

## Our Community's Story of Hope for Herring

Herring are a keystone species that sustain the world's oceans, and our ecosystems in Southeast Alaska. In Sheet'ka Kwaan, Tlingit peoples' subsistence practices have actively cultivated kinship and mutual abundance with the herring people since time immemorial.<sup>1</sup>

Records and stories show us the natural abundance of herring: local waters made silver by flashing scales, milky milt and spawn turn shorelines turquoise. Herring once flopped up on beaches across the region, and kids went fishing from docks with buckets.

In the early 1900s, over forty canneries greatly reduced the herring living across Southeast. Fish processing peaked at 125,000 tons in 1937, followed by a fast decline, and the closure of all Southeast herring fisheries by 1942. State management of the fish began in 1959, and stocks collapsed following the first re-opening of the Sitka sac roe fishery in 1970.<sup>2</sup> In 2021, the Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) went ahead with a 33,304 ton catch limit on Sitka Sound's estimated 210,000 tons of returning herring. The full roe sacs of mature females are sold as lucrative Kazunoko on Japanese markets; the bulk of remaining fish are ground for byproducts like salmon feed. It's one of the last herring fisheries left on the Northwest Coast.

From the spawning grounds that remain throughout Sitka Sound, families pull up hemlock branches and kelp fronds to gather tasty, vitamin-rich herring roe. In 2002, ADF&G entered a Memorandum of Agreement with the Sitka Tribe of Alaska (STA) to ensure a subsistence harvest level of 105,000 to 158,000 pounds, set by the Board of Fisheries. By 2008, STA's harvest had fallen short of this benchmark multiple times.<sup>3</sup>

This April, a Superior Court vacated a 2018 lawsuit filed by STA, which argues ADF&G and the Board of Fisheries' mismanagement of herring infringes on subsistence rights. Judge Daniel Schally wrote that under the Alaska Constitution, ADF&G is not required to use the "best available information" when making management decisions.<sup>4</sup>

Amidst the 2021 Sitka sac-roh herring fishery, neighbors gathered one Sunday to honor the yaww (herring) together in the spirit of yáa at wooné (respect for all things) with an outdoor celebration organized in lieu of a traditional koo'ex' (potlatch). Between nourishing ceremonies, songs and speeches, guests at the public gathering visited an additive community art piece made by volunteers. All were asked to respond: What is your hope for herring?

Hopes accumulated as our coastal city of 9,000 emerged from the pandemic, and the board traveled to spring gatherings like Earth Day and a music festival. Here's a summary of what Sitkans have to say:

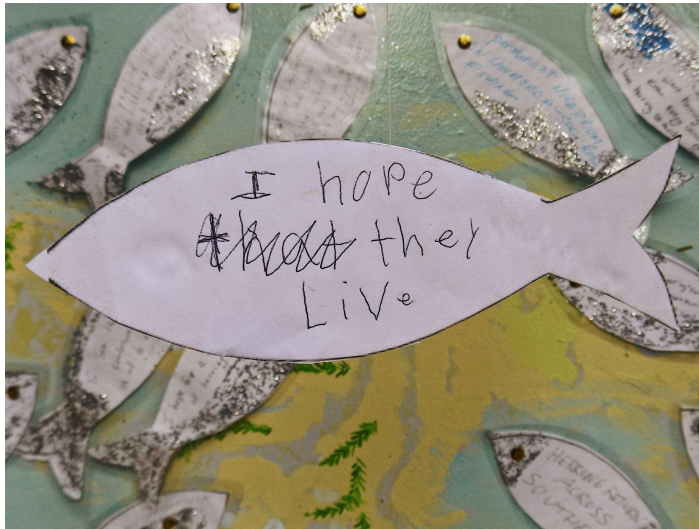
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<sup>1</sup> *The Herring Rock Woman (Kaxátjaashaa) was the first to call the Yaaw (Pacific Herring) to T'eyyi, the Herring Rock. She rested her hair in the ocean where the Yaaw could spawn, and where great schools would return each spring.*

<sup>2</sup> (*Herring Synthesis* Thornton, Butler, Moss, Hebert, Elder) <https://uas.alaska.edu/research/herringsynthesis/>

<sup>3</sup> (*Herring Synthesis* Thornton, Butler, Moss, Hebert, Elder) <https://uas.alaska.edu/research/herringsynthesis/>

