



ALASKA
MARICULTURE
ALLIANCE

Alaska Mariculture Public Relations and Outreach Plan

The background is a collage of four grayscale images related to mariculture. Top left: A close-up of hands holding a large, textured shellfish. Top right: A woman wearing a hard hat and a life vest with a 'MUSTANG SURVIVAL' logo, smiling with goggles in her mouth. Bottom left: A man and a woman in waders holding up a large fish. Bottom right: A person in a wader standing on a boat, looking out at another small boat on the water.

ALASKA MARICULTURE ALLIANCE'S MISSION

Develop and support a robust and sustainable mariculture industry, producing shellfish and aquatic plants for the long-term benefit of Alaska's economy, environment, and communities.

PREPARED BY



RIISING TIDE
communications

The background of the page is a collage of four grayscale images related to oyster farming. The top-left image shows a close-up of a wooden bucket filled with oyster shells. The top-right image shows a dense cluster of oyster shells. The middle-left image shows a smiling man wearing a hard hat with the words 'GET ON BOARD' on it. The bottom image shows a person on a boat, likely an oyster farmer, with ropes and buoys visible. The text 'Contents' is in a large, bold, green font, underlined.

Contents

01

Background & Context 4

02

PR Plan Implementation 8

03

Goals and Outcomes of The PR Plan 10

04

Audiences 12

05

Messaging 16

06

Strategies. 18

07

Tactics 20

08

Metrics and Indicators of Success 26

Appendix 28

01 Background & Context

About the Alaska Mariculture Alliance

The Alaska Mariculture Alliance (AMA) was created in response to the final report of the Alaska Mariculture Task Force, which was established in 2016 to explore potential avenues for industry growth in Alaska. The report recommended the creation of the AMA to coordinate the many parties interested in the development of mariculture in Alaska. AMA's commitment to honoring traditional Indigenous knowledge and ways of life remains paramount, and as such, special consideration of this partner group is essential to AMA's mission and vision.

Alaska Mariculture Alliance’s mission:

“to develop and support a robust and sustainable mariculture industry, producing shellfish and aquatic plants for the long-term benefit of Alaska’s economy, environment, and communities.”

Project Purpose

The Alaska mariculture industry aims to develop a public relations, outreach, and engagement plan to inform stakeholders about shellfish and aquatic plant farming. As with any industry in its early phases, opportunities and challenges will require specific, targeted messaging. The plan will provide the entities and organizations tasked with communications about mariculture with the resources to communicate strategically and comprehensively. The Public Relations Plan is a vital element designated by the Governance, Coordination & Outreach component of the Alaska Mariculture Cluster (AMC) Build Back Better Regional Challenge grant, of which AMA is a sub-awardee.

Current Perceptions

The project brief for the Public Relations Plan identified a research phase as a key component of the plan’s development to understand the concerns held by communities, participants, and other relevant parties about the industry’s growth. The recommendations in this plan are the result of this research, which involved interviewing members of the AMC (Alaska Mariculture

Cluster) governing board, AMA mariculture liaisons, Tribal and Indigenous partners, current mariculture industry participants, economic development professionals, and other key voices. Interviewees provided vital insight into the current state of the industry, challenges, and opportunities. A team of contractors from Rising Tide Communications and Agnew::Beck conducted two rounds of interviews with partners and stakeholders from September 2023 through February 2024. Thirty-eight unique voices contributed their input, and the results were key themes and related potential public considerations that have informed the plan. As part of this research, AMA emphasized that the inclusion and encouragement of Alaska Native involvement in the plan’s development was a key objective, and over one-third of the interviews conducted represented Indigenous perspectives. The full interview summary report is available in the appendix.

Mariculture in Alaska is a burgeoning industry with untapped potential. It is the focus of speculation and a source of hope for the revitalization of coastal communities and economic prosperity. Many see an opportunity to find economies of scale and synergy with the commercial seafood industry at a welcome time, as that industry faces challenges. Many crucial voices need to be invited and considered as the industry grows.



Opportunities

Interviewees are excited about the prospects for a new industry with diverse market development opportunities.

Many interviewees voiced enthusiasm for the diversity of the market opportunities that fall under the banner of mariculture. The opportunities emerging from the shellfish industry are especially compelling, and for kelp, animal feed, and bioplastics/biofuels surfaced as the most interesting to interviewees.

Various opportunities for economic expansion and diversification were mentioned in interviews.

The opportunities range from increased federal funding options and additional grant opportunities for Tribal entities to new income streams for rural communities, including tourism, carbon markets, and environmental finance credits.

Interviewees see more potential opportunities than risks from an expanding mariculture industry.

Though there may have been less consensus around specific opportunities, the range of opportunities mentioned by interviewees was broader than the range of risks.

Risks

Interviewees agree that some of the most significant risks facing mariculture in Alaska stem from the underdeveloped nature of the markets.

Specific concerns and risks cited ranged from low real demand for kelp (although there is a lot of excitement and market chatter around kelp, the demand has not yet reached the market) to the supply of active shellfish production being insufficient to meet demand. There was also notable agreement that small markets run a real risk of being left behind as the larger markets come online.

Of equal concern to interviewees was the risk that subsidies from federal and other funding sources may be standing up nonviable businesses that smaller and emerging shops will not be able to compete with.

Current funding opportunities favor larger operations over smaller shops that are actively engaged in the market.

Processing capacity and infrastructure, especially for kelp, emerged as another top risk for the mariculture industry's ability to launch and scale.

New technology is needed to improve efficiency and effectiveness in the kelp market, but a lack of processing capacity across the industry was cited as an area of concern. Costs associated with shipping and supply chain infrastructure, in general, were mentioned as additional barriers to improving capacity for processing.

Areas of Misalignment and Conflicting Opinions

Permitting.

A few interviewees cited the permitting process and governance as significant barriers and risks to developing the mariculture industry. However, there were also comments that the permitting environment is a positive one. It also emerged that there is an opportunity to positively influence permitting with the State and protect Indigenous interests and traditional lands and land uses.

Communications.

