

SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA SUBSISTENCE
REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes

BLM Campbell Creek Science Center
Anchorage, AK
October 10-11, 2024

Invocation:

R. Greg Encelewski provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order Wednesday, October 10, 2024, at 9:34 am. Council Chair R. Greg Encelewski, and Council members Judith Caminer, Michael Opheim, and Dennis Zadra were present in person. Council members Edward Holsten, and Angela Totemoff attended telephonically, and Members Andrew McLaughlin, Diane Selanoff, and Heath Kocan were absent and excused, and member Hope Roberts was absent. The Council has three vacant seats. With seven out of ten seated Council members present, quorum was established.

Attendees:

* Denotes attended telephonically

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Regional Office – Chris McKee; Glennallen Field Office – Tessa Whitman, Tim Sundlov, Caroline Ketron*
- National Park Service (NPS): Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (WRST) – Mark Miller, Amber Cohen, Dave Sarafin*, Kyle Cutting*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): Southern Alaska Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Ken Gates*; Kenai National Wildlife Refuge – Todd Eskelin
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS): Regional Office – Greg Risdahl; Chugach National Forest – Dr. Andrew Sanders, Heather Thamm*
- Department of the Interior, Office of Policy, Management and Budget (DOI PMB): Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Environmental Management, Office of the Secretary – Eric Werwa*
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): George Pappas, Kevin Foley, Lisa Grediagin, Brian Ubelaker, Gisela Chapa, Nissa Pilcher, Katya Wessels, Dr. Hannah Voorhees*, Kristen Morrow*, Robbin La Vine*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Subsistence Division – Jackie Keating, Christian Woodard, Maddie Christiansen, McKenna Slivensky; Wildlife Conservation Division – Todd Rinaldi

- Other Organizations: Ahtna Inter-Tribal Resource Commission (AITRC) – Karen Linnell, Deanna Kosbruk, Dan Gorze; Ahtna Inc. – Kathryn Martin*

Review and Adopt Agenda:

- Motion by Member Totemoff, seconded by Member Opheim, to adopt the agenda as written. The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Dennis Zadra of Cordova reported that Cordova had a cold and wet spring. He informed the Council that the Copper River gillnet commercial season was closed in mid-season, although the in-river escapement of 250,000 thousand Sockeye Salmon was above the upper management goal set by ADF&G. He also said that Sockeye Salmon did well in Prince William Sound (PWS), but both wild and hatchery Chum Salmon and Pink Salmon were poor, with the commercial Pink Salmon harvest in PWS being the lowest amount since 1993. He informed the Council that there were subsistence openers when commercial fishing was closed, and those fishing periods were good – many people got their fish, and he proxied a few people and took others out in his boat to help other families get subsistence fish. Member Zadra noted that there were a lot of salmonberry flowers everywhere and he was looking forward to an excellent harvest, but it ended up being a poor berry year in Cordova; maybe the berries were not able to be pollinated or a windstorm destroyed a lot of flowers before they could be pollinated. This, coupled with the weak salmon runs, was hard on bears, especially the black bears, which came into the community to eat garbage. Hunters needed to be even more aware of bears than usual while in the woods. Member Zadra reported that fall moose hunting went well in both state and federal hunts, and that the weather was typical fall weather, with lots of rain and storms, and Cordova had snow on the ground by the time of this meeting.

Michael Opheim of Seldovia reported that the bears around his community showed up late but all looked healthy, even with the lack of a good Pinks [Pink Salmon] return. Although the planted (hatchery run) kings (Chinook Salmon) did good, the silvers (Coho Salmon) never showed up. He noted that the salmonberries and blueberries also did very poorly; the salmon berries that were found were deformed. The wild strawberries did very well, and he had gone out a few times to gather mushrooms, but it may have been too late in the year to find much. Member Opheim commented that it was a good rabbit year as well. Member Opheim finalized his report by informing the Council that halibut fishing had been poor all summer in places that should have been good (other than the very first time he had gone out) and that is concerning.

