

NORTH SLOPE SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Inupiat Heritage Center
Utqiagvik, Alaska
February 28, 2025

Invocation

Peter Williams provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Friday, February 28, 2025, at 9:40 a.m. Council members Wanda Kippi, Peter Williams, Esther Hugo, Leonard Barger, Jenysa Ahmaogak, and Chair Brower Frantz were present in person at the meeting. Council member Martha Itta and Ernest Nageak, Jr. were present via teleconference. Council member Adams was absent and excused. With eight of the nine seated Council members present (Council has one vacant seat), quorum was established.

Attendees:

*Asterisk * identifies if present via teleconference.*

- Inupiat Circumpolar Council, Alaska (ICC): Marie Green*
- North Slope Borough Department of Wildlife Management: Brian Person, Todd Sformo*
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Kristen Morrow, Kendra Holman, Chris McKee, Gisela Chapa, Robbin LaVine*, Katerina Wessels*, Pippa Kenner*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Clayton Merrill*, Jill Klein*, Cody Smith*,
- National Park Service (NPS): Eva Patton*, Marcy Okada*, Kyle Joly*, Victoria Florey*
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): DeAnna Depue*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Carmen Daggett, Jordan Pruszenski*, Helen Cold*

Tribute to Late Council Member Steve Oomittuk

Prior to the beginning of business, the Council took time to pay tribute to Council member Steve Oomittuk of Point Hope who passed away unexpectedly in December 2024.

Review and Adopt Agenda

- Motion by Member Itta, seconded by Member Barger, to adopt the agenda as presented.

The motion **passed** unanimously.

Election of Officers

- Brower Frantz was elected Chair
- Leonard Barger was elected Vice-Chair
- Wanda Kippi was elected Secretary

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

- Motion by Member Barger, seconded by Member Kippi, to approve the fall 2024 meeting minutes as presented.

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

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Wanda Kippi of Atqasuk reported they had a good spring but experienced some bad weather with fog. She reported the *nigliqs* (geese) were good and caught them as they arrived, but their arrival was earlier than usual. She also reported that berry picking in the summer was ok; the blueberries and cranberries around her area were too small to pick, and she did not have an opportunity to harvest many. Young caribou were still with the females and some young bucks were around and not harvested. She also reported owls, ptarmigans, and many *amaquqs* (wolves) and foxes around her community. She believes the abundance of wolves may be a reason why caribou were not seen often this past season. Fishing was good with nets and rod-and-reel. In October there was only a very thin layer of ice around the banks of the river, forcing them to icefish from the edges for safety.

Peter Williams of Anaktuvuk Pass talked about people hunting caribou in the fall. People reported a bear and stated that bears scare caribou away. There were many *siksriks* (squirrels) spotted in his community. He expressed his appreciation for all the people working together to be where they are today and encouraged people to continue working together to preserve wildlife, their traditions, and customs.

Esther Hugo of Anaktuvuk Pass added to member Williams' report remarking on the unusual summer with the prevalence of southerly winds and bad weather. She shared that *aqpiks* (salmonberries), blueberries, and blackberries weren't as abundant and had a short harvest season. They only had one or two *tuttu* (caribou) stragglers, forcing people to climb up the mountains and harvest sheep. Their caribou migration was late, and people harvested cows. Member Hugo plans to make *aminilik* (a dish using the intestines of the caribou), a recipe she learned from her mother-in-law, for her siblings and grandchildren. She also noted that caribou have started their migration north earlier than usual over the last two years; they are migrating by the second or third week in March, whereas they would normally begin their migration north in April. Fishing wasn't as good; she took her grandson or granddaughter out fishing but didn't catch much with rod and reel. They were successful ice fishing at Chandler Lake where they caught trout and char. At the time of her report, Ms. Hugo shared the John River had open water by the glacier and stated it was unusual. She also reported many rabbits and squirrels over the summer and many foxes and wolves in the fall. She also mentioned she has a nephew and a grandson who go trapping

and is pleased to see the younger generations trapping. The Chair commented on his desire to see an incentive program for youth to learn about trapping and keep the tradition going.

Martha Itta of Nuiqsut reported many concerns impacting the people of her community, some of which had been ongoing for many years. Member Itta reported fishing was good; cold weather hit early, and they were able to build the ice road to their fishing spot earlier than usual. People caught *tiktaliq* (burbot), and the *qaaktak* (whitefish) season was good although there was a shortage of fishermen. Member Itta also reported issues with caribou. Although caribou made their way to town, she reported the caribou were scattered, their movements impacted by the constant traffic due to industry in the community of Nuiqsut, and issues harvesting caribou for the same reason. She also reported other instances of user conflict, where people have been banned from hunting on their ancestral lands due to leases to the oil and gas industry. She explained that some leaseholders have taken control of the leased lands and cited people for trespass. Member Itta also reported they have been losing access to land with more pipelines and continued development, which negatively impacts subsistence. She shared how caribou that rest near pipelines cannot be harvested and young hunters have been restricted from accessing hunting grounds. She expressed dissatisfaction with the way young hunters had been treated since they are trying to provide for their families and trying to learn; the community depends on these youth as they will become the next generation of elders. She encouraged people from nearby communities to educate themselves about the impacts of development and industry on subsistence and noted that the people of Nuiqsut are still trying to adjust their way of life after 25-30 years of development. Member Itta concluded by stating she hadn't sighted any muskoxen in the area but reported the presence of many predators like *qavviks* (wolverines) and *amaguq* (wolves) and shared there's a problem with many rabid foxes in Nuiqsut. The community harvested two whales this year but noted the whaling seasons are getting shorter. This year, wind was a factor that shortened the season.