Perhaps not a surprise, but there were conflicting opinions about communications within and surrounding mariculture opportunities. Some cited opportunities to increase awareness and participation within the industry, and that communications are generally positive. On the risks side, communication between interest groups was flagged as a barrier. More specifically, there is market confusion between the kelp and shellfish industries, and a perception that kelp is getting much of the attention.

Commercial fishing.

A benefit that emerged both directly and indirectly (i.e., as a subtext to other comments) was that the kelp and shellfish market opportunities could help shore up the struggling commercial fishing industry. However, it was also noted that there has been hesitation and a lack of investment in these markets from commercial fishermen themselves.

Climate change.

Climate change impacts were mentioned several times as environmental risk factors to consider as a new market develops. On the opportunities side, however, some interviewees highlighted that mariculture offered various solutions to climate impacts and environmental concerns, including water quality improvements, increased monitoring of the water due to increased activity, revitalization of wild shellfish stocks, and kelp as an input to reduce methane emissions from fertilizer.



02 PR Plan Implementation

Interviewees report being overwhelmed by the many different directions from which that information is being shared, leading to a paradoxical sense of both too much information and not enough. While, in an ideal scenario, one Alaska mariculture-focused organization has the capacity and resources to step up as the lead implementer of this communications plan, this is not currently the case. This plan has been re-drafted to reflect the need for a collaborative execution among multiple organizations to communicate about the mariculture industry to key audiences.

Currently, AMA, AMC, and Alaska Mariculture Research and Technical Center (AMRTC), through the support of SeaGrant, have been communicating with various audiences through different channels: AMA hosts webinars and standing meetings, advocates at the legislative level and maintains a LinkedIn presence; AMRTC has established a robust public-facing social media presence, and AMC keeps their stakeholders informed about funding opportunities.

AMC is designed to sunset along with the grant funding it administers, so it is not well-positioned to take on a long-term communications role. AMA and AMRTC's aligned missions and sister relationship position them as the most intuitive entities to engage in collaborative communication efforts about the mariculture industry to the key audiences identified in this report.

AMA, AMRTC, and SeaGrant convened to strategize roles and responsibilities, determine the most effective ways to collect, share, and disseminate information, and leverage labor resources to ensure success. Collaboration will be essential to the success of this organizational structure.



03

Goals and Outcomes of The PR Plan

A sound communications plan should always work toward attaining specific, measurable, and realistic goals. By keeping these goals top of mind, you can proceed strategically in planning, executing, and evaluating your communications efforts.



GOAL | **01**

Increased awareness and perceived value of the Alaska mariculture industries by priority audiences.

GOAL | **02**

Clear, accessible communications, education, and advocacy resulting from a collaborative effort among multiple organizations.

GOAL | **03**

Increased participant, partner, and stakeholder involvement, prioritizing equitable access and opportunity.

GOAL | **04**

Improved reciprocal communications that give Tribal and Indigenous representatives more opportunities to lead and participate.



04 Audiences

Establishing audiences is an essential component of a public relations plan. If an organization had unlimited resources, it could communicate effectively to every imaginable audience segment, utilizing every available tactic. However, in this case, where resources are limited for this young industry, it's essential to identify and prioritize the audiences who will benefit most from targeted communications efforts.



Local and State Governments



Alaska Native Communities, Individuals, and Tribal Organizations

Audiences

OUR RESEARCH LEADS US TO
RECOMMEND THE FOLLOWING
AUDIENCES OF EQUAL
PRIORITY:



Alaska Public at Large

Coastal communities and residents

Ocean users



Active Mariculture Industry Participants and Organizations

In the future, a consumer-facing brand or elements of a brand may be developed, which may have an audience focus of domestic and/or global consumers; this PR Plan does not consider those audiences.

Discussion of Primary Audiences



Alaska Public at Large

Every Alaskan can benefit from learning more about Alaska's mariculture industries, even if they do not have a direct connection to them. However, statewide education efforts are costly and unrealistic for all but the largest organizations and companies, and without a specific call to action, are unlikely to yield a measurable impact that warrants the investment. We recommend the following audience segments of the Alaska Public at Large for focus:

- **Coastal communities and residents.** This audience is most likely to encounter mariculture operations in their region. They must receive timely, accurate, and clear information. The Mariculture Liaison program is an indicator that this audience is a high priority and takes a localized approach to both sharing and receiving information from coastal community residents.
- **Ocean users.** This audience encompasses commercial fishing industry participants, recreational boaters, charter boat operators, subsistence harvesters, and commercial transporters. This audience has a significant overlap with coastal community members; however, efforts should be made to approach them independently, as many may not be residents of the coastal communities where they conduct subsistence activities, recreate, or operate businesses. This audience has the likelihood of encountering and potentially opposing mariculture operations.



Alaska Native Communities, Individuals, and Tribal Organizations

Alaska's mariculture industries can distinguish themselves from other resource development industries in Alaska's history by prioritizing the inclusion and perspectives of Alaska Native individuals, communities, and Tribal organizations in leadership and decision-making spaces.



Local, State, and Federal Governments and Elected Officials

Government officials should be a priority audience, from town councils to Alaska's congressional delegation. Part of AMA's public relations strategy is competent advocacy and information sharing at the government level. AMA should be seen as knowledgeable, proactive, and trustworthy. Local and legislative leadership should look to the organization for insight and leadership.



Active Mariculture Industry Participants and Organizations

Most industry participants and organizations in these young industries focus on activities that help them survive and thrive. AMA can meet their desire to grow and support this industry by conducting frequent and informative communication tactics directed at them, making them powerful and effective advocates for their industry.



05

Messaging

Implementing clear and consistent messaging is a priority when communicating with your audience. The more consistent you are with your messaging, the more familiar your audiences will become with who you are and what your mission is. An excellent way to deliver consistent messaging is to adhere to a set of pillars, which can be referenced during the development of all communication tools. These pillars are instrumental when generating social media content, as you can categorize posts by themes based on these pillars.