Judy Caminer of Anchorage reported that summer came late this year. It didn't feel like summer until around solstice, and there was a lot of rain starting in July. It was rare to have more than one dry day back-to-back. She commented that the blueberries and cranberries were good picking, but that there may have been other kinds that did not do as well. Member Caminer reported that fishing was closed in Ship Creek due to concern over the low number of Chinook Salmon. She finalized her report by noting that there was currently a (draw) moose hunt going in in Anchorage.

Edward Holsten of Cooper Landing reported that his area also had a lot more rain than typical starting in July, and while June was nice, there was still more rain than average. He noted that the rain this summer in addition to a large snowpack past winter in the mountains led to the upper Kenai River being extremely high all season. He informed the Council that there are two runs of Sockeye Salmon in the Kenai River. The first run goes up the Russian River, and the second run goes both into the Russian River and the upper Kenai into Kenai Lake, and that both runs were late, although they did come in strong and met the escapement goals. There is no clear reason why they were both late, and Member Holsten speculated that it may be due to the water temperature or the high river volumes. He also reported that the Chinook and Coho [salmon] runs were horrible. Member Holsten finalized his report by noting that the blueberries and cranberries were good in his area.

Angela Totemoff of Anchorage reported that her home community of Tatitlek saw the same weather patterns as Member Zadra noted, and that the wet and rainy summer impacted most of the berries other than the high bush cranberries. She relayed that this was true even for the local blueberries, which ripen earlier than they do in Anchorage. She informed the Council that seals and sea otter populations around the community were much higher than typical. Member Totemoff wanted to recognize the work of David Totemoff, an elder from Tatitlek who held subsistence issues in high regard and who had recently passed away. She said that one of the issues that concerned him was the commercial trawlers. She noted that she sits on the Subsistence Committee for the Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN), and that there had been a lot of discussion of this concern in this group, as it is a very complex issue that has created tension within AFN. Between this and litigation between the Federal government and State government there is a lot of discussion on what this all means for management of the resources. Member Totemoff informed the Council that AFN is working on educating the public on what subsistence uses are and what management is. She finalized her report by stating that co-management was a huge topic at AFN this year, and that she is very impressed with the Elders of Eyak and with Ahtna for their efforts in this arena.

R. Greg Encelewski of Ninilchik reported that the Tribe was able to use their community subsistence net in the Kenai and Kasilof rivers this year, and that it was a very successful red (Sockeye Salmon) run, even though they were a bit smaller than normal. He expressed concern over the number of parasites in the fish, and informed the Council that some tribal members got sick when they did not freeze the fish before putting them in the smokehouse, and relayed that the Tribe is watching for this now. Chair Encelewski stated that there are no kings (Chinook Salmon) anymore, and that the talking about fixing it needs to be done and something needs to be done so that they just come back. The silvers (Coho Salmon) still hadn't come in yet and were hopefully just late. He also reported that people had done well moose hunting this fall and relayed that he and his son harvested one, but it charged his son as he was attempting to bring it down, which was an experience. Chair Encelewski reported that his garden did very well this year with carrots and potatoes, but that the wild berry crops were very poor, which may have been caused by the wet and cold summer. He reported that Ninilchik formed a Cook Inlet Subsistence Commission with six villages on the Kenai with the goal of getting a subsistence fishery in the Economic Exclusion Zone, and that halibut fishing had also been poor on his side of the peninsula.

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda items

Karen Linnell, Executive Director for AITRC, spoke on the request for reconsideration that AITRC submitted on the recently created Cordova subsistence dip net season, and said that she was concerned that the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council was told they had no jurisdiction over this area when the Copper River headwaters are in their region. Ms. Linnell also requested the Council to discuss the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) Proposals 51, 52, and 53 that address meeting subsistence needs on the Copper River. Ms. Linnell informed the Council that this year there were in-season teleconferences funded by the WRST with federal and state fisheries managers and subsistence users of the Copper River and that AITRC is doing some salmon sampling on the Copper River and looks forward to sharing that information with the Council in the future.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

- Motion by Member Caminer, seconded by Member Opheim, to approve the winter 2024 meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.
- Motion by Member Opheim, seconded by Member Caminer, to approve the All-Council winter 2024 meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member Training

Brian Ubelaker, OSM Wildlife Biologist, presented information on delegated authority, specifically an overview of what it is, where and how to find information on delegated authority, and an outline of Council and user involvement in delegated authority.

