



USDA Southeast Sustainability Strategy Frequently Asked Questions

What is the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy?

The Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy is USDA's approach to support economic, cultural, and natural resources sustainability in the region. Southeast Alaska's culture, people, and economy are interwoven with the Tongass National Forest. The strategy prioritizes USDA resources and capacity to better serve the broader economy of Southeast Alaska. We look to be part of an inclusive, responsive approach that complements existing efforts toward practical, common-sense solutions. Our initial Economic Investment effort will commit up to \$25 million in federal funding based on local priorities for short-term, project-based investments.

What is the role of the Alaska-based intra-agency team in the investment component of the Strategy?

The Alaska-based, USDA intra-agency team is co-led by Rural Development, Natural Resources Conservation Service, and the Forest Service. This team is locally based and will continue to consult with Tribal Nations and Alaska Native corporations and to engage with partners and municipal governments to continue to identify priorities and practical opportunities for investments of financial and technical assistance.

Why did USDA initiate this Strategy and the economic investment component?

USDA is focused on maximizing its collective resources to provide the highest level of support and service to Southeast Alaska. Overall outcomes anticipated include stronger relationships with Tribal Nations, Alaska Native corporations, and municipal governments; inclusive, diverse engagements that represent the people, communities, and cultures of Southeast Alaska; an understanding of administrative barriers that continue to impact funding distribution and may include changes to policies, laws, and regulations; and be able to use input gained from engagements to determine short- and long-term investments for the region.

What are the other components of the strategy?

In addition to the Economic Investment component, the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy also involves ending large-scale, old-growth timber harvest and focusing resources to support forest restoration, recreation, climate resilience, and sustainable young-growth management. It also includes a proposal to restore the 2001 Roadless Rule protections on the Tongass and to engage in meaningful consultations with Tribal Nations and Alaska Native corporations.

How are the funds being distributed?

The commitment identifies short investments that reflect diverse investment opportunities and needs in the Southeast Region. The initial \$25 million investment will be divided into four broad categories:

- **Tribal and Indigenous Interests - \$12.5 million (50%)**
 - Art and Culture
 - Food Security and Sovereignty
 - Shared Stewardship
 - Traditional Technical Knowledge and Cultural Use of Forest Products
 - Workforce Development Projects

- **Natural Resources - \$6.25 million (25%)**
 - Agriculture
 - Mariculture
 - Restoration
 - Young Growth Forest Management

- **Infrastructure - \$3.125 million (12.5%)**
 - Recreation Sites
 - Renewable energy
 - Waste management projects

- **Community Capacity - \$3.125 million (12.5%)**
 - Tourism and Business Development
 - Tribal and Community Youth Engagement
 - Community Workforce Development

How was the Southeast Alaska Sustainability Strategy investment proposal funding determined?

USDA’s initial commitment of \$25 million to support investment efforts is a positive, near-term commitment in the region’s long-term potential to support a diverse economy, conserve natural resources, and improve community resiliency.

The OneUSDA team employed a four-step assessment process to inform its recommendation for the initial investment of \$25 million. The Team first used coarse filters to assess investment readiness, and then used an expanded review team to conduct a qualitative assessment. Each idea or proposal was read by multiple reviewers. This qualitative assessment included review of the following elements:

- Inclusion of a strong set of partners.
- Representation of a priority economic sector.
- Addresses critical community capacity needs and/or increases capacity.
- Meets USDA commitment to ecological, economic, and cultural sustainability.
- Addresses historic and/or structural decisions that previously contributed to inequitable access to USDA programs.

How will USDA support longer-term economic opportunities?

The depth of interest, and diversity of communities and partners that submitted investment ideas, indicates that USDA is well-positioned to support economic, cultural, and ecological resiliency in Southeast Alaska for the long-term. Federal funding from recent and proposed legislation, like the Great America Outdoors Act, the Bipartisan Infrastructure Deal, and other agency appropriations, can likely fund many of the investment ideas that were not quite ready for short-term support.

The USDA intra-agency team continues to engage with Tribal Nations, Alaska Native corporations, municipal governments, local partners and communities, and the public to support economic development planning and implementation efforts. USDA plans to leverage its resources to support these efforts including programs to strengthen small businesses, broadband, renewable energy production, local foods and agriculture production, water and sewer infrastructure, healthcare, housing, outdoor tourism, silviculture support and others as appropriate. Our long-term strategy will include establishing an interagency lead for the Sustainability Strategy, establishing a team charter for the Alaska-based OneUSDA team, and empowering shared leadership within the region by aligning programs with locally developed strategies such as the Blueprint for Southeast Alaska, the Visitor Products Cluster Working Group, the 2025 Economic Development Plan, and the All Landowners Working Group, among others.

How did USDA conduct an inclusive, responsive approach?

A USDA intra-agency team consulted with Tribal Nations and Alaska Native corporations, and engaged with municipal governments, local partners and communities, and the public to support an integrated approach to economic development planning and implementation. USDA will leverage its resources to support these efforts including programs to strengthen small businesses, broadband, renewable energy production, local foods and agriculture production, water and sewer infrastructure, healthcare, housing, outdoor tourism, silviculture support and others as appropriate.

How did the USDA intra-agency team gather information for the Economic Investments?

The intra-agency team collected diverse public input to inform opportunities for priority investments and in reducing administrative barriers that support a diverse economy, enhance community resilience, and conserve natural resources. The team used a two-pronged approach to gather public input. It conducted targeted engagement with key partners and provided opportunities for citizens and organizations to participate in shaping the economic investment component of the strategy.

How did Tribal Nations, local and state governments, organizations, communities, and individuals participate in the process?

The intra-agency team reached out to schedule tribal consultations and sessions to engage and inform participants about the strategy and engage in discussions about opportunities for economic investments. Discussions also focused on identifying administrative barriers to federal funding. Meanwhile, broad public engagement, in the form of a 30-day public outreach period, was held in mid-September through mid-October with several of platforms offered for additional engagement. This included virtual Open Houses, an online feedback tool, an information-filled website, and a dedicated email address for submitting input, letters, and/or existing plans or specific investment proposals.