PILLAR | 01

Alaska's mariculture industries will create economic value and opportunity, especially in coastal Alaska

The newness of the mariculture industry in Alaska offers a wide range of economic benefits that will only increase as these industries grow. These economic benefits are widespread, benefiting families, coastal communities, and Indigenous community economies. Mariculture is an emerging industry with broad potential in various markets beyond food production. The opportunities to incorporate farmed mariculture materials into fertilizers, health supplements, cosmetics, biomedicine, and more are endless. The mariculture industries' chief seasons are well-timed seasonally to expand opportunities for commercial fishing industry participants.

PILLAR | 02

Mariculture production is ecologically beneficial

Mariculture products are renewable and sustainable resources that enhance water quality, mitigate ocean acidification, capture and process excess carbon, and support the growth of ecosystems and habitats for other valuable marine species.

PILLAR | 03

Mariculture in Alaska is a young industry; its growth will come with both volatility and opportunity

As the Alaska mariculture industry is in its infancy, participants have the opportunity to explore how best to apply mariculture in their corner of the state. The sector currently faces challenges, many of which are similar to those faced by other Alaska industries, including logistics, transportation, and market

PILLAR | 04

The Alaska mariculture industry prioritizes equitable access and leadership

Alaska mariculture industry leaders and chief funders are aware of the opportunity to guide growth in a manner that considers and centers Alaska Native perspectives and leadership in a way that has not been equitably considered in past Alaska industry growth. Currently, dominant funding opportunities are guided by a governance committee that regional representatives jointly lead from Tribal-affiliated entities and regional economic development councils. Mariculture liaison host organizations are dominantly Alaska Native or Tribally oriented. Two-way communication is essential to limiting site conflicts and preventing disenfranchisement of Alaska Native residents. Community cultural and subsistence resources are as necessary as economic opportunity.

EVERY COMMUNICATIONS PARTNER SHOULD MASTER A SIMPLE ELEVATOR PITCH ABOUT THE INDUSTRY, UTILIZING THESE MESSAGING PILLARS. HERE IS AN EXAMPLE:

Mariculture is the growth of plants or animals in saltwater. In Alaska, mariculture refers to the cultivation of species such as oysters, blue mussels, seaweeds, sea cucumbers, geoducks, and other marine organisms. Mariculture industries have great potential to increase economic opportunities for a diverse array of Alaskans and Alaska communities, while also benefiting our ocean ecosystems positively. To date, commercial aquaculture activities have been relatively small-scale; however, larger farms are beginning to develop in various parts of the state.

06

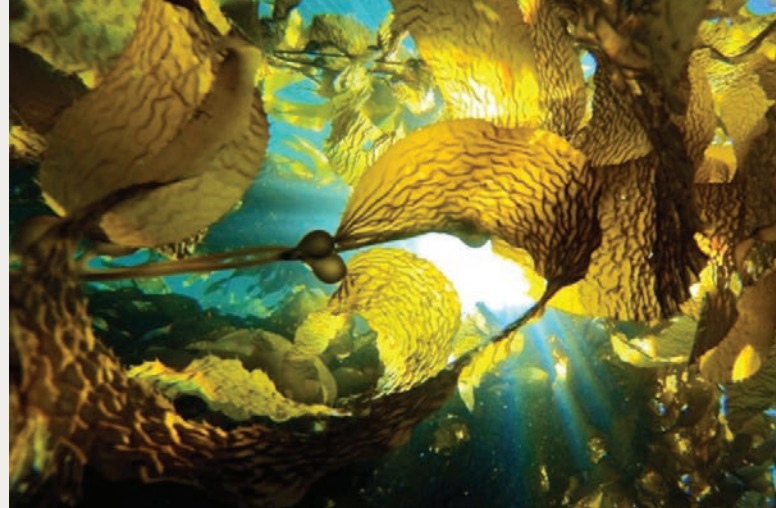
Strategies

What's the game plan to achieve your goals?

A vital part of the communications process is establishing strategies that help provide the structure to your foundational messaging pillars and inform the communication tactics deployed. These strategies give intention and structure to your efforts to meet your goals.

Strategies:

- *Combine resources to optimize communications efforts*
- *Front-load investment*
- *Be specific to be informative*
- *Ensure two-way dialogues and invest in building a shared voice*
- *Promote the importance of cultural and subsistence resources*
- *Let your communications efforts “learn”*
- *Cultivate industry leaders to be ambassadors*
- *Investigate collaborative opportunities*



Combine resources to optimize communications efforts

Many interviewees said it is a challenge to track and ingest all the different sources of information about the Alaska mariculture industry. The Alaska Mariculture Alliance and the Alaska Mariculture Research and Technical Center have begun the process of establishing collaborative workflows that will help maximize their respective staff's skill sets and capacity. Through this cooperative agreement, they will share planning and execution roles in strategic communications planning,

Front-load investment

Utilize the available grant funding to invest in developing communication streams for targeted audiences. Develop newsletters, listservs, media resources, fact sheets, and other materials to ensure that resources remain available after funding expires. Now is a great time to build a robust social media audience, which can be sustained through future periods. Use this period to establish communication channels and a reputation as a reliable source of information.

Be specific to be informative

For non-industry audiences, use specific terms like “oysters,” “kelp,” and “seaweed” to facilitate better understanding. Embrace opportunities to communicate about the lesser-known aspects of mariculture, including crab stock restoration and geoduck cultivation.

Ensure two-way dialogues and invest in building a shared voice

Many current and past engagements have reportedly felt like “box-checking” exercises to Tribal leaders who do not think their perspectives are taken seriously. Center engagements around an effort to learn about Tribal and subsistence priorities and better understand how these priorities can be supported and advanced. Improving information flow by sharing data and committing to transparency in the process demonstrates that Tribal perspectives are valued. The mariculture liaison program is an essential component of this effort; ensure that there are built-in opportunities for two-way information flow and collaboratively developed messaging on shared priorities

Promote the importance of cultural and subsistence resources

In Alaska, resource industries have historically been developed without consideration or respect for Alaska’s Tribal communities. AMA can help change this pattern by promoting standards that consider the cultural and subsistence resources of Alaska villages and communities as important as the economic benefit from mariculture. Although these factors are not always fully considered in the official State of Alaska permitting processes, industry leaders can instill the importance of these values at every level of communication, including social media, community outreach, and guidance on establishing site locations. AMA should also continue to advocate for the consideration of these factors when interacting with Alaska State permitting agencies.

