

SEWARD PENINSULA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL Meeting Minutes

Education Center Rm. 102
University of Alaska Fairbanks, Northwest Campus
Nome, Alaska
October 24 – 25, 2024

Invocation:

Council member Mary Freytag provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order on Thursday, October 24, 2024, at 9:15 a.m. Council members Martin Aukongak, Mary Freytag, Robert Moses, Sr., Elmer Seetot, Jr., Raymond Hunt, Acting Chair (day one of the meeting) Thomas Gray, and Chair Louis Green, Jr. (day two of the meeting) were present at the meeting. Member Ronald Kirk was not present and was excused. With seven of the eight seated Council members present (Council has two vacant seats), quorum was established.

Attendees:

*Asterisk * identifies if present via teleconference.*

- Kawerak: Chuck Menadelook
- Nome Eskimo Community: Allison Johnson
- Arctic Yukon-Kuskokwim Tribal Consortium: Mellissa Johnson
- Office of the Secretary, Policy, and Environmental Management: Eric Werwa*
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Jarred Stone, Dr. Hannah Voorhees, Lisa Grediagin, Gisela Chapa, Brian Ubelaker*, Brooke McDavid*, Nissa Pilcher*, Robbin La Vine*, Tom Plank*, Leigh Honig*, Crystal Leonetti*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Boyd Blihovde*, George Yaska*, Jill Klein*, Curtis Stevens*
- National Park Service (NPS): Eva Patton, Letty Hughes, Nikki Braem, Ken Adkisson, Jeannette Koelsch*, Victoria Florey*
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Tom Sparks, Walker Dusty*, Bruce Seppi*, Chris McKee*
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA): Glenn Chen*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Alicia Carson, Sara Henslee, Luke Henslee, Helen Cold*, Marianna Mallory*, Sam A. Kirby*
- Ocean Conservancy: Kristina Tirman*
- The Nome Nugget: Anna Lionas
- Public: Frank Kabairlook, Roy Ashenfelter, Irvin J. Barnes*, Debbie (unidentified last name)*, Gayla Hoseth*

Review and Adopt Agenda:

- Motion by member Green, seconded by member Freytag, to adopt the agenda as presented.

The motion **passed** unanimously.

Service Awards:

Eva Patton, Interagency Staff Committee member from NPS, presented a service award to Council member Tom Gray for 21 years of service.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

- Motion by member Seetot, seconded by member Aukongak, to approve the March 5-6, 2024, Joint-Council Meeting minutes as presented.

The motion **passed** unanimously.

- Motion by member Seetot, seconded by member Green, to approve the March 7, 2024, Quadrilateral Winter 2024 Meeting minutes on WP24-28/29 as presented.

The motion **passed** unanimously.

- Motion by member Seetot, seconded by member Aukongak, to approve the March 8, 2024, Council Winter 2024 Meeting minutes as presented.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Martin Aukongak of Golovin stated that fishing was slow compared to what it used to be, and commercial crabbing went quickly. He also mentioned that at the time of fishing and crabbing, there were more storms and floods noting that the weather is changing, and stated they are “getting a lot more water.” He wished everyone a safe fall and hoped for good freeze up so people can harvest caribou.

Mary Freytag of Unalakleet shared this meeting would likely be her last. She stated she has enjoyed sharing knowledge and learning from everyone and thanked all the agencies that have been involved in Regional Advisory Council meetings as they play an important role in the Council’s decision-making and on subsistence.

Robert Moses of Golovin stated the salmon berries, blueberries, and blackberries were bountiful. Fish arrived late to Golovin, but people were able to get silver salmon (Coho Salmon) to dry for the winter and some people also got the opportunity to harvest moose. He also reported there were more storms in the area with increased wind and noted that storms seemed to push seaweed onto the beach earlier than usual.

Tom cod, smelt, and silver salmon were out of the usual season and showed up late. Smelt were more abundant than tom cod, trout fishing was fair, and crabbing was good. He stated that commercial fishing harvests for silvers (Coho Salmon) were the lowest he has seen despite the State's comments about Golovin being the top fishing village in the region. Member Moses also stated that people were successful harvesting caribou last winter, but people had to travel about 200 miles to do that. Lastly, he stated that people were able to harvest greens and other medicinal plants this season, two belugas were also harvested, and herring were seen in the bay this fall.