Jenysa Ahmaogak of Wainwright reported a hard summer due to inclement weather, which prevented them from harvesting seals and walrus. Her family was unable to harvest any seals, which is unusual. Other families that normally harvest 3 or more were only able to harvest one. It was also a bad year for berries due to the rain and cold summer. The fall caribou hunt was good, and the people of Wainwright were able to stock up on the meat they needed to sustain the winter. Member Ahmaogak also reported ice fishing was favorable, noting that a lot of people were able to catch and share their smolt with others outside of the community. Springtime was also a good harvest season for bowhead and reported the community was able to harvest five. She also noted the presence of foxes and heard reports the sighted foxes were rabid, although there were no tests to confirm that. Caribou remained close to Wainwright throughout the season, which was probably due to predators in the vicinity. People were actively trying to do predator control to minimize predation on caribou. Member Ahmaogak concluded her report by stating muskoxen had been sighted near Wainwright and that she heard reports that the caribou are confusing muskoxen with predators.

Leonard Barger of Point Hope was happy to report that a group of ladies in Point Hope were working on sewing a skin boat. This is a source of pride for the whaling community as it keeps the whaling tradition of hunting using skin boats alive. Member Barger shared he was able to harvest a caribou for someone

else who is unable to hunt. Getting hunting licenses in Point Hope is difficult despite the application process being available online. He also actively reported muskoxen sightings to Ms. Lucy Leavitt, Subsistence Research Coordinator with the North Slope Borough's Department of Wildlife Management. At the time of the report, people from Point Hope were getting ready for whaling and it is expected the season would be difficult without the late Steve Oomittuk on the ice teaching youth how to mark a whale and setting the pace on the towline, encouraging the community to pull the harvested whales onto the beach. Fifty dead birds were sighted along the coast through the summer, which was reported to the Borough's Wildlife Department.

Ernest Nageak, Jr. of Utqiagvik shared his report via text due to a work meeting. He stated hunting was good but was unable to get his muskox permit.

Chair Brower Frantz of Utqiagvik shared that muskoxen were plentiful last year. He heard of multiple sightings along the Chipp, Ikpiuk, and Topagoruk rivers but the caribou populations were lower where they've been sighted. Chair Frantz also reported the sightings of muskoxen over the last five years or so, seem to indicate the herd is expanding northward. Fishing has been great, and he had not heard any issues with whitefish harvests, and many pink salmon. Likewise, geese and ducks are abundant. Whaling was good, and Chair Frantz reported landing his fifth whale this past season. The predator population seemed high. Walrus harvests had also been good; however, that depends on the ice conditions. Once the ice leaves people have to hunt walrus immediately or lose the opportunity to harvest for the summer. Along those lines, Chair Frantz shared the ice hunting season was shorter than it used to be. Most berries were ok this past summer, but blueberries were lacking in the area, and, for the second year in a row, most *aqpiks* (salmonberries) did not sprout. He concluded his report by expressing his desire to see more people harvest beluga and reported a lot more porpoises and orcas. During the fall, the weather was bad and kept people from hunting.

Public Testimony:

The Council did not have any public comment at this meeting.

Council Training:

Kristen Morrow, OSM Anthropology Pathways Intern, provided the Council training on proposing changes to Federal Subsistence Hunting and Trapping Regulations.

Action Items:

Deferred WP24-01, Statewide Sale of Brown Bear Hides

- Motion by Member Itta, seconded by Member Kippi, to support WP24-01 with the OSM modification.

The Council shared that brown bears are abundant in the region. They supported the proposal as modified by OSM but also noted that the permitting and sealing requirements to sell brown bears are burdensome to subsistence users.

The motion **passed** with five votes for and two against.

Wildlife Closure Reviews

Kendra Holman, OSM Wildlife Biologist, provided an overview of the wildlife closure reviews (WCR) to the Council.

WCR26-25 – Unit 26C, Muskox harvest closure except by Kaktovik residents

The Council briefly discussed OSM's preliminary recommendation to maintain the closure but modify the closure regulatory language to clarify that the hunt is open to federally qualified subsistence users. Council members noted that muskox harvests are a good opportunity for residents of Kaktovik as muskoxen seem to be more abundant.

WCR26-18: Unit 23, Sheep harvest closure to non-federally qualified users in the Baird Mountains

The Council discussed OSM's preliminary conclusion to rescind the closure. While the Baird Mountains sheep population is very low, the State sheep hunt in Unit 23 has been closed since 2014. Additionally, the Western Arctic National Parklands Superintendent would retain a Delegation of Authority to close Federal lands to non-federally qualified users if necessary. Members expressed concern that rescinding the closure might promote user conflicts and negatively impact hunting opportunities for federally qualified subsistence users.