Let your communications efforts “learn”

Part of an annual communications planning process should include establishing key communications performance indicators to help track and measure progress. AMA and AMRTC have initiated the process of co-developing certain aspects of communications planning. This will allow the relevant organizations to evaluate the success of your efforts and identify areas for innovation or improvement. Measuring the effectiveness of your outreach will help you make adjustments that bring you closer alignment with your goals, as well as highlight any efforts that are less effective uses of resources, allowing for better allocation of funds.

Cultivate industry leaders to be ambassadors

Industry leaders and board members are already passionate about mariculture. Many would benefit from communications training to get out of the weeds and be conversant in big-picture messaging themes relevant to target audiences. This strategy would be best executed by coordinating with a professional agency to develop and deliver a media training that aligns with the messaging priorities outlined in this plan.

Investigate collaborative opportunities

Mariculture shares many commonalities with the seafood, maritime, and resource development industries, as well as the food security, climate, and scientific research communities. What key audiences do you share with these potential partners? How can your key messages align? Identify natural communications partners and educate them on AMA’s goals. Offer quality content in exchange for access to their audience members.





07

Tactics

PRIORITY
HIGH

First 6 Months

- *Newsletter*
- *Social Media*
- *Website Improvements*

PRIORITY
MID

First 12 Months

- *Collateral Resources*
- *Town Hall or Community Forum*
- *Annual Report*
- *Legislative/Local Government Tactics*
- *Visual Assets*
- *Media Relations*
- *Advocacy Toolkits*



Newsletter | AUDIENCE: All

Generally, interviewees expressed a wish to get more information about the Alaska mariculture industry from fewer sources. A key communications component moving forward should be a regular (at least monthly) newsletter that includes the following range of content: funding opportunities, training opportunities, media coverage, research, reports, calls to action, surveys or feedback requests, and other information-sharing opportunities. Establishing a comprehensive newsletter that captures the many things happening in the mariculture universe will necessitate collaboration with the the Alaska Mariculture Research and Training Center.. While both organizations should maintain separate newsletters, AMA and AMRTC will develop a shared custom content accrual system to facilitate information sharing.

Social Media | AUDIENCE: All

Social media is one of the most effective ways to target key audiences while also educating and catching the imagination of a broader Alaska audience. With the onboarding of a full-time Communications Manager, the AMA can select from many social media channels, including Facebook, Instagram, X, YouTube,, and LinkedIn. These channels all require different content and moderation strategies, but with a strong strategy plan for content, cadence, and management, they they can successfully reach a wide range of Alaskans, resulting in a better-informed and energized populace. Investment in social media platforms should focus on audience growth and engagement, which will pay off in the future, when funds and staff time may not be as reliable. Currently, AMRTC is producing high-quality social media content directed at a very similar audience base to AMA. Moving forward with a strategy to co-post content that is relevant to each organization's overlapping audiences will make the most of staff time and talents. Communications staff from each organization will use a collaborative planning and sharing process.

Website Improvements | AUDIENCE: All

The Alaska Mariculture Alliance website requires meaningful updates to support effective newsletters and social media operations. We recommend expansion to offer the following:

Newsletter Home

Create a home for a newly developed newsletter, featuring a sign-up form and a section for storing back issues of the newsletter

Improved News and Events hub

Current news articles are updated only sporadically and could capture a much broader range of information. Events are currently

Enhanced information organization

The existing [Resources](#) page contains extensive information that can be reorganized and expanded into separate pages, organized by audience. Breaking this information into separate pages will make it easier for website visitors to navigate and provide a better-organized place for information to be added. We recommend developing more introductory and interstitial copy for each page to help better each audience understand how to utilize the information and understand it within a situational context.

A landing page for consumer-facing mariculture information

A continual interest exists in developing consumer-facing messaging and resources. We recommend creating a landing page for consumers or product-focused interests.

Site-wide search index function

Set up a function that allows visitors to search the entire site by keyword, making the site more user-friendly.

Google Analytics functions

Once set up, Google Analytics provides a thorough glimpse into who is visiting your site, how they are getting there, and what content they are consuming. This data helps determine the effectiveness of both advertising and social media content.

Market inquiry functions

AMA has an opportunity to build markets for member producers by establishing a wholesale matchmaking function, where buyers can submit inquiries that are distributed to qualified members. An example can be found [here](#).

Town Halls/Community Forums

AUDIENCE: *Public - Coastal Communities and Residents, Alaska Native Communities, Individuals, and Tribal Organizations*

Research emphasized the necessity for two-way communication among Tribal and coastal community participants. Mariculture Liaisons and other mariculture industry leadership should regularly invite feedback from these audiences. Town halls or community forums are essential tools for convening engaged stakeholders, curious neighbors, and potential allies or critics and providing them with accurate and deliberate information. We recommend creating a public meeting guide for mariculture liaisons and other organizations that makes it simple to host, notify, promote, and manage public meetings.

Annual Report

AUDIENCE: *Local and State Governments, Active Mariculture Industry Participants, and Organizations*

Many audiences lack the bandwidth to absorb all the available information. An annual report is a typical and valuable tool that helps audiences with limited time get an overview of prominent topics within your industry and establish your organization as the go-to source for comprehensive information about mariculture. These reports are ideal for distribution among industry members, local governments, and legislative bodies.

Legislative/Local Government Tactics

AUDIENCE: *Legislative + local government*

Advocacy is a key function of the Alaska Mariculture Alliance, and it's essential to maintain regular communication with leadership at the local, Tribal, and state government levels. Always greet new members of these bodies with welcome letters that establish your organization as a key source of information and guidance. Develop at-a-glance leave-behinds that communicate that you know these leaders have extensive demands on their time, but their awareness of your issues is paramount. Consider organizing lunch-and-learn meetings during the legislative session and collaborating with other industries to jointly welcome and engage in outreach opportunities. This advocacy is the function of the the Alaska Mariculture Alliance, specifically, but regular consultation with sister organizations to develop shared priorities is a best practice.

