TEK and TECH: Data Sovereignty, Artificial Intelligence, and Data Centers

A Policy Framework for Alaska on Alaska's Terms

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Our Vision

Alaska stands at the threshold of the digital economy as we once stood at the threshold of the oil economy: rich in what the world wants and deciding whether we will be owners or bystanders. The world wants cold air, abundant energy, open land, and stable ground for the computing infrastructure behind artificial intelligence. We have all four. The question is not whether AI and data centers will come to Alaska; they are already here, and billions of dollars in proposals are on the table, including a campus on the North Slope that could reach three gigawatts of generation, more power than urban Alaska uses today (Herz, 2026). The question is whether they arrive on our terms.

Our terms are simple to state and firm in practice. Alaskans own their data the way we own our fish and our Fund. Workers are protected and trained, never discarded. Our children learn to command these tools, not merely consume them. Tribal Nations govern Indigenous data under Indigenous authority. Ratepayers never subsidize a server farm. And the same computing power that strains ecosystems elsewhere will be put to work healing ours: counting fish, watching permafrost, predicting fire, and keeping our communities safe. We led the nation in creating a Permanent Fund from a nonrenewable resource. We are leaving the Industrial Era and entering the Technological Era, and if we are to thrive, we will have to do it on our own terms.

Guiding Principles

- Freedom: no Alaskan is surveilled, scored, or sorted by algorithms operating in the dark. Government use of AI is disclosed, documented, and answerable to the public.
- Privacy: your personal data belongs to you. Collection requires consent, use requires purpose, and retention requires justification.
- Agency: every consequential decision about an Alaskan's benefits, liberty, employment, or children goes through a human being with authority that makes the final decision. Any determination can be sent to a panel of humans for review.
- Indigenous Data Sovereignty: data about Indigenous Peoples, lands, waters, languages, and lifeways is governed by the CARE Principles of Collective Benefit, Authority to Control, Responsibility, and Ethics (Carroll et al., 2020), alongside FAIR data standards (Wilkinson et al., 2016), with free, prior, and informed consent consistent with the United Nations Declaration on the Rights of Indigenous Peoples (United Nations, 2007).
- Additionality: large computing loads bring their own power and pay their own way. Alaska families do not subsidize the world's compute bill on their electric statements. Systems will be powered by renewable energy that is tailored to the environment.

- Reciprocity: what is taken from a place must return to that place, in energy, heat, jobs, revenue, and stewardship. This is Indigenous law older than the state, and it will be state practice.
- TEK and Tech: Traditional Ecological Knowledge and technology advance together, as equal systems of knowing. Neither replaces the other, and Alaska is strongest when both are at the table.

TEK and TECH: The Way Forward

Running through every part of this framework is the method I have spent my career developing and named in my doctoral research: TEK and TECH, Traditional Ecological Knowledge and Western systems of knowledge and technological innovation, working together (DeWitt, 2021). Our traditional stories have taught us about this time. Our world is on the verge of societal and environmental collapse, and we are faced with the options of collective transformation or downfall. Our ancestral stories teach us that there is no going backward; they lay out the actions necessary to survive and eventually thrive. Our ancestral wisdom is accessible, but it has to be communicated cross-culturally and epistemologically so that people can understand and implement its guidance. By utilizing both TEK and TECH, we will successfully navigate our way forward.

Traditional Ecological Knowledge is the body of empirical observation, practical know-how, ethical guidance, and management practice that Indigenous Peoples have developed through long-term, place-based relationships with specific ecosystems (Berkes, 2012; Thornton, 2008). TEK is not folklore. It is sophisticated ecological science, refined over thousands of years and encoded in language, ceremony, seasonal practice, and place names. What TEK carries that technology alone never will is relational accountability: the researcher, the system, and the state answer to all their relations, and the question is never only whether a tool is valid but whether we are fulfilling our obligations in relationship (Wilson, 2001). Indigenous protocols of caretaking and stewardship guide scientific inquiry itself and play an integral role in self-determination and revitalizing vibrant ways of life (Whyte, 2015, as cited in DeWitt, 2021).

Applied to this policy, TEK and TECH means every technological system Alaska adopts is paired with the knowledge system that already understands this place, and both are used to heal the shared trauma inflicted on people and planet in a way that elevates our combined health and supports collective transformation (DeWitt, 2021). Sensors measure what Elders have observed for generations; models are checked against ten thousand years of ground truth; and the questions technology answers are shaped by the people who have lived the answers. Using the best of both worlds is the working method behind our fisheries platform, our Climate Resilience Roadmap, our On the Land Guardian Network, and every application in this document. It is also the standard we set for anyone who wants to compute in Alaska. We are leaving the Industrial Era and entering the Technological Era, and TEK and TECH is how we enter it whole.

