



HOONAH INDIAN ASSOCIATION

P.O. Box 602

Hoonah, AK 99829-0602

Phone: 907.945.3545

Fax: 907.945.3703



November 6, 2021

Secretary Sally Jewell,
TNC Global Board Member
2201 Sunset Ave SW
Seattle, WA 98116

Dear Secretary Jewell,

In August 2018, I had the honor of sharing with UW students led by Professor Tim Billo and yourself, a short history of Glacier Bay from the viewpoint of the indigenous population, the evolving relationship between Hoonah Indian Association and the National Park Service, and the tribes ongoing effort to restore indigenous stewardship to our homelands. With that brief, but meaningful encounter as introduction, I reach out to you as a Global Board Member of The Nature Conservancy (TNC), seeking assistance and support for the Huna Tlingit in reclaiming a landscape that has nurtured our people since time immemorial; lands currently owned by TNC known as “The Gustavus Forelands.”

As you know, Hoonah Indian Association (HIA) is the federally recognized tribal government representing the Huna Tlingit clans who have called the greater Glacier Bay environment *Haa Áani* - Homeland - for countless generations. Drawn to the rich and sheltered place we called *S'é Shuyee* (Edge of the Glacial Silt), our people not only survived - but thrived - on the abundance of the land and sea. Ice ages, western acculturation and the federal government have not diminished our connection to our ancestral Homeland. We return repeatedly to gather traditional foods, walk with our ancestors, and connect our children to their heritage. It sustains us both physically and spiritually, it enfolds the spirits of our ancestors, and it defines us as Huna Tlingit.

Forced out by advancing glaciers during the Little Ice Age, our ancestors nonetheless retained relationship with *Xáatl Tú* (Among the Icebergs), ultimately returning to an altered, but remembered landscape, where we built new homes in *Sit' Eeti Geiyí* (Bay in Place of the Glacier). Expelled a second time by federal actions, we collectively travelled back in 1992 to peacefully demonstrate on the shores of Bartlett Cove, an event that charged the National Park Service (NPS) to recognize our Homeland claim. Weathering painful years, we forged new relationships in a modern world, winning the right to

harvest gull eggs in Glacier Bay Homeland; joyfully celebrating our new Tribal House, *Xunaa Shuká Hít* (Huna Ancestors House), on the shores of Bartlett Cove; and fashioning a unique partnership with the Conservation Fund, the National Park Foundation, and the NPS to reclaim our sacred *Chookanhéeni* (Berg Bay).

For years we have focused our attention on Glacier Bay Homeland, but our territory comprises much broader terrain. Tlingit oral tradition, corroborated by western science, documents the Huna Clans' settling of *L'éiwshaayí* (Sand Hill Area), a broad outwash plain encompassed today by Bartlett Cove, Gustavus, and the Gustavus Forelands. Although the Little Ice Age erased this landscape, the retreating glacier recreated it. Our new homes again lined the shores of what is now Bartlett Cove and Strawberry Point, but we stewarded a much broader area. The flat expanses of the Gustavus Forelands were important berrying places for our grandparents, and they harvested deer, martin, and waterfowl there as well. Clan stories and songs document our history and ownership of this landscape. And even today, our tribal members treasure their opportunities to harvest berries there.

We are grateful that the community of Gustavus and The Nature Conservancy have protected this special place from development, but we long to steward our own lands. Our vision for this sacred place mirrors that of The Nature Conservancy; for the Huna Tlingit it remains a rich and diverse landscape where natural processes unfold and ancestral spirits rest. We, too, are stewards of the land, the air, and the sea; our elders say, "*a káx yan tudél wé tl'átgi ka at wudikeen áani aat ka éil*" (We cared for and managed this land for generations).

The Nature Conservancy is a leader in the conservation world in embracing the rights of Indigenous people to cooperatively manage their Homelands and in collaborating with Indigenous groups to achieve common conservation goals. Aligning your commitment to deepening relationships with indigenous communities, we ask you to champion our efforts to manage lands that our ancestors stewarded for centuries. HIA has the administrative capacity and scientific expertise to effectively manage "The Gustavus Forelands" in a manner consistent with present conservation priorities TNC presently has attached to the lands.

HIA has developed a strong environmental division with the capacity to develop natural resource management programs (recognized in TNC newsletter <https://www.nature.org/en-us/about-us/where-we-work/united-states/alaska/stories-in-alaska/hoonah-native-forest-partnership-in-the-tongass/>) and have considerable expertise in partnerships with government, tribal, and non-profit entities. The tribe is poised to expand their capacity in Gustavus to participate in cooperative management of Glacier Bay National Park programs including the Huna Tribal House and park interpretation more effectively. For example, HIA has negotiated purchase of the Gustavus Inn to expand its active physical and economic presence in the community. HIA is partnered with Alaska Communication in a proposal to bring fiber optic broadband connectivity to both Hoonah and Gustavus. Through park and community efforts, HIA has developed stronger, healthier relationships with the Gustavus community. HIA recognizes that having a physical presence in the community will build additional bridges and open pathways to community healing.

Would you please consider facilitating conversations about transferring ownership of the Gustavus Forelands to the traditional owners of this land – the Huna Tlingit Clans as represented by HIA. I can make myself available to further discuss this matter at your convenience should you see value in that.

Aatlein Gunalchéesh



Robert Starbard

Tribal Administrator

Attachment:

Gustavus Flats Plat (page 1)