Elmer Seetot, Jr. of Brevig Mission spoke about the spring harvest season for marine mammals being short again this year; Port Clarence Bay, which is their main mode of transportation for marine mammal harvest, melted earlier than usual due to rain. He also shared that snow arrived earlier this year and expected winter temperatures to be early as a result. Member Seetot reported changes in fisheries and went on to state the Sockeye Salmon run was good this year, but the Chum Salmon and the pinks were missing. Additionally, clam harvest was good, and no one died of Paralytic Shellfish Poisoning in Brevig. His son also harvested walrus this year. Member Seetot also expressed the need to encourage more people to speak up or participate in forums such as this Council, and not only rely on representatives, like himself, to speak up for them. He also encouraged people to talk to the local elders to learn more about the environment since Traditional Knowledge is passed down and not written and concluded his report by sharing his hopes to see this practice continue.

Louie Green of Nome reported caribou were scarce in Unit 22 and people had to travel long distances, between 80 – 100 miles, to find caribou during the spring hunt. He stated that berry season was successful this year, a lot of spring mammal hunts were successful, and subsistence king crab fishing was successful as well. Chair Green expressed his disagreement with the State's decision to close the Port Clarence mixed-stock fishery in June as it is difficult to preserve fish later in the season due to rain. Regarding fisheries, Chair Green reported the red salmon (Sockeye Salmon) run was a success, but the weather was bad in the summer in the Nome subdistrict. He also stated his desires to see the subsistence fishery on the west side of Cape Nome open seven days a week as it is on the east side, that commercial fishery should not take priority over subsistence fishing and urged the State to make that adjustment in their fisheries management. He further justified his statements with the Traditional Knowledge that himself, along with other Council members of this region have shared to date and should be incorporated to State and Federal fisheries management. He also urged the State to reconsider moose management in Unit 22C to reduce the harvest pressure on the resource in the fall, especially along the road system. He heard as many as 40 moose were taken in Unit 22C and attributed the popularity of the hunt to high gas prices and people not being able to afford travelling longer distances to harvest moose. The whitefish in the Kuzitrin [River] seemed to be abundant and whitefish harvests went well this season. Beluga season also went well and was ongoing at the time of the meeting. Lastly, Chair Green wanted to state on the record that there are people against trawling in the Bering Sea and further commented on the detrimental impacts of trawling on the marine environment. He urged the public to be aware and engaged on this issue to bring salmon back.

Acting Chair Gray of Nome/White Mountain emphasized the role weather plays on what people can do or harvest. He stressed the changes in weather over the years and that conditions need to be just right to put dry fish away for the winter and supported his statements by sharing that this year was the first in three they had pinks to harvest up the Fish River, the river was at its lowest, and had a short one-week window to dry fish. He also shared fish runs are unpredictable, they don't have a King Salmon (Chinook Salmon) run anymore and urged all users to "back off" to improve the runs. Acting Chair Gray shared complaints from commercial fishermen from Golovin Bay and his confusion as to why commercial fishing is opened to harvest a handful of silver salmon. He runs a hunting and fishing lodge all summer upriver from White Mountain and stated that out of 56 fishing holes in his river system, only three were productive, and he takes that as an indication of the health of fish populations. Comparably, Acting Chair Gray stated *Oogruk* (bearded seal) hunting was awesome and snow geese are more abundant than in the past. Commercial crabbing was successful last year after many years of closures and he shared that his son, now 35 years old, handlined for the first time and caught 25 crabs handlining. He further shared his hopes that subsistence lifestyles are accounted for in the management of commercial crabbing rather harvesting as much as possible and decimate the resource once more. He also stated beluga stocks seem to be in good standing all around Alaska, except for the Kotzebue and Cook Inlet stocks. Regarding moose hunting, Acting Chair Gray shared the fall hunt around White Mountain was very slow; it was rainy and very warm, and no one got moose until the end of the season. He would be in support of a potential proposal to open Unit 22B later in the season in response to weather and to improve moose harvest opportunities. He also stated there was a handful of caribou harvested around White Mountain and attributed that to people travelling farther, and not necessarily due to an increase in the caribou population. He concluded his report by providing some advice to "manage the resources wisely" – to safeguard and address the needs of subsistence users first, then manage for commercial activities carefully.