Briefing on Proposed Changes to Wildlife Delegation of Authority Letters

Mr. Ubelaker presented the Council with information about upcoming proposed changes to wildlife delegation of authority.

Due to the proposed changes, the Council decided to postpone reviewing current delegation of authority letters until after the proposed changes have been considered to avoid reviewing letters that may be rescinded or modified.

Action Items

Fisheries Proposals and Closure Reviews

Regional

FP25-03a: Tolsona C&T Chitina Subdistrict Salmon

The Council **opposes** FP25-03a. There does not appear to be a long-term history of passing on traditions. It is unclear if the proponent has a history in the area, and the Council had questions about the individuals named as having histories of use in the proposal area; discussion indicated that many of these individuals had not lived in the area for a long time or are deceased. It is unknown if there is support for this proposal from the community, and more information is needed. The Council encourages proponents to attend their

meetings in the future. Written and tribal testimony in opposition to the proposal was also compelling, and the Eastern Interior Council also opposed the proposal. Additionally, there is a conservation concern for the resource.

- Motion by Member Opheim, seconded by Member Zadra, to support fisheries proposal FP25-03a as written. The motion failed unanimously.

FP25-03b: Tolsona C&T Upper Copper River Freshwater Fish

The Council **opposes** FP25-03b. Several significant data gaps exist. However, there does not appear to be a long-term history of passing on traditions. It is unclear if the proponent has a history in the area, and the Council had questions about the individuals named as having histories of use in the area in the proposal; discussion indicated that many of these individuals had not lived in the area for a long time or are deceased. It is unknown if there is support for this proposal from the community, and more information is needed. The Council appreciated receiving written comments from the proponent during the meeting and encourages proponents to attend their meetings in the future. The Council was surprised that the Wrangell-St. Elias Subsistence Resource Commission did not act on this proposal.

- Motion by Member Opheim, seconded by Member Zadra, to support fisheries proposal FP25-03a as written. The motion failed unanimously.

2026 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and Priority Information Needs (PINs) development

Kevin Foley, OSM Fisheries Biologist, and Hannah Voorhees, OSM Cultural Anthropologist, presented a draft list of PINs for the Southcentral Region to the Council. Amber Cohen, Cultural Anthropologist with NPS WRST, informed the Council that the WRST Subsistence Resource Committee (SRC) requested that an additional PIN be created on freshwater predation of salmon before they reach their spawning grounds.

- Motion by Member Opheim, seconded by Member Zadra, to approve the Southcentral PINs with the additional topic from the WRST SRC. The motion passed unanimously.

Wildlife Proposal

WP25-01: Nelchina Caribou seasons, hunt management, and §804 user prioritization analysis

The Council **supported** this proposal **as modified by OSM and the Eastern Interior Council**. The Council supported this proposal based on the information presented in the OSM analysis and in Tribal testimony provided by ATRIC. The Council recognized the tremendous effort and amount of work that went into this proposal analysis. The Council expressed how unfortunate it is that there is such a severe conservation concern but appreciated that everyone is teaming up to make the best of it and do what needs to be done given the tough circumstances.

- Motion by Member Opheim, seconded by Member Zadra, to adopt with OSM's modification, as well as to add Gakona to Unit 13A, Gulkana to Unit 13C, and Mentasta Lake and Chistochina to Unit 12 remainder as modified by the Eastern Interior Council. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Statewide Sheep Discussion

Nissa Pilcher, OSM Council Coordinator, informed the Council about the Western Interior Council's efforts to create a Dall Sheep Management Strategy, and their request to distribute the Strategy to all other Councils with sheep in their region, with the intent that it could be adopted and modified as needed by other Councils. The Council chose to not take action on this topic.