Collateral Resources | AUDIENCE: All

By developing durable collateral resources, current funding can be leveraged to set up the mariculture industry for future success. These items can be used internally, during outreach and education efforts, and by partners. Examples may include infographics, enhanced and expanded fact sheets, maps, tool kits, and other guides.

Visual Assets | AUDIENCE: All

A well-developed story allows you to connect with your audience on a deeper level. The production of high-quality video, photography, and illustrations will enable you to continue defining your industry and its participants across multiple platforms. Industry participants, partners, and other stakeholders can utilize shared assets, such as photos, videos, and illustrations, for mutual benefit.

Media Relations | AUDIENCE: All

Engaging with the people and organizations that report news in Alaska is critical to ensuring the organization is portrayed fairly and accurately. Seek annual editorial board meetings with larger news outlets. This will position AMA as a subject matter expert and resource for reporters, allowing you to share feedback on how the news outlet is handling coverage of the issues that matter most to your organization. Maintain and utilize a press release strategy for timely topics.

Advocacy Toolkits | AUDIENCE: All

Industry and ocean user audiences would benefit from receiving the occasional advocacy toolkit from AMA. Toolkits reinforce messaging to the audience and prepare individuals to rebroadcast key messages by sharing the provided assets. Examples of tools you may provide include infographics, tutorials, content to share on social media, sample emails or letters to policymakers, logos and graphics, and anything else an individual may need to support the call to action.

08 Metrics and Indicators of Success

During the interview phase, we asked stakeholders to define what they considered the success of this PR Plan. The responses generally centered around four areas: market activity, funding opportunities, public perspectives, and the creation of cohesive messaging across all AMA channels.

The success of this PR Plan can and should be measured using various methods. Both quantitative and qualitative data are essential for measuring success, particularly for this plan. Metrics such as the number of newsletter opens, website clicks,, and toolkit downloads will provide overall trends and highlight the most successful tactics, while also showing areas where to pivot. Town hall opportunities for stakeholders will provide anecdotal insight into stakeholder reactions to the deployed tactics.

Rising Tide recommended several campaign tactics for deployment, as previously discussed. These tactics can provide metrics by which to measure the success of this plan:

TACTIC	METRIC(S)	DATA TYPE	FREQUENCY
Newsletter	Clicks, opens	Quantitative	Monthly
Social Media	Engagement, reach, clicks	Quantitative	Monthly
Website	Traffic Content	Quantitative Qualitative	Monthly
Government	Increased market activity and funding opportunities	Quantitative	Annually
Fact Sheets	Increased awareness within communities	Qualitative	Annually
Town Halls	Public attendance Feedback	Qualitative Quantitative	Bi-annually /Annually
Visual Assets	Usage statistics - downloads, use	Quantitative	Monthly
Media Relations	Coverage, requests	Quantitative	Monthly
Toolkits	Downloads Feedback	Quantitative Qualitative	Monthly Annually
Research	Survey feedback	Qualitative	Annually
Curriculum	Downloads Feedback	Quantitative Qualitative	Monthly Annually



Appendix

Partner & Stakeholder Interviews Summary Report

Prepared by



AGNEW
:: BECK

FINAL:

March 20, 2024

Purpose

To best inform the Public Relations, Outreach, and Engagement Plan (PR Plan), stakeholder interviews were conducted from across the industry and Alaska Mariculture Alliance's (AMA) direct and indirect networks. The PR Plan will be used with various audiences and regions across Alaska and will serve as a means of effective information exchange across stakeholder groups. Therefore, the primary goal of these interviews was to better understand the perceptions and concerns related to the growth of the mariculture industry and associated infrastructure at local and statewide levels.

Interviewees & Process

Two rounds of partner and stakeholder interviews were conducted through this process. Round One consisted of Board Members and direct partners of Alaska Mariculture Alliance and Round Two interviewees were subject matter experts, Tribal groups, market participants, and other key voices identified by the project team and Round One interviewees.

Round One interviews were conducted between August and late October. Round Two interviewees were conducted between mid-January and mid-February. Round Two required more time and management to get started. The initial communication was sent in late November and limited follow-up communications were exchanged out of acknowledgement and respect for the holiday season. A re-engagement note was sent in mid-January that yielded better responses and interviews ultimately wrapped up by the middle of February. In both rounds, there were many interviewees that required multiple communications to schedule or reschedule.

A set of guiding questions were asked consistently across both rounds, with one variation between the two (See Appendix for Guiding Questions). Round One was asked additional questions about how the PR Plan might impact their work and what success would look like for them. Interviews were roughly 30 minutes long and all responses were notated or recorded and then coded into a spreadsheet for analysis of themes, insights, and key findings.

A total of 38 interviews were conducted, 13 (34%) of which represented Indigenous perspectives as Indigenous Peoples and/or a leader or key staff at an Indigenous-led organization.