Part One: Data Sovereignty for Every Alaskan

The Alaska Personal Data Protection Act

Alaska has a constitutional right to privacy that most states envy (Alaska Const. art. I, § 22), and almost no modern statute to enforce it in the digital age. We will introduce the Alaska Personal Data Protection Act in the first session, establishing:

- The right to know what data is collected about you, by whom, and for what purpose, and the right to access, correct, and delete it.
- Opt-in consent for the sale of personal data, with data brokers registered and audited by the state.
- Heightened protection for biometric, genetic, location, and health data, including traditional healing and behavioral health records, with a private right of action for violations.
- Children's data protections that prohibit behavioral advertising to minors and require the strongest privacy settings by default.
- Data minimization requirements for state agencies: government collects only what it needs, keeps it only as long as needed, and never sells it.

The Alaska Likeness, Voice, and Identity Rights Act

Your face, your voice, and your name are yours. In the age of AI cloning, that sentence needs the force of law behind it. Copyright is federal territory, so a state cannot literally extend copyright to a person's likeness, but a state can do something just as strong: establish likeness, voice, and identity as personal property under state law, the way Tennessee did for voice in the first-in-the-nation ELVIS Act (Ensuring Likeness, Voice, and Image Security Act, 2024). We will introduce the Alaska Likeness, Voice, and Identity Rights Act to make every Alaskan the legal owner of their own identity:

- A property right in your name, image, voice, likeness, signature, and other personal identifiers, held by you from birth. Like other property, it can be licensed on your terms, and it cannot be taken, simulated, or sold without your consent.
- AI cloning protections: creating or distributing an AI-generated replica of an Alaskan's voice or likeness without written consent is a civil violation with statutory damages and injunctive relief, and a criminal offense when used for fraud, sexual imagery, harassment, or election deception. Tools marketed primarily to clone identities without consent carry liability too, reaching the software, not just the user.
- Consent that means consent: likeness licenses must be written, specific in scope and duration, and revocable for future uses not yet made; blanket perpetual grants buried in terms of service are void. Minors' identity rights cannot be signed away beyond narrow, court-reviewable limits, protecting child performers and every kid whose photos train someone's model.
- Inheritance and cultural continuity: identity rights survive death and pass to family, so no company can resurrect an Alaskan's voice for profit, and grieving families control commercial use of their loved one's image. For Alaska Native ceremonial imagery, regalia, crests, and recorded voices of Elders, the Act works alongside Tribal law and clan protocol, recognizing that some identities are held collectively and governed by protocols older than the state.
- Working Alaskans covered: fishermen, artists, musicians, dancers, and performers whose image is their livelihood get the same protection as celebrities, with a private right of action, attorney fees, and enforcement support through the ADGO and the Department of Law. First Amendment protections for news, commentary, satire, and art are preserved in the statute, because protecting identity and protecting speech are partners, not rivals.

Indigenous Data Sovereignty

Alaska is home to 229 federally recognized Tribes, and data about our peoples has been extracted for two centuries under the same logic that took everything else: collected without consent, stored without access, and used without benefit. That ends. Indigenous Data Sovereignty means Tribal Nations hold authority over data concerning their citizens, territories, resources, and knowledge systems (Carroll et al., 2020; Kukutai & Taylor, 2016). Our administration will:

- Recognize Tribal data governance authority in state data-sharing agreements, with government-to-government protocols for health, child welfare, fisheries, wildlife, and education data.
- Apply CARE alongside FAIR in every state data system that touches Indigenous information, so openness never overrides authority to control.
- Protect Traditional Knowledge from uncompensated ingestion into commercial AI training datasets, and support Tribal ownership of language models built from Alaska Native languages, so our languages are revitalized by our peoples rather than harvested from them.
- Require free, prior, and informed consent for research and AI projects using Indigenous data, building on standards Alaska's Tribal health system already applies.

The Alaska Data Governance Office

We will establish the Alaska Data Governance Office (ADGO) by executive order on day one, with statutory authorization in the first session. The ADGO will serve as the state's chief privacy and AI accountability office: maintaining the public inventory of state algorithmic systems, reviewing agency AI procurements, enforcing the Personal Data Protection Act, coordinating Tribal data agreements, and publishing an annual Data and AI Accountability Report to the Legislature. Alaska manages billions in resources with professional rigor; our data deserves the same.

