

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM DELTA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Yupiit Piciryarait Cultural Center
Bethel, Alaska
March 4-5, 2025

Invocation

Council member Henry Parks provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Tuesday, March 4, 2025, at 9:09 am. Council members Henry Parks, Norma Evan, John Andrew, Walter Morgan, Francis Prince Jr., Phillip Peter Sr., Wassily Alexie, Tiffany Agayar, and Chair Jacqueline Cleveland were present in-person. Council members Frederick Beans and Alissa Nadine Rogers attended via teleconference. Council member Myron Naneng, Sr. was absent and excused. With eleven out of thirteen seated Council members present, a quorum was established. There is currently one vacant seat on the Council.

Attendees

* *Denotes attended virtually*

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Brooke McDavid, Brent Vickers, Pippa Kenner, Tom Plank, Lisa Grediagin*, Kevin Foley*, Ciisquq Crystal Leonetti*, Orville Lind*, Katerina Wessels*, Robbin La Vine*, Jason Roberts*, Cory Graham*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Fisheries and Ecological Services – Frank Harris*, Keith Herron*, Shane Ransbury*; Science Applications – George Yaska; Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) – Spencer Rearden, Laurie Boeck, Aaron Moses, Christopher Tulik, Emmitt Nicori, Stanislaus Sheppard*, Christian Alexie*; Togiak NWR – Andy Aderman*; Regional Office – Jill Klein*
- Bureau of Indian Affairs: Glenn Chen*, Rosalie Debenham*
- U.S. Forest Service – Greg Risdahl*
- National Park Service – Victoria Florey*, Lisa Fink*
- North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC): Rachel Baker, John Moller, Rudy Tsukada, Nicole Kimball, John Kurland
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): Doug Shaftel, Sarah Marrinan, Amy Holman*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Commercial Fisheries – Deena Jallen*, Bonnie Borba*, Andy Padilla*, Matt Olson*, Dave Runfola*; Wildlife Conservation – Phillip Perry
- Tribal and Native Organizations: Tanana Chiefs Conference Tribal Resource Stewardship – Krystal Lapp, Orutsaramuit Native Council – Greg Hoffman, Walter Jim, Mary Herrera-

Matthias, Jacob Wade; Yukon-Kuskokwim Health Consortium – Robin Masterman; Kuskokwim Inter-Tribal Fish Commission – Terese Vicente, Daniel O’Connor; Calista Corporation – Curtis Chamberlain*, Rose Bennett*, Thomas Leonard*; Association of Village Council Presidents – Jennifer Hooper, Ashley Johnson*, Rachel Simon*; Inter-Tribal Agriculture Council – Katie Herzner*; Mother Kuskokwim Tribal Coalition – Beverly Hoffman

- Non-profits and Other Organizations: Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) – Jadon Nashoanak; Bethel Community Services Foundation - Michelle DeWitt; Salmon State – Morgan Urquia*
- Public: Kate Fitzgerald, Nick Fitzgerald, Father Martin Nicolai, Robert Hoffman, Timmy Vaughn, Alex Nick*, Martin Kelley*, Gabriel Nanok* Andre Simon*, Evon Waska, Robert Hoffman, Timmy Vaughn
- Yup’ik Interpreter: Patrick Samson

Election of Officers

Ms. Jacqueline Cleveland was elected as the Council’s Chair.

Ms. Tiffany Agayar was elected as the Council’s Vice Chair.

Ms. Alissa Nadine Rogers was elected as the Council’s Secretary.