<sup>4</sup> [https://www.kcaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/sharp465@akcourts.us\\_20210330\\_102826-1.pdf](https://www.kcaw.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/04/sharp465@akcourts.us_20210330_102826-1.pdf)



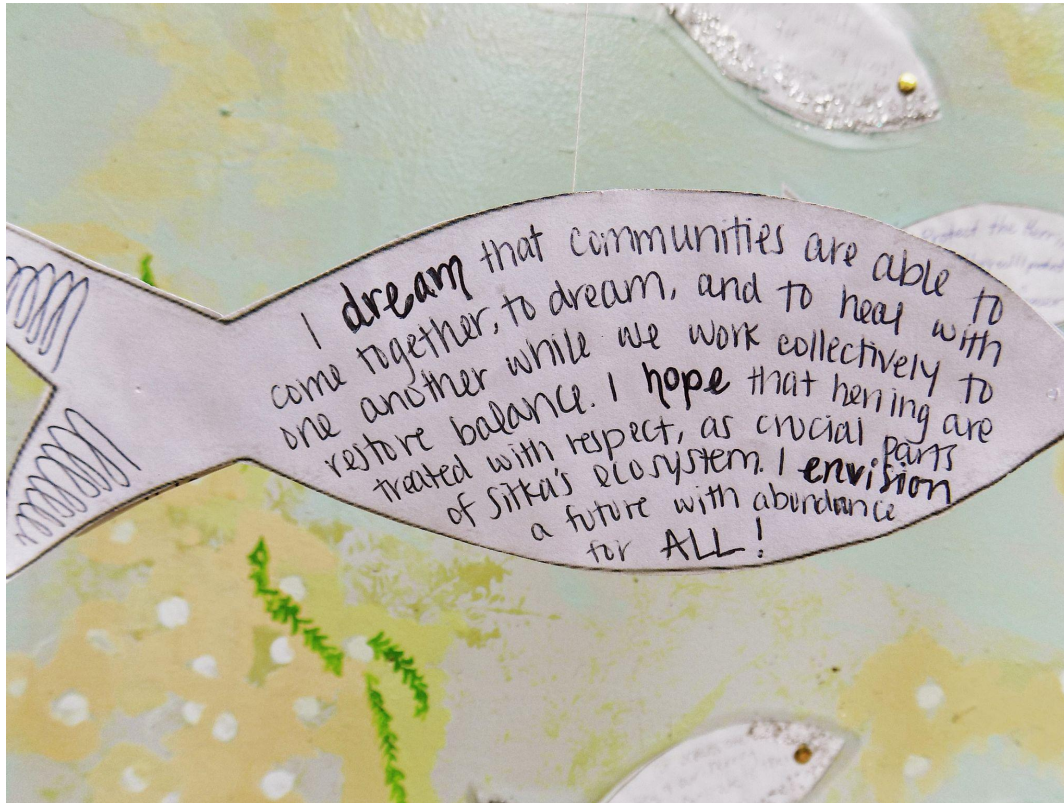
**They feed every thing.**

*Herring protect the entire web of life in this place • Our oceans, our health • we are one • We want whales to keep coming, population recovery • Protect the Herring and they will protect us too — now and forever • Respect the Herring, the Yaaw.*

***I hope the herring flourish and swim free of the influence of humans.***



*I hope for the herring to be accessible & plentiful for all • Thriving population + sustainable harvest • People will start voting to help the herring • Demand a permanent moratorium on commercial sac-roe fishing • I hope Herring continue to lead us all to a whole future. • Like all Southeasterners I hope for resilience for the herring! • Multiply and thrive!*



### **I LOVE HERRING EGGS**

*Herring in my front yard (bay) • I hope that herring can be fully appreciated for their eggs and allowed to live • For herring spawning all across Sitka Sound and SE AK every year • For many herring for generations to come • To keep returning and bringing joy • Keep swimming freely • Stay wild & free for all creatures' benefit • Protecting our herring is about nature and culture.*



### **FOR HERRING TO RETURN ACROSS SOUTHEAST**

*I hope for a world in which all gatherings are gatherings of joy because we do not need to fight for a better world, because all is bountiful and respected and people only take what they need and give twice that • I hope one day the herring fill the sound once more and there is no fear. • Bountiful returns, peace, and safety • Herring! May you be here in Sitka Sound by the billions throughout the next ten thousand years!*