



USET

SOVEREIGNTY PROTECTION FUND

Washington, DC Office
1730 Rhode Island Ave., NW, Suite 406
Washington, DC 20036

Nashville, TN Office
711 Stewarts Ferry Pike, Suite 100
Nashville, TN 37214
P: 615-872-7900 | F: 615-872-7417

USET SPF Resolution No. 2026 SPF:003
SUPPORTING TRIBAL-LED PROTECTION AND RESTORATION OF
EELGRASS MEADOWS AS COASTAL NURSERY HABITATS

- WHEREAS,** United South and Eastern Tribes Sovereignty Protection Fund (USET SPF) is an intertribal organization comprised of thirty-three (33) federally recognized Tribal Nations; and
- WHEREAS,** the actions taken by the USET SPF Board of Directors officially represent the intentions of each member Tribal Nation, as the Board of Directors comprises delegates from the member Tribal Nations' leadership; and
- WHEREAS,** USET SPF member Tribal Nations steward coastal and marine environments that sustain Tribal cultures, food systems, subsistence practices, and local economies; and
- WHEREAS,** the Passamaquoddy Tribe at Sipayik is a sovereign Tribal Nation with inherent authority and responsibility to manage, protect, and steward its natural resources, including coastal and marine ecosystems that have sustained the Passamaquoddy people since time immemorial; and
- WHEREAS,** the Passamaquoddy people maintain Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK)—a rigorous, place-based, and living system of knowledge and practice developed through generations of stewardship, observation, harvesting, and cultural relationships with marine and coastal environments; and
- WHEREAS,** TEK constitutes a foundational, recognized form of science generated and passed down since time immemorial, providing an essential line of evidence- and observation-based understanding of ecosystem health, species dynamics, and environmental change; and
- WHEREAS,** coastal nursery habitats, including eelgrass (*Zostera marina*) meadows and nearshore benthic environments, are foundational to marine ecosystems and support the life cycles of numerous species, including ecologically and commercially important groundfish such as cod, haddock, and pollock; and
- WHEREAS,** eelgrass meadows stabilize sediments, improve water quality, support biodiversity, and provide shelter and forage for juvenile fish and marine invertebrates, directly contributing to fisheries productivity and ecosystem resilience; and
- WHEREAS,** rapid environmental change, including warming waters and shifting ecosystem conditions, is increasing stress on nearshore habitats and underscores the need for adaptive management approaches grounded in both long-term Indigenous observation and gold-standard Western scientific analysis; and

WHEREAS, Tribal-led monitoring, mapping, restoration, and adaptive management efforts are most effective when TEK and Western science are applied on co-equal footing through ethical, mutually agreed, and Tribal-directed processes; and

WHEREAS, in December 2010, the United States recognized the rights of its First Peoples through its support of the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (UNDRIP), whose provisions and principles support and promote the purposes of this resolution; therefore, be it

RESOLVED the USET SPF Board of Directors supports the protection and restoration of eelgrass meadows and other coastal nursery habitats using a co-equal, multiple-lines-of-evidence approach that integrates Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) and gold-standard Western science; and be it further

RESOLVED USET SPF affirms TEK as a foundational, recognized science and supports Tribal inherent sovereign authority and decision making over how TEK is shared, protected, and applied, including appropriate safeguards for sensitive information from public dissemination without Tribal consent and respect for Tribal terms of engagement and consultation; and be it further

RESOLVED USET SPF supports and elevates Tribal-led eelgrass and nearshore habitat monitoring, restoration planning, implementation, and post-restoration evaluation, and calls for expanded technical assistance and dedicated funding for Tribal natural resource programs; and be it finally

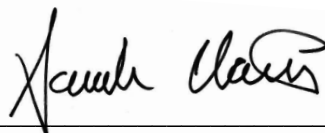
RESOLVED USET SPF encourages federal agencies, research institutions, and funding partners to recognize and operationalize the co-equal application of TEK and Western science in coastal habitat protection, fisheries sustainability, and restoration initiatives under the expressed guidance and approval of Tribal Nations.

CERTIFICATION

This resolution was duly passed at the USET SPF Impact Week Meeting held in Arlington, VA at which a quorum was present on March 12, 2026.



Chief Kirk E. Francis, Sr., President
United South and Eastern Tribes
Sovereignty Protection Fund



Vice Chairwoman Sarah Harris, Secretary
United South and Eastern Tribes
Sovereignty Protection Fund

Because there is Strength in Unity