List of Interviewees

NAME, TITLE	AFFILIATION(S)	INDIGENOUS PERSPECTIVE
ROUND 1 INTERVIEWS: AMA Board Members, Partners		
Sean Den Adel, <i>Mariculture Liaison</i>	CRRC	No
Alicia Bishop, <i>Alaska Regional Aquaculture Coordinator</i>	NOAA	No
Jon Bonkoski, <i>Senior Director of Knowledge Systems</i>	EcoTrust, Spruce Root Liaison Host	No
Julie Decker, <i>Executive Director</i>	Alaska Fisheries Development Foundation (at time of interview)	No
Lia Heifetz, <i>Founder</i>	Barnacle Foods, AMA Board	No
Jeff Hetrick, <i>Executive Director</i>	Alutiiq Pride Shellfish Institute, Chugach Regional Resources Commission	Yes
Brooke Leslie, <i>Rural Economic Development Catalyst</i>	Spruce Root	Yes
Anthony Mallott, <i>President & CEO</i>	Sealaska	Yes
Nick Mangini, <i>Seaweed Farmer, Mariculture Director at SWAMC</i>	Southwest Alaska Municipal Conference, AMA Board	No
Heather McCarty, <i>President</i>	Central Bering Sea Fishermen's Association	No
Lexa Meyer, <i>Mariculture Liaison</i>	Kodiak Island Archipelago Institute	Yes
Briana Murphy, <i>Mariculture Liaison</i>	CRRC, Alutiiq Pride Marine Institute	Yes
Lindsay Olsen, <i>Co-owner, Director of Training and Support</i>	Spinnaker Sea Farms, Greenwave	No
Mandy Salminen, <i>Environmental Director</i>	Qawalangin Tribe of Alaska	Yes
Markos Scheer, <i>Founder, CEO</i>	Premium Aquatics	No
Shayla Shaishnikoff, <i>Mariculture Liaison</i>	Qawalangin Tribe of Alaska	Yes
Tommy Sheridan, <i>Associate Director, Blue Economy Center, UAF</i>	AMA Board	No
Mike Stekoll, <i>Professor Emeritus</i>	UAF	No
Thea Thomas, <i>Owner</i>	Royal Kelp Farm	No
Robbie Townsend Vennel, <i>Executive Director</i>	Kodiak Island Archipelago Institute	No
Ralph Wolfe, <i>Director of Native Lands & Resources</i>	Central Council of Tlingit & Haida Indian Tribes of Alaska	Yes
Eric Wyatt, <i>Shellfish Farmer</i>	Blue Starr Oyster Farm	No
ROUND 2 INTERVIEWS: Subject Matter Experts, Market Participants, Other Stakeholders		
Marina Anderson, <i>Director, Sustainable Southeast Partnership</i>	Spruce Root	Yes
Weatherly Bates, <i>Shellfish and Seaweed Farmer</i>	Alaska Shellfish Farms, LLC	No
Keolani Booth, <i>Councilmember, Mariculture Catalyst</i>	Metlakatla Indian Community, Ecotrust	Yes
Ezekial Brown, <i>Commercial Fisherman</i>	President, Cordova District Fishermen United	No
Cassidy Cameron, <i>Executive Director</i>	Kenai Peninsula Economic Development District	No
Kristin Carpenter, <i>Executive Director</i>	Prince William Sound Economic Development District	No
Ed Doueville, <i>General Manager</i>	ShaanSeet, Inc	Yes
Missy Good, <i>Mariculture Specialist</i>	AK Sea Grant	No
Chris McDowell, <i>Commercial Fisherman, Seafood Analyst</i>	Yakobi Fisheries, formerly McDowell Group	No
Caitlin McKinstry, <i>Biologist</i>	Native Village of Eyak	Yes
Todd Paige, <i>Director, Social License to Operate</i>	World Wildlife Fund	No
Tom Panamaroff, <i>Regional and Legislative Affairs Executive, COB</i>	Koniag, Inc.; KALI	Yes
Alf Pryor, <i>Seaweed Farmer</i>	Alaska Ocean Farms, LLC	No
Marc Stover, <i>Marine Operations Manager</i>	Chenega Corporation	Yes
Robert Venables, <i>Executive Director</i>	Southeast Conference	No
John Whiddon, <i>Executive Director</i>	Kodiak Economic Development Corporation	No

Key Findings

SUMMARIZED BELOW ARE KEY THEMES THAT EMERGED UNDER EACH TOPIC AREA FROM THE INTERVIEWS CONDUCTED, AS WELL AS QUOTES FROM PARTICIPANTS.

Industry Opportunities & Risks

OPPORTUNITIES

- **Interviewees are excited about the prospects for a new industry with diverse market development opportunities.** Many interviewees voiced enthusiasm for the diversity of the market opportunities that fall under the banner of mariculture. The opportunities coming out of the shellfish industry are especially compelling, and for kelp animal feed and bioplastics/biofuels surfaced as the most interesting to interviewees.
- **Various opportunities for economic expansion and diversification were mentioned across interviews.** The opportunities range from increased federal funding options and more grant opportunities for Tribal entities to new income streams for rural communities from tourism, carbon markets, and environmental finance credits.
- **Interviewees see more potential opportunities than risks from an expanding mariculture industry.** Though there may have been less consensus around specific opportunities, the range of opportunities mentioned by interviewees was broader than the range of risks.

“The oceans are changing, and fishing and our methods of harvesting are changing and we really need to create strategies to get ahead of that as a state.”

“I see this as an opportunity to develop an industry in a way that is meaningful to the people who live in our state and our coastal communities.”

RISKS

- **Interviewees agree that some of the most significant risks facing mariculture in Alaska come from the very fact that the markets are underdeveloped.** Specific concerns and risks cited ranged from low real demand for kelp (though there is a lot of excitement and market chatter around kelp, the demand has not hit the market) and the supply of active shellfish production being insufficient to meet demand. There was also notable

agreement that small markets run a real risk of keeping up as the bigger markets come online.

- **Of equal concern to interviewees was the risk that subsidies from federal and other funding sources may be standing up nonviable businesses that smaller and emerging shops will not be able to compete with.** Current funding opportunities tend to favor bigger operations as opposed to smaller shops that are active in the market.
- **Processing capacity and infrastructure – especially for kelp – emerged as another top risk for the mariculture industry’s ability to launch and scale.** New technology is needed to improve the efficiency and effectiveness in the kelp markets, but across the industry lack of processing capacity was cited as an area of concern. Costs associated with shipping and supply chain infrastructure in general were mentioned as additional barriers to improving capacity for processing.

“And now you’re seeing all those resources depleted, so we don’t want the cycle to happen again... That’s why we’re asking to have a bigger voice at the table.”

“There’s somewhat of a gold rush mentality around it. And so I really think that we need to stand up operations that really are set up for success. And I don’t know that we’re doing that as an industry right now.”

AREAS OF MISALIGNMENT + CONFLICTING OPINIONS

In a few instances, interviewees had opposite perspectives on aspects related to the mariculture industry’s ability to scale.

- **Permitting.** A few interviewees cited the permitting process and governance as being a real barrier and risk to developing the mariculture industry. However, there were also comments that the permitting environment is a positive one. It also surfaced that there exists an opportunity to positively influence permitting with the State, and potentially protect Indigenous interests and traditional lands/land uses.