Alaskans' data stays in Alaska. As set out in our What's Next, Alaska? economic roadmap, state government data, including health, educational, and financial records, will be stored on Alaska soil in Alaska-owned or Alaska-partnered facilities within five years (DeWitt for Alaska, 2026). Local storage means faster access for Alaska users, a layer of security and sovereignty that does not exist when our records sit in Outside facilities controlled by outside corporations, and reduced vulnerability to out-of-state corporate decisions or federal overreach. Today's state cloud spending flows south; under this policy it becomes an anchor tenant for Alaska's own data economy.

Part Two: AI Governance That Protects Freedom and Agency

More than 300 data center and AI bills were filed across the states in early 2026 alone (Davis Wright Tremaine, 2026a); the technology is being governed somewhere, by someone, and Alaska will govern it here, for us. Our public-sector AI framework aligns with the National Institute of Standards and Technology AI Risk Management Framework (NIST, 2023) and includes:

- Human review guarantee: no state system may deny benefits, revoke a license, flag a family to OCS, set bail conditions, or take any consequential adverse action against an Alaskan by algorithm alone. A named human decides, and Alaskans have the right to appeal to a person and be reviewed by a board of humans.

- Algorithmic transparency: every AI system used by state government is publicly inventoried, with its purpose, data sources, and error rates disclosed. High-risk systems undergo bias and accuracy audits before deployment and annually after.
- Procurement standards: vendors selling AI to the state accept Alaska audit rights, data locality requirements, and liability. No black boxes purchased with public money.
- Election integrity: disclosure requirements for AI-generated content in campaign communications and criminal penalties for deceptive deepfakes of candidates and election officials, protecting the voice of every voter.
- Surveillance limits: prohibition on state use of untargeted facial recognition in public spaces. Our constitutional privacy right means what it says.

Part Three: Protecting the Alaska Workforce

Every technological wave in Alaska's history came with a promise of jobs and a fine-print risk of displacement. We will take the jobs and strike the fine print. Our workforce framework:

- Labor at the table: partner with Alaska's labor sector to build a legal framework that protects jobs, so that people can work, earn a living, and live well. Every standard below flows from that partnership.
- AI Transition Standards: employers deploying AI that materially changes or eliminates positions in workforces provide advance notice, transition planning, and access to retraining, modeled on the federal Worker Adjustment and Retraining Notification (WARN) Act principles. Automation is a management choice, and choices carry responsibilities. (U.S. Department of Labor, Employment and Training Administration, n.d.)
- Collective bargaining protection: AI deployment, electronic monitoring, and algorithmic management are mandatory subjects of bargaining for state employees, and we will defend that standard in the private sector. No Alaskan should be hired, scheduled, disciplined, or fired by an unexplainable machine.
- Worker surveillance limits: prohibitions on continuous biometric monitoring and off-duty data collection, because a paycheck does not purchase a person.
- Build the builders: registered apprenticeships in data center construction, electrical work, HVAC, fiber, and operations, developed with our building trades unions and the Alaska Vocational Technical Center, with local-hire commitments in every state agreement. Data centers employ fewer people than they promise; construction, power, and maintenance employ more, and those are Alaska jobs if we train for them now.
- The pension connection: a defined-benefit pension for public employees remains the backbone of our workforce agenda. Alaska cannot govern AI, staff a Data Governance Office, or inspect a data center with a workforce that leaves after three years.

Part Four: Education for Command, Not Consumption

Our children are already living their whole lives alongside these systems. The choice is whether they grow up as the tool's user or the tool's product. We choose command. Our education framework:

- AI literacy across K-12: age-appropriate instruction in how these systems work, where they fail, and how to think critically alongside them, integrated into digital citizenship rather than bolted on.
- Teachers decide: AI as a tool for lesson planning, translation, and accessibility, never as a replacement for educators, and never as an automated grader of a child's future. District AI policies are developed with teachers at the table.
- Student data protection: education technology vendors are barred from selling student data or training commercial models on it. Our classrooms are not data mines.
- University of Alaska leadership: expanded programs in data science, AI, cybersecurity, and energy systems across UAA, UAF, and UAS, with the UAF Alaska Center for Energy and Power positioned as the research hub for cold-climate computing, microgrids, and waste-heat engineering. Every data center agreement includes funded UA research partnerships and internship pipelines, so Alaska students run these facilities within a decade.
- Language and culture: state support for Tribally owned Alaska Native language AI, speech models, and archives, developed under CARE governance, turning the technology that endangers small languages into a tool of revitalization.
- TEK and Tech in the classroom: TEK-informed, land-based learning paired with modern tools, so a student flying a drone over a salmon stream is also learning the clan teachings, seasonal rounds, and place names that explain what the camera sees. Alaska graduates will read a sonar screen and a river with equal fluency, and that combination will make them the most sought-after ecological technologists in the world.