WCR26-45 – Unit 23, Caribou hunting closure to non-federally qualified users around Noatak

The Council discussed OSM's preliminary conclusion to retain the status quo. The members shared they are in agreement with OSM's preliminary conclusion to retain the status quo.

Call for Federal Wildlife Proposals

Ms. Holman informed the Council about the window of opportunity to submit wildlife proposals to change Federal subsistence wildlife harvest regulations for the 2026 – 2028 regulatory years. The Council did not develop any proposals to submit at this time.

Council Charter Review

Gisela Chapa, OSM Council Coordinator, provided an overview of the Council charter for review and renewal. The Council discussed their desires to have representation from unit 26C residents on the Council and expressed desires for OSM to increase outreach efforts to increased engagement in Council meetings by residents of the same unit.

- Motion by Member Barger, seconded by Member Kippi, to approve the Council charter without modification.

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

Review and Approve FY2024 Annual Report

Ms. Chapa presented the information contained in the Council's FY2024 draft Annual Report for their review and approval.

- Motion by Member Barger, seconded by Member Williams, to accept the report as presented.

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

Alaska Board of Game Statewide Proposals

Carmen Daggett, Unit 26A Wildlife Biologist for ADF&G, provided an overview of the State of Alaska Board of Game Statewide proposals that may have an impact on residents of the North Slope region.

Proposal 86, 5 AAC 92.010. Harvest tickets and reports

- Motion by Member Barger, seconded by Member Kippi, to submit a comment in opposition of proposal 86, which would require mandatory harvest reporting of sea ducks throughout the State. The Council stated sea ducks are an important part of people's diet and believes this reporting requirement would impose a burden on subsistence users in the region.

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

Proposal 151, 5 AAC 92.015. Brown bear tag fee exemption

- Motion by Member Williams, seconded by Member Barger, to submit a comment in support of proposal 151, reauthorizing the tag fee exemptions for brown bears in Units 18, 22, 23, and 26A. The Council shared their agreement with the justifications provided by the North Slope Advisory Committee, as discussed in their February 20, 2025, meeting and believes the reauthorization of this proposal would alleviate the burden associated with purchasing a \$25 tag and minimize confusion on brown bear harvest regulations among users.

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

Proposal 165 5 AAC 85.045(a)(24)

- Motion by Member Barger, seconded by Member Kippi, to submit a comment in support of proposal 165 to reauthorize the resident antlerless moose season in Unit 26A with a proposed amendment to extend the antlerless moose season through September 30. The Council's discussed their support for the amendment, which aligns with the recommendation provided by

the North Slope Advisory Committee as discussed in their February 20, 2025 meeting. Furthermore, the Council concurs that extending the season through September 30 can increase harvest opportunities for users and is unlikely to negatively impact the moose population within the specified portion of unit 26A.

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

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed their fall 2025 meeting dates and location: September 16 – 17, in Utqiagvik.

The Council selected their winter 2026 meeting date and location: February 24 – 25, in Point Hope.

The Council selected their fall 2026 meeting date and location: October 1 – 2, in Utqiagvik.

Agency Reports:

- OSM Winter 2025 Update, presented by Chris McKee, Acting Deputy Director.
- 2025 ADF&G Unit 26A Update, presented by Carmen Daggett, Wildlife Biologist for the North Slope.
- 2025 ADF&G Unit 26B and 26C updates, presented by Jordan Pruszenski, Assistant Area Biologist for Northeast Alaska.
- Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve update presented by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator.
- Arctic, Kanuti, and Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuges, Collared Moose Project update by Clayton Merrill, Subsistence Coordinator.
- NPS Amended Alaska Sport Hunting and Trapping Regulations, Final Rule, presented by Kim Jochum, Subsistence Program Analyst.

Other Business:

Council Correspondence:

Ms. Chapa provided an update on the following correspondence sent to the Council since the fall 2024 meeting in Utqiagvik.

- Response letter from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game commissioner regarding concerns over the Western Arctic Caribou Herd.
- Response letter from the former Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget (PMB) to the Council regarding Council member compensation.
- Response letter from the former Assistant Secretary for PMB to the Council regarding council correspondence.
- Response letter from the former Assistant Secretary for PMB to the Council regarding fisheries management.

Young Leader Seat Update

Ms. Chapa provided an update on the non-voting young leader seat. The Board had advertised the open period for the non-voting young leader membership on Councils, which closed on February 16th. No letters of interest were received from youth of the region.

Per Diem Card Update:

Ms. Chapa provided an update to the Council regarding Council member travel stipends and that two new payment options were to be implemented at the next fall meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:30 p.m. on February 28, 2025.

Gisela Chapa, DFO
DOI Office of Subsistence Management

CERTIFIED by the Chair for accuracy on 5/13/2025

Brower Frantz, Chair
North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

This document is a DRAFT version of the meeting minutes that has been certified by the Council Chair. These minutes will be formally considered and approved by the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its September 2025 meeting in Utqiagvik, AK. Any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

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.