- **Communications.** Perhaps not a surprise, but there were conflicting opinions about communications within and surrounding mariculture opportunities. Some cited there are opportunities to increase awareness and participation within the industry, and that communications are generally positive. While, on the risks side, communication between interest groups was flagged as a barrier. More specifically, there is market confusion between the kelp and shellfish industries and a perception that kelp is getting much of the attention.
- **Commercial fishing.** A benefit that emerged both directly and indirectly (i.e., subtext to other comments) was that the kelp and shellfish market opportunities could shore up the struggling fishing industry. However, it was also noted that there have been hesitation and lack of investment in these markets from commercial fishermen themselves.
- **Climate change.** Climate change impacts came up several times as environmental risk factors to be considered as a new market develops. On the opportunities side, however, some interviewees highlighted that mariculture offered various solutions to climate impacts and environmental concerns: water quality improvements, more monitoring on the water because of increased activity, revitalization of wild shellfish stocks, and kelp as an input to reduce methane emissions associated with fertilizer.

Perspectives & Messaging

LOCAL PERSPECTIVES

- **The general perception of mariculture opportunities is positive, though mixed feelings and uncertainty are the next most common.** Many interviewees cited a lack of awareness or understanding of mariculture and its opportunities, benefits, and risks, which contribute to the prevention of faster uptake.
- **Pushback and concerns around big farms and corporatization of mariculture.** There was a lot of alignment around the threats that big industry poses to rural and Tribal communities. Villages and communities would like to see the market prioritize small shops and existing fishing families as this market opportunity develops.
- **Conflicts among user groups could escalate to cause problems and slow the growth process.** Various user groups have concerns that mariculture opportunities will begin to dominate the space, bringing crowding, competition for limited resources, community and commercial infrastructure pressure, and environmental harm.
- **There is also wariness among interviewees about who the true beneficiaries will be.** Currently the perspective is that the opportunities require large upfront investment but have low profitability potential, which suggests that only big corporate markets will come out on top. The concern most coupled with this is the impact this might have on traditional and Tribal resources and interests.
“People haven’t seen successful operations and those operations need to be shown and highlighted. And it’s the operators willing to share then how they got to that point. So people have a realistic view of what’s going to happen.”

KEY MESSAGES

- **Prospective market participants and the public need more information.** The general lack of understanding and awareness of mariculture comes from a lack of organized and consistent messaging from the industry. Education campaigns are needed to correct misconceptions and develop consistent messaging around opportunities, risks, and what mariculture is and means for Alaska. Market participants need better access to data, research, and resources that are simple and actionable; this includes feasibility studies, market analyses, permitting process, site selection, grant opportunities, and case studies of successful operations.
- **There is widespread market skepticism rooted in “boondoggles” from Alaska’s past, most cited were the gold rush and timber markets.** Many interviewees pointed to fresh wounds from other industry opportunities with a lot of potential that were then followed by market crashes. There is an opportunity for transparent messaging about lessons learned from these experiences and how they are being applied in developing the mariculture opportunity. Messaging around governance and market development efforts that signals equitable opportunity and sound oversight could reduce misconceptions and negative messaging.
- **Thoughtful and intentional market development commitments could drive better participation from smaller shops.** Throughout the interviews, participants vocalized the tension between corporate fishing and seafood operations and the smaller shops that sustain rural and Tribal communities. Despite this storied past, many participants also saw opportunities in mariculture to develop differently. At this stage, there are opportunities to invest at all levels without inhibiting overall market development, but the intention (and incentives and subsidies) needs to be there at the beginning.

“People see doom and gloom stories. ... Paint a realistic picture of what mariculture looks like in SE Alaska ...[it] isn’t just kelp. It’s also a solution to other issues. We could be talking about restoration of traditional clam gardens or abalone.”

PRIORITY AUDIENCES

Interviewees were asked what audiences they would like to see prioritized for a report of this kind. The top five audiences mentioned are ranked below, followed by the list of other important stakeholder groups.

Top Five Audiences

1. Tribes, Tribal groups, Native communities
2. The public, writ large
3. Coastal communities and landowners
4. Ocean users (e.g., boaters, fishermen)
5. Legislature and regulators at various levels of government

Other Priority Audiences

- Seafood leaders, processors
- Salmon hatchery operators
- Buyers
- Investors, funders
- Already active participants
- Advocacy groups
- Youth

Implementation

SUCCESS METRICS

Interviewees from Round One, the AMA board members and direct network stakeholders, were asked to comment on how they would measure the PR Plan’s success and how it would help them as a mariculture liaison. Three themes emerged from the responses:

- **PR/Communications Indicators.** Responses under this category included witnessing a greater understanding and awareness of mariculture opportunities, specifically from Tribal communities. Another response suggested that developing and seeing consistent messaging built across platforms would indicate success of the PR Plan.
- **Market signals.** Increased participation in mariculture industry activity, and especially from Native groups, would be a strong signal that the PR Plan was successful. In addition to this, success indicators for the industry in general would be resiliency (i.e., financial sustainability) and stability in the subcategory markets.

- **Emerging tools to bolster the industry.** Targeted fact sheets to increase participation, as well as ongoing support resources for small-scale farming would indicate a healthy market. Funding for both research and startup/operating costs in the form of low collateral loans were mentioned as additional indicators of market success.

“Aquaculture is challenging, it looks really good on paper. Growing organisms in the ocean is difficult, communities should be aware short-term grants are available but may not always be available. It is important to set farms up to be profitable.”

Other Key Findings, Questions, & Concerns

TRIBAL REPRESENTATION

- **Consensus among the participants is that Tribal and Indigenous voices are underrepresented in the mariculture industry.** Interviewees believe this comes from a variety of factors – there’s an ongoing level of mistrust in the communities, larger Native corporations are not going to get involved until there is a business case, and there is general indifference toward the mariculture industry.
 - **Participants also pointed out that there are multiple obligations to include Tribal and Indigenous voices.** Federal funding opportunities have mandates to demonstrate how Tribal voices were considered, and funds are specifically benchmarked for these communities. This is driving up the level of engagement that is happening.
 - **There is potentially too much noise in the market for Tribal stakeholders (and others) to find the most efficient and effective opportunities to engage.** There are many workshops, Facebook groups, email newsletters, and convenings making it hard to know where and when to show up. Unsurprisingly, turnout at these events is low, especially for Tribal participants.