Part Five: Data Centers on Alaska's Terms

Anchorage has already adopted a municipal data center ordinance, the Legislature has advanced SB 250 to keep data center infrastructure costs off other ratepayers, and communities across Alaska are asking the same question communities across the country are asking: who benefits (Anchorage Ordinance AO 2026-27; Davis Wright Tremaine, 2026b; The Alaska Center, 2026). Our statewide framework answers it clearly, and it starts with a deliberate choice of scale.

Decentralized first. Where communities choose to host data infrastructure, our What's Next, Alaska? roadmap favors a distributed nodal network of micro-to-small facilities, each between 150 kilowatts and 5 megawatts (a footprint closer to a community warehouse than an industrial campus), powered by local renewables and integrated into community microgrids. The UAF Alaska Center for Energy and Power has identified this distributed approach as the most feasible for Alaska (DeWitt for Alaska, 2026). Decentralization is strategic resilience: concentrated hyperscale facilities are single points of failure and strategic targets, while a distributed network keeps regional disasters, as Typhoons Merbok and Halong taught us, from taking down statewide services. Community-scale facilities co-owned with Alaska Native corporations, Tribes, and municipalities, capturing waste heat for greenhouses and district heating, running on 80 percent or more renewable energy, and training and hiring locally, are the backbone of Alaska's data economy.

Proposed facilities carry the burden of proof, and in Alaska that burden rests with the developer, not the community. No hyperscale facility will be permitted without enforceable permit conditions covering the following, including continuous monitoring, public real-time reporting, automatic penalties that escalate to shutdown for repeat violations, and Guardian and community observations carrying evidentiary

weight: electricity consumption, capped at the facility's own new generation, with zero draw on the community supply and mandatory curtailment in favor of residential load during shortage events; water consumption, with hard annual withdrawal ceilings, closed-loop cooling required, no consumptive use of salmon-bearing waters or community drinking water sources, and metered public reporting of every gallon; water pollution, with zero-discharge standards for cooling chemicals, biocides, and thermal effluent into any Alaska water body, secondary containment for all fuel and coolant, and baseline-plus-monitoring of downstream water quality established before ground breaks; and noise pollution, with enforceable decibel limits at the property line and at the nearest residence, measured day and night, low-frequency and tonal noise standards that account for how sound carries across water and tundra, and quiet hours protecting subsistence camps, fish camps, and wildlife corridors. Violations are not a cost of doing business; they are a reason to stop doing business. Hyperscale data centers are prohibited in permafrost- and cryosphere-dependent zones, where waste heat, ground disturbance, and heavy water demand would accelerate the thaw already destabilizing Alaska communities. If a hyperscale operator cannot meet these terms, Alaska does not need that facility, because our future is the distributed, community-owned network above. Every large-scale data center in Alaska will meet the Alaska Standard:

- Bring your own power. Facilities above 1 megawatt provide new, additional generation or firm contracted capacity that does not tighten supply or raise rates for existing customers, with the Regulatory Commission of Alaska overseeing every interconnection. We will sign ratepayer-protection legislation that embodies SB 250's cost-allocation principle and strengthens it.
- Pay your own way. Full cost recovery for roads, water, fiber, and emergency services; a data center tax framework that funds education and the communities that host them; and no blank-check tax exemptions. Incentives, where offered, are earned by verified local hire, heat reuse, and clean energy performance.
- Community consent. Conditional-use permitting statewide with public hearings, and free, prior, and informed consent for projects on or affecting Tribal lands, subsistence areas, and culturally significant places. Local governments and Tribes hold real authority, not comment periods.
- Water and cooling discipline. Cooling designs suited to our climate: air-side economization, closed-loop systems, and strict limits on consumptive water use, with public reporting of water withdrawals. Alaska's cold is our competitive advantage precisely because it means we never need to drain an aquifer to cool a server.
- Waste heat is wealth. Every facility files a heat reuse plan. Data center waste heat can warm greenhouses, hatcheries, mariculture operations, pools, and district heating loops. In a state where energy poverty is real, venting heat into the sky while the village next door burns diesel is a design failure we will not permit.
- Decommissioning assurance. Bonded reclamation from day one, so no community inherits a square mile of dead servers the way others inherited rusting canneries.
- Alaska ownership pathways. State support for Tribal, ANCSA corporation, and municipal equity participation in data infrastructure. Alaskans as owners of the digital economy, not spectators.