Public Testimony:

George Yaska, Tribal member of the Huslia Tribe on the Koyukuk River near Galena, introduced himself to the Council as an Indigenous Knowledge Liaison with the USFWS, Science Applications and stated he attended the meeting to remain informed on subsistence issues in the Region. Mr. Yaska also provided a personal comment as Tribal member and shared information about a petition from the Huslia Tribe to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Hawaii, to declare the Bering Sea as a marine protected area to restrict bottom trawling. He stated this petition is moving through individual Tribes in Alaska for support.

Chuck Menadelook, Subsistence Director at Kawerak, reported the results of beach surveys for dead animal and birds. He reported 48 dead short-tailed shearwaters and other species such as kittiwakes, and glaucous gulls, all who died due to starvation. These specimens will be sent out to a lab for further study. Other dead specimens found were six belugas and two baby belugas that had to be euthanized, two dead seals and 12 dead porpoises. Those specimens were sent for further testing, and Kawerak is awaiting those results. Council members expressed their concern on these findings and stated these specimens are indicators on the health of the marine environment.

Gayla Hoseth, Subsistence Chair with the Alaska Federation of Natives, shared more information about the opportunity for Tribes to nominate individuals to fill the three public seats added to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board). She further stated that nominations to serve on the Board should be submitted by Tribal Councils and those nominations should be sent to the Office of the Secretary of the Interior.

Melissa Johnson, Tribal member with Nome Eskimo Community and a member of the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) Advisory Panel (AP), shared the NPFMC's call for nominations to serve on the AP, the Scientific and Statistical Committee (SSC), and provided the deadline to submit nominations.

Council Training:

Lisa Grediagin, OSM Supervisory Wildlife Biologist, provided the Council training on Delegation of Authority.

Briefing on Proposed Changes to Wildlife Delegation of Authority Letters

Ms. Grediagin provided an overview of proposed changes to existing wildlife Delegation of Authority Letters. The proposed changes would move some wildlife delegated authorities into unit-specific regulations rather than Delegation of Authority Letters. This briefing was intended to serve as an introduction to the topic and additional opportunities will be provided to the Council to review and comment on these proposed changes.

Action Items:

Fisheries Proposals and Closure Reviews

Jarred Stone, OSM Fisheries Biologist, provided an overview of one fisheries closure review to the Council.

FCR25-01 – Unalakleet River Chinook Salmon ((50CFR 100.27(e)(2)(ii)(C))

- Motion by member Seetot, seconded by member Green, to **retain status quo**. The Council supported retaining the closure because of the severe conservation concern over Chinook Salmon in the Unalakleet River. As stated by Council members, there are no fish to harvest and, as the Council Member from Unalakleet noted, there is a prevalence of “little jack Kings” over the once plentiful “huge salmon” she recalls from her youth. The Council also noted continued concerns over weather changes and increased high-water events in the river systems, trawlers, and the interception of Chinook Salmon in commercial fisheries.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

2026 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) Priority Information Needs (PINs) Development

Hannah Voorhees, PhD, Anthropologist for OSM, and Mr. Stone presented the FRMP PINs to the Council.

- Motion by member Freytag, seconded by member Aukongak, to adopt the PINs for the Seward Peninsula region as follows:
 - Chinook Salmon abundance estimate for the Unalakleet River.
 - Changes in Grayling, Dolly Varden, and Sheefish populations related to climate change.
 - Chinook, Chum and Coho Salmon abundance estimate for the Pikmiktalik River, with comparison to historical counts.
 - Coho Salmon abundance estimate for Boston, Fish, Pargon, and Wagon Wheel Rivers.
 - Summer and Fall Chum Salmon abundance estimates for the Agiapuk River drainage including American River and Igloo Creek.
 - Investigate causes of salmon decline in Norton Sound freshwater drainages.
 - Historical analysis of postseason salmon harvest surveys for residents of Unalakleet fishing in the Unalakleet Subdistrict, combined with assessment of causes of low harvest years and overall declines. Investigators must present results to the residents of Unalakleet.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Annual Report

Board FY-2023 Annual Report Replies

Gisela Chapa, Council Coordinator and Designated Federal Officer with OSM, provided a summary of the Board replies to the Council's FY-2023 Annual Report.