“I want to empower Alaska Natives to be the employERS not just employEES. I can provide the tools but they need to pick up the hammer.”
- Participants were then asked to share ideas to improve engagement with Tribal and Indigenous voices:
- **Offer more leadership opportunities.** Bring Tribal and Indigenous leaders into the conversation early and at leadership levels. There were multiple mentions that Tribal

leaders are concerned about traditional waters not being honored and being leased or permitted out by the state. Offering the Tribes permitting powers alleviates this issue.

- **Ensure two-way dialogues.** Center engagements on an effort to learn what Tribal priorities are and better understand how these priorities can be supported and advanced. Improving information flow by sharing data back and committing to transparency of process demonstrates that Tribal perspectives are valued. Many current and past engagements have felt like “box-checking” exercises and Tribal leaders do not feel their perspectives are taken seriously.
- **Improve processes and policies.** Engaging with legislative and regulatory process often leaves Tribal and Indigenous voices out. Changing the process to be more inclusive and proactive about bringing these voices to the table could make a big difference. There is also acknowledgment that the variety of perspectives is overwhelming because of how many communities there are, but building unified voice and bi-directional communications are important goals to prioritize from both sides.

PROCESS QUESTIONS

A handful of questions emerged from the process; these are captured below:

- “How is this grant money being spent? What is this project in the bigger Build Back Better picture?”
- “Can any of these mariculture funds be used to create shellfish hatcheries to bolster depressed crab and shrimp stocks around the state?”
- “Will this [PR Plan] product speak to our region (Kenai), will it have regional influence that we could utilize? If a commercial fisherman comes into my office to ask about A, B, C, would I be able to use this product to give them information?”
- “If you guys have ideas that you’re willing to share back with us, we’re all ears on how we can be more effective at supporting, communicating with Tribes.”

- “Are grants being effectively utilized by Indigenous organizations?”

Limitations

- **Relationship and trust building that facilitates knowledge sharing requires time and thoughtful engagement.** The condensed and specific timeframe of the AMA PR interview process was a barrier to connecting to some potential interviewees, especially Tribal and Indigenous partners. A longer process that allows for in-person interviews and/or leverages existing meetings to connect with partners and stakeholders during times and in spaces that are most convenient for them would have facilitated increased and more robust responses.
- **Recognize the value of Tribal and Indigenous partner knowledge and contributions.** Historically, in many planning or decision-making processes, Tribal and Indigenous partners have often been asked to share their perspective and knowledge on issues without having received prior background or context on respective topics. Once plans are complete, those same partners have not received draft or final plans to review how their input was considered and to provide additional feedback. When the Draft and Final PR, Outreach, and Engagement Plans are complete, they should be shared with Tribal and Indigenous partners – this will facilitate relationship building, trust, and contribute to the success of the plan objectives.
- **Tribal partners, coastal communities, and other stakeholders are still learning about mariculture.** Mariculture is still new to Alaskans – the potential challenges and opportunities are still being investigated, developed, and piloted; confusion and misconceptions are still prevalent in communities and among various partner and stakeholders. In that way, interview results may oversimplify partners and stakeholder knowledge, understanding, and related concerns of Alaska’s emerging mariculture industry.

Appendix

Round 1 Guiding Questions

YOUR BACKGROUND:

1. Name and position, location of operation, home (Alaskan or from out of state).
2. Tell us about your background in the context of the mariculture industry.
3. What made you decide to get involved in the mariculture industry?

THE INDUSTRY:

From your perspective:

4. What are the biggest opportunities for mariculture in the next 5, 10, 15 years, or more?
 - *What are the biggest opportunities for the seaweed industry?*
 - *What are the biggest opportunities for the shellfish industry?*
5. What are the biggest risks for mariculture in the next 5, 10, 15 years?
 - *What are the biggest risks for the seaweed industry?*
 - *What are the biggest risks for the shellfish industry?*

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE:

6. In the region you work in/constituency you represent, what is your impression of local concerns, enthusiasms, and viewpoints of mariculture?
 - *Are there key individuals or organizations we can learn more from?*
7. We are developing a PR Plan with outreach and engagement strategies and messaging for specific audiences – as a mariculture liaison or support organization staff member:
 - *Who are your priority target audiences?*
 - *What do you want Alaskans (or specific target audiences) to know, understand, or do because of the PR Plan? Is there an educational piece you hope they better grasp, and as a result support policy, infrastructure, etc.?*
 - *What groups do you hope respond and/or contribute (and in what ways)?*
8. What would make the PR Plan most helpful for you as a mariculture liaison or support organization staff member? What structure or components would assist you in your role?

- *What is your vision for how the PR Plan is implemented in your specific region?*
- *How will you know you've been successful? What would have changed because of PR Plan implementation? How will you share those successes (and challenges) with key stakeholders?*

Round 2 Guiding Questions

YOUR BACKGROUND:

1. Please share your name, home community, where you work, and roles.
2. Please share your background and connection to the mariculture industry.

THE INDUSTRY:

From your perspective:

3. What are the biggest opportunities for mariculture in the next 5, 10, 15 years, or more?
 - *What are the biggest opportunities for the seaweed industry?*
 - *What are the biggest opportunities for the shellfish industry?*
4. What are the biggest risks for mariculture in the next 5, 10, 15 years?
 - *What are the biggest risks for the seaweed industry?*
 - *What are the biggest risks for the shellfish industry?*

PLANNING FOR THE FUTURE:

5. In the region you work in/constituency you represent, what is your impression of local concerns, enthusiasms, and viewpoints of mariculture?
6. How are Tribal/Indigenous voices represented in the mariculture industry? How can/should that improve or be different?
7. We are developing an Alaska Mariculture PR Plan with outreach, engagement, and messaging for specific audiences – as a Tribal community/organizational representative:
 - *Who are your priority target audiences?*
 - *What do you want them to know or understand about mariculture? Is there an educational piece you hope they better grasp, and as a result start a business, support policy, infrastructure, etc.?*



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