Review and Adopt Agenda

- Motion by Member Alexie, seconded by Member Rogers, to adopt the agenda and request that the in-season fisheries managers provide a forecast for the 2025 salmon season during their presentations. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

- Motion by Member Rogers, seconded by Member Beans, to approve the Fall 2024 Council meeting minutes with the following amendment:
 - Add a note under FP25-17 and FCR25-02 explaining that the Council met prior to the Eastern Interior Council and therefore did not have the recommendations of the home region to consider when making their recommendation. The Council did not intentionally vote differently than the home region.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Walter Morgan of Lower Kalskag reported that fishing last season was okay; they didn’t get a lot of fish but they got enough to make due and the fish were in good shape. He said that the front-end fishing closures seem to be helping fish get upriver. Member Morgan mentioned that the whitefish and berries were plentiful. He has noticed a lot of erosion along the riverbanks as he travels up and down the river. In some places the riverbank soil is falling off and making the water extremely shallow all the way across the river. It makes it difficult for boat travel and he is also worried that it might impact fish, since it freezes to the bottom in the shallow places. Member Morgan has noticed some other environmental

changes too. Storms are becoming more intense, and some creeks are not freezing up like they used to always do in the winter.

Phillip Peter Sr. of Akiachak began his report by sharing a story about how his uncle told him a long time ago that the chum and coho salmon would one day crash but to wait patiently and they would come back again, big and fat. He also noted that he heard predictions that more red salmon (Sockeye) would come to the Kuskokwim from Bristol Bay. Member Peter said that last year some really big king salmon (Chinook) were caught by Akiachak fisherwomen. He said they were about three feet long and it had been a long time since they saw fish that big in the river. It made him happy to see. His elders told him it is important to hunt and fish, to use the resources so that the resources will be plentiful. Member Peter said the moose numbers are doing good, but the weather has been weird this year. It was a bad winter with no snow. They could not snowmachine over to the Yukon River area. Mr. Peter shared his concerns about the Area M commercial salmon fishery, and how they intercept fish bound for Western Alaska rivers. He does not think it is fair that commercial fishing is favored over subsistence.

Alissa Nadine Rogers of Bethel reported that there was very little snow until late February. Travel for subsistence was dangerous and several lives were lost because of poor ice conditions on the river. Sea ice conditions were also poor and delayed seal and walrus hunting, but it improved, and it sounded like there were many successful harvests. Member Rogers was unable to moose hunt this year because of her work schedule, but moose numbers are doing well in the Bethel area. She noted that fishing for silver salmon (Coho) was good, pike and lush (burbot) were more plentiful and larger than last year, and that there were fewer blackfish where they usually trap them. She has heard concerns from coastal communities about declining sizes and numbers of halibut. Member Rogers noted that bycatch of salmon and halibut in the marine trawl fisheries continues to be a major concern for regional residents. She noted that it was a poor year for blackberries. Smelts were very big, and tomcods were small in size; fishing was slower than usual for both. She saw ducks flying through late November due to warmer than normal weather. She also saw large flocks of ptarmigan flying toward the mountains around the same time. She has not seen snowy owls recently and feels that research on their population status should be prioritized. Member Rogers heard reports that salmon were being caught in nets on the Yukon River in December. Like other Council members, she noted an increase in the number of pike and beaver in the region. Beaver are changing the landscape by lowering the water levels of lakes and causing ecological succession. She would like to see incentive programs to increase harvest of beaver. The rebuilding of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd continues to be a major priority for Member Rogers, and she encouraged the Council to continue to support the hunting closures and predator control programs for the time being.

Henry Parks of Nunapitchuk reported that the whitefish were huge last summer and that it was a very good summer for subsistence overall. There were a lot of waterfowl that came through in the fall that fattened up on the tundra lakes. Member Parks noted the ptarmigan numbers have been rebounding. Community members also harvested pike and whitefish in the fall time. He sets a blackfish trap and shares his harvest with elders. He asked that managers consider not having any salmon fishing openers on Sunday because that is the day of rest.

Tiffany Agayar of Alakanuk reported that last summer they were able to catch a few salmon and make dry fish, but not in the full amount they would have liked due to fishing restrictions on the Yukon River. Member Agayar noted that salmonberries were not abundant in their usual places, but they were able to find some to pick in other areas. She has noticed more Sockeye Salmon in the lower Yukon River. There are a lot of moose near Alakanuk which is good for hunting but bad because it brings wolves to town. Because of the lack of salmon, people are fishing for more ocean species like halibut and