership (2 interviews)
- Spruce Root leadership (2 interviews)
- Tlingit & Haida leadership (2 interviews)

Federal Agency Representatives:

- USDA Forest Service (1 interview)
- USDA Rural Development (1 interview)
- USDA Natural Resources Conservation Service (0 interviews)

Case Study Participants:

- Project leads for each selected case study (7 interviews)

Additional Partners:

- SASS Storytelling Team (1 interview)

Data Collection and Analysis Procedures

Interview Implementation

- Interviews were conducted virtually
- Each interview lasted approximately 90 minutes
- Interviews were recorded with permission and transcribed for analysis
- Initial interviews with Regional Strengthening Partners were conducted first to establish context
- Case study interviews were conducted after preliminary analysis of RSP interviews
- Monthly SASS meetings were attended to observe partnership dynamics firsthand

Documentation Review

- Available reports and documentation were collected from RSPs
- A structured documentation synthesis template was applied to each document
- Information was extracted for all three methodological frameworks
- Gaps in documentation were identified and prioritized for follow-up
- Public-facing media and communications were collected for storytelling analysis

Analysis Procedures

The analysis followed a systematic, multi-phase process:

Phase 1: Initial Coding and Extraction

- Interview transcripts were coded according to the three methodological frameworks
- Documentation was systematically analyzed using standardized templates
- Initial patterns, systems changes, and strategic insights were documented
- Data gaps were identified and prioritized for follow-up

Phase 2: Cross-Interview Integration

- Findings from multiple interviews were synthesized to identify consistent themes
- Divergent perspectives were documented and analyzed
- Rating scale responses were aggregated to identify consensus areas
- Quote libraries were developed for each major finding

Phase 3: Cross-Method Triangulation

- Findings from each methodological approach were compared and integrated
- Supporting and contradictory evidence was documented
- Confidence levels were assigned based on triangulation results
- Case study selection was finalized based on integrated findings

Phase 4: Case Study Development

- In-depth case studies were developed to illustrate key findings
- Each case study integrated all three methodological lenses
- Visual elements were developed to enhance case presentation
- Case studies were validated with key partners

Phase 5: Portfolio-Level Synthesis

- Cross-cutting findings were synthesized at the portfolio level
- Systems change narratives were developed and refined
- Pattern relationships were mapped and analyzed

- Strategic learning recommendations were formulated

Database and Analysis Tools

- A structured database was created to organize project information
- Coding frameworks were implemented in analytical software
- Visualization templates were developed for key findings
- Cross-reference systems linked evidence across methodological frameworks

Longitudinal Analysis (Subset of Projects)

For the projects with multi-year documentation, additional analysis captured transformation over time:

- Individual year analysis using adapted templates focusing on evolution
- Multi-year synthesis documenting cumulative impacts and sustainability
- Integration of trajectory insights into portfolio-level findings

This approach provided deeper evidence of how SASS investments mature and compound over time, though it was limited to projects with consistent multi-year reporting.

Limitations and Validation Approaches

Methodological Limitations

Implementation Timing Limitations:

- Many SASS projects remain in active implementation
- Long-term impacts cannot yet be fully assessed
- Systems changes may still be evolving
- Mitigation approach: Focus on process outcomes, preliminary impacts, and indicators of systems change trajectories

Documentation Variability:

- Reporting detail and quality varied significantly across RSPs
- Some projects had comprehensive documentation while others had limited records
- Financial data detail was inconsistent
- Multi-year documentation gaps: While most SASS projects span multiple years, relatively complete annual documentation was shared for only ~69% of projects, limiting longitudinal analysis to this subset
- Mitigation approach: Prioritize interview data with documentation as supporting evidence

Attribution Challenges:

- Systems changes typically result from multiple factors beyond a single initiative
- Pre-existing efforts and concurrent initiatives influence outcomes
- External contextual factors impact results
- Mitigation approach: Focus on contribution analysis rather than attribution; document multiple influencing factors

Interview-Based Limitations:

- Retrospective recall of pre-SASS conditions may be imperfect
- Key partner perspectives may be influenced by current roles
- Not all relevant partners could be interviewed
- Mitigation approach: Triangulate across multiple interview sources; validate with available documentation

Scope Constraints:

- The evaluation timeframe limited the depth of investigation possible
- Geographic scope made comprehensive community engagement challenging
- The breadth of SASS initiatives required selective focus
- Mitigation approach: Strategic sampling of projects and partners; transparency about evaluation scope

Validation Approaches

Triangulation Methods:

- Cross-partner validation across different participant types
- Cross-method validation between interviews and documentation
- Cross-time validation comparing early and later implementation perspectives
- Cross-geography validation examining patterns across communities

Confidence Level Assessment:

- High confidence: Consistent evidence across multiple sources
- Medium confidence: Evidence from limited sources or with some inconsistencies
- Low confidence: Limited evidence or significant contradictions
- Confidence levels assigned and considered for all major findings

Partner Validation:

- Preliminary findings shared with key partners for feedback
- Case studies reviewed by project implementers
- Validation of specific findings with subject matter experts
- Interpretation validation through focused discussions

Alternative Explanation Examination:

- Systematic consideration of alternative explanations for observed changes
- Documentation of competing hypotheses where evidence was inconclusive
- Explicit acknowledgment of attribution limitations
- Careful language distinguishing correlation from causation

Transparency Measures:

- Clear documentation of data sources for all findings
- Explicit acknowledgment of information gaps
- Differentiation between direct evidence and inference
- Comprehensive documentation of analytical procedures

Through these methodological approaches, validation strategies, and transparent acknowledgment of limitations, this evaluation provides a credible assessment of SASS's impact while recognizing the evolving nature of this transformative initiative.

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WALKING THE PATH TOGETHER

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An Independent Evaluation By

Prism Kind, LLC

In Partnership With

Tlingit & Haida | Spruce Root | Southeast Conference

July 2025