Part Six: Safeguarding Our Ecosystems from AI's Footprint

A hyperscale data center can consume as much electricity as one hundred thousand homes (The Alaska Center, 2026), and the North Slope proposal alone contemplates gas consumption exceeding twice urban Alaska's current use for power and heat (Herz, 2026). We will not trade the health of our lands for the world's compute. Ecological safeguards:

- Full lifecycle accounting: greenhouse gas reporting for large facilities, including upstream methane from gas supply, with independent verification. Methane leakage will be measured, not modeled away.
- Clean energy trajectory: new facilities meet a rising clean and renewable energy standard over the life of the permit, with Alaska hydro, wind, tidal, and geothermal prioritized. Stranded gas may bridge; it does not anchor.
- Permafrost and Arctic protection: siting standards that account for permafrost thaw, tundra disturbance, caribou movement corridors, and cumulative North Slope impacts, reviewed with Tribal governments and the North Slope Borough, and informed by subsistence mapping under community control.
- Noise, light, and habitat: enforceable operational standards, because the industrial hum that has degraded communities in the Lower 48 will not become the soundtrack of rural Alaska.
- Cumulative impact review: the ADGO and the Department of Environmental Conservation jointly assess statewide data center energy, water, and emissions load annually, so Alaska sees the whole picture before approving the next project, not after.
- Guardians as monitors: the On the Land Guardian Network holds paid stewardship roles in data center compliance monitoring, integrating TEK with western science to watch the lands, waters, and wildlife around every facility. The people who know a watershed best are its best inspectors, and Guardian observations carry evidentiary weight in permit review.

Part Seven: Putting AI to Work Healing Alaska's Ecosystems

The same computation that strains grids can steady ecosystems, and Alaska is the best place on Earth to prove it, because Alaska is where TEK and Tech meet. Our administration will direct state research funding, data center community-benefit obligations, and UA partnerships toward an Alaska Ecological Intelligence agenda:

- Fish first, counted right: AI-assisted sonar and video enumeration of salmon runs, electronic monitoring of bycatch across the fleet with independent verification, and machine learning stock assessment that gives the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and the Board of Fisheries real-time truth instead of two-year-old estimates. Accountability on the water begins with counting that cannot be argued with.
- Fire and flood foresight: predictive wildfire modeling for a boreal forest that is burning hotter and faster, and flood and breakup forecasting for river communities, delivered in time to act.
- Permafrost, erosion, and relocation: satellite and sensor monitoring of coastal erosion and permafrost thaw feeding directly into our Climate Resilience Roadmap, so protect-in-place and managed relocation decisions rest on evidence communities can see and shape.
- Glacier and watershed stewardship: partnership with the Institute for Glacier Stewardship and UAF on monitoring glacial change, outburst flood risk, and downstream salmon habitat.

- TEK and Tech as required method: every ecological AI program pairs machine learning with Traditional Ecological Knowledge holders, Elders, Guardians, and local observers, under data governance the communities control, in the spirit of Two-Eyed Seeing. TEK holds ten thousand years of ground truth that no satellite carries: spawn timing, ice behavior, animal movement, and the ethics of taking only what is needed. Models trained with our peoples, for our peoples, will outperform models trained on us, and the On the Land Guardian Network is the workforce that carries both ways of knowing into the field.
- Carbon and forest intelligence: measurement, reporting, and verification tools for Alaska-led forest carbon projects, so intentional forest management by ANCSA corporations and Tribes earns full value in carbon markets.

Implementation: The First Session

- Day one executive order establishing the Alaska Data Governance Office and the state AI inventory.
- First-session legislative package: the Alaska Personal Data Protection Act; the Alaska Likeness, Voice, and Identity Rights Act; the Data Center Standards Act (the Alaska Standard above, incorporating and strengthening SB 250 ratepayer protections); the AI Accountability in Government Act; and election deepfake protections.
- Government-to-government Tribal data compact framework opened within the first one hundred days.
- UA and AVTEC workforce initiative funded in our first budget, tied to every state data center agreement.
- Alaska Ecological Intelligence agenda launched through existing fisheries, wildfire, and resilience programs, with community-benefit obligations from data center permits as a sustained funding source.

Closing

Alaska has been the testing ground for other people's ambitions for long enough. This framework makes us the authors instead. We will welcome the digital economy the way our ancestors welcomed every season: prepared, discerning, and certain of who we are. TEK and Tech, the oldest knowledge on this continent and the newest tools on Earth, working together under Alaska's authority: that is how we enter the Technological Era. Our data, our power, our children's minds, and our living lands are not inputs to someone else's model. They are the inheritance we govern together.

Gunalchéesh,

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