Identify Topics for FY 2024 Annual Report

- Motion by Member Freytag, seconded by Member Aukongak, to approve the following items be included in the FY-2024 Annual Report to the Board.
 1. Develop curricula or youth programs to engage youth in subsistence practices and the Federal Subsistence Management Program in the Seward Peninsula region.
 2. Continued concerns of the impacts of trawling and commercial fisheries on salmon.
 3. Request to host interagency workshops to address long-standing subsistence issues negatively impacting subsistence users in the Seward Peninsula region.
 4. Concerns about the impacts of microplastics and pollution on the Arctic marine environment.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed their winter 2025 meeting date and location: April 1 – 2, 2025 in Nome, Alaska.

The Council confirmed their fall 2025 meeting date and location: October 14 – 15, 2025 in Nome, Alaska.

Agency Reports:

- NPS Amended Alaska Sport Hunting and Trapping Regulations, Final Rule, presented by Eva Patton, Subsistence Program Manager.
- 2024 Seward Peninsula Muskox Population Survey Results, presented by Letty Hughes, Acting Integrated Resources Program Manager for Bering Land Bridge National Park and Preserve, and Sara Henslee, Game Management Unit (GMU) 22 Area Biologist for ADF&G.
- 2024 ADF&G Moose Update in Unit 22, presented by Sarah Henslee, and Alicia Carson, Assistant Wildlife Biologist.
- 2024 ADF&G Fisheries Update, presented by Luke Henslee, Norton Sound and Kotzebue Management Area Fishery Biologist.
- NPFMC Meeting Schedule and Chum Bycatch Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) Updates, presented by Mellisa Johnson, NPFMC Advisory Panel Member.
- Gravel to Gravel Update, presented by Boyd Blihovde, Senior Advisor for Conservation for the USFWS, Alaska Region.
- BLM update, presented by Tom Sparks, Associate Field Manager.
- Ocean Conservancy Marine Debris in Alaska, presented by Kristina Tillman, Manager of Arctic Marine Debris.
- OSM Fall 2024 Update, presented by Lisa Grediagin, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist.

Other Business:

Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program

Mr. Stone informed the Council of the upcoming competitive funding opportunity through the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program.

805(c) Report:

Ms. Chapa provided a summary of the 805(c) Report outlining Board action on wildlife proposals and closure reviews impacting residents of the Seward Peninsula region.

Council Application Open Season:

Ms. Chapa advised the Council that the window to apply for a seat on the Council is not yet open. There will be two vacancies to fill on the Council as those terms expire December 2nd, 2025. Council members

with expiring seats will be informed when this window opens, and outreach will be done across the region at that time.

Council Correspondence:

Ms. Chapa provided an update on the following correspondence sent on behalf of the Council since the winter 2024 meeting in Anchorage.

- Joint Council Letter to the Board Regarding Concerns Over Bycatch.
- Joint Council Letter to the Board Regarding Council Member Compensation.
- Joint Council Letter to the Board to Address Issues in Council Correspondence.
- Joint Council Letter to the Board Regarding Concerns Over the Proposed Withdrawal of ANCSA 17(d)(1) lands.
- Joint Council Letter to the Board Regarding Caribou Concerns Statewide.
- Joint Council Letter to the Board Regarding Concerns on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd.

Ms. Chapa also provided the following updates on topics of interest to the Council:

- Yukon Delta and Eastern Interior transmittal letters Regarding Urgent Revisions to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery and Conservation Management Act (MSA).
- OSM's Comments to the NPFMC Outreach and Engagement Plan on Chum Salmon Bycatch.

The Council voted to submit the following correspondence:

1. A letter to the Bering Strait School District requesting the inclusion of ANCSA and ANILCA in school curricula.
- Motion by member Freytag, second by member Green.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

2. A letter to the Board, requesting the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to work with the Department of Commerce to address the impacts of trawling and commercial fishing on salmon.
- Motion by member Green, second by member Aukongak

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Declining Balance Cards:

Ms. Chapa provided information to the Council about proposed changes to the way OSM processes payment for invitational travel for Council members. The Council supported the use of declining balance cards stating it will streamline the process.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:15 pm on October 25, 2024.

Signature on file

Gisela Chapa, DFO
DOI Office of Subsistence Management

Signature on file

Louis Green, Jr., Chair
Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These meeting minutes were formally considered and approved by the Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its winter meeting, April 1, 2025.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcripts, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Gisela Chapa at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-310-6129, or email gisela_chapa@ios.doi.gov.