Annual Report

Federal Subsistence Board (Board) FY2023 Draft Annual Report Reply Summary

Ms. Pilcher briefly reviewed the Council's FY23 Annual Report and provided an overview of the Board's replies to the Council's FY-2023 Annual Report topics. She informed the Council that a final version will be sent to the Council after the meeting.

Identify Issues for FY2024 Annual Report to the Board

The Council identified the following issues to include in their FY2024 annual report:

- The Council would like to request that the Board:
 - supply information on how to have a ceremonial or potlatch harvest for shrimp in PWS,
 - reevaluate the criteria for the FRMP as there are important processes for subsistence that are left out of this funding process such as contaminants in relation to marine food webs and climate change effects on subsistence resources,
 - review the effect of the Chitina subdistrict personal use fishery on subsistence fishing and Chinook and Sockeye salmon returns, and
 - provide information on what the process is to list Chinook Salmon as a threatened or endangered species, as well as what that would mean for salmon habitat.
- The Council would like to inform the Board:
 - of ongoing effects of climate change that impact this region in relation to ocean resources, and
 - The alarming rate at which the Southcentral Region's subsistence resources are being depleted.

Relevant Alaska Board of Fisheries Proposals

Mark Miller, NPS WRST Research Coordinator, informed the Council of a few proposals that the BOF would be discussing at the December 2025 Prince Williams Sound and Upper Copper/Upper Susitna meeting that may be of interest to the Council. Ms. Linnell spoke to these proposals also. The Council chose not to submit comments to the BOF but noted that many members also sit on local State Fish and Game advisory committees and that they hope that these committees will take up these proposals.

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed its winter 2025 meeting dates as March 12-13 in Cordova.

The Council confirmed its fall 2025 meeting dates as October 14-15 in Anchorage.

Reports

The Council received oral updates on the following topics:

- ADF&G Current Division of Subsistence Research in the Southcentral Region presented by Jacki Keating, Subsistence Resource Specialist
- FWS Kenai National Wildlife Refuge Update presented by Todd Eskelin, Fish and Wildlife Biologist
- NPS WRST Fall Fisheries Report presented by David Sarafin, Fisheries Management Biologist
- NPS WRST Wildlife Report presented by Kyle Cutting, Wildlife Biologist
- NPS WRST Subsistence and Anthropology Report presented by Amber Cohen, Cultural Anthropologist
- NPS Final Rule; Amended Alaska Sport Hunting and Trapping Regulation Update presented by Victoria Florey, Subsistence Program Analyst
- BLM Glennallen Field Office Update presented by Caroline Ketron, Anthropologist & Subsistence Coordinator
- USFS Chugach National Forest Update presented by Andrew Sanders, Subsistence Program Manager
- OSM update presented by Lisa Grediagin, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist

The Council received written reports from the FWS and BLM Gravel to Gravel Initiative, NPS Denali National Park and Preserve, and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration on the Gulf of Alaska Chinook Salmon Endangered Species Act status review and listing processes.

Other Business

The Council received briefings on the following topics:

- Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program update
- 805(c) Report and summary of the Federal Subsistence Board wildlife regulatory actions
- 2025 Council application and nomination open season
- Correspondence update on status of the Council's previous correspondence, as well as an update on correspondence drafted by others of interest to the Council
- Special action updates on WSA24-02/03 and WSA24-06
- Proposed move to the use of declining balance cards for Council member travel

Minutes were Chair certified for accuracy on December 20, 2024

R. Greg Encelewski, Chair
Southcentral Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Southcentral Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its March 2025 meeting in Cordova, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

For a more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Nissa Pilcher at 1-800-478-1456 or (907)891-9054 or email nissa_pilcher@ios.doi.gov.