



## Dr. Dolly Garza – Marine Advisory Agent

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There is a saying among my father’s people, the Tlingit, “When the tide is out, the table is set.” The Haida (my mother’s people) and the Tlingit are the Native peoples of Southeast Alaska and British Columbia and for millennia have thrived on the bounty of the land and sea.

We are a canoe people—fisherman, hunters, and gatherers of marine resources—and our lives are inextricably tied to the Earth. The Haida language reflects this deep connection to the natural world and celebrates the beauty that surrounds us. For example, the names of the months in the Haida calendar inform us of the activity happening in our ecosystem throughout the year. *Kong koaans* (June/July) means “Great month” because the weather becomes warm and the food becomes plentiful.

*K’algyaa kongaas* is “ice month,” when the first ice appears on the rainwater in the canoes; and *Wiid gyaas* (April) means “Salmonberry bird month” when the song of the salmonberry birds announces that winter is over.

While the Haida, Tlingit, and other Native Alaskans are still intricately tied to the land, we are not the only ones to reap the bounty. Although commercial fishing is rated as one of the most hazardous occupations in America, fishing in Alaska is a billion dollar industry and is made up of both large commercial fishing operations and individual fisherman. A percentage of these individual fishermen are Alaska Natives, but their voices are not always heard during the setting of state and federal fishing policies. I spent my career as an Alaska Sea Grant Marine Advisory Agent (through the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration [NOAA]) speaking on behalf of Alaska Natives to ensure that their needs and uses of marine resources were recognized and accounted for.

I never set out to get a Ph.D. in marine policy. In fact, I wasn’t planning on going to college at all—I wanted to get married right out of high school. When our families didn’t approve of the marriage, the wedding was called off and my fiancé moved away. Soon after, my sister applied for me to go to college at the University of Alaska in Fairbanks. The whole thing happened quickly. She sent the application on a Wednesday, my uncle—who was a professor there—took the application to the admissions office himself and I got accepted by Friday. I arrived on campus on Sunday, two days later. I had a sleeping bag, two suitcases, and my sewing machine. My sister registered me as a business major, but I quickly found that I didn’t like the field. I switched to home economics, but then the department closed down. At my uncle’s urging, I became a fisheries major.

As a fisheries major, I had a strong focus on biology and learned methods of sustainable approaches to the harvesting of fish and other marine resources. After I graduated, I wanted to do what every fisheries biologist does: sit up on a tower on a river and count the fish going by. But my uncles, many of whom were fisherman, encouraged me to get a master’s degree with a focus on management so that I could better represent their needs as Native Alaskans in the fishing industry. However, when I started my work as a Marine Advisory Agent after earning my master’s, I learned that neither my undergraduate nor master’s degree actually taught me how to truly support Native fisherman.

As a Marine Advisory Agent, the job was multi-faceted: one part community educator, one part policy advisor. As a community educator, I taught individual fisherman about running a business and marketing their catch. I also taught basic survival skills and marine safety to fisherman and the community at large. For the fisherman, I taught basic survival skills—what to do if your skiff goes down. For others in

the community, I focused on outdoor survival skills and Native food gathering. In terms of policy work, I focused on advocating for Alaska Natives in the fishing industry, and on representing Natives and non-Natives who customarily use many marine resources. When natural resources are being allocated out, it is often the “subsistence” users who lose out, even though they live next to, and rely upon these many resources. Since everything about the fishing industry is regulated, it is vital that non-economic values—cultural and community—are recognized and accounted for in regulations and allocations.

To make sure that I was the most effective voice for my people, I earned a Ph.D. in marine policy from the University of Delaware. My doctorate taught me how to examine and understand political documents and figure out how to speak on behalf of my community in a policy arena. Earning my Ph.D. also gave me the essential credentials to make sure I was listened to. In the middle of a meeting, when someone is talking down to the Native fisherman and subsistence users, it helps when the chairman says, “Excuse me, we will have *Dr. Garza* speak next.” That definitely puts the whole Native group on a higher plane! I often spoke to issues and concerns that other Natives had, but were not comfortable voicing in a large public setting. Their knowledge of sustainability and concern for conservation matched any scientist.

As I became increasingly involved in making sure Native Alaskan’s needs were met in the setting of marine policy, I spent more and more time inside at meetings! Pretty soon, teaching about Native food gathering and outdoor survival skills felt like a breath of fresh air—literally! Although I grew up harvesting seaweed, as a child I didn’t realize that there was science involved. But to gather food on the beach, you are a botanist, a biologist, and a climatologist all in one because you have to be able to correctly identify the plants and animals you are collecting, you need to know how to read the tides, understand the seasons, and study the clouds to learn about the weather conditions. This “traditional ecological knowledge” is science that has been passed down through generations of Alaska Natives. In this part of my career, I used my traditional science along with the science I learned in the university to protect, and support my community. I still continued to learn from the many Native hunters and fishermen who have decades of experience of the local ecology and biology, as well as generational knowledge from their fathers and forefathers.

In addition to cultivating their scientific awareness of their environment, the ancient Haida and Tlingit also became advanced artists, storytellers, and craftspeople. In my retirement, I am learning more about the language and the arts of the Haida people. I do beading, basket weaving, and Raven’s Tail, a traditional weave using wool. I am gathering the cedar bark for my baskets and learning why *Sgaana gyaas* (July/August) is “Killer whale month,” when cedar bark is stripped from the trees it sounds like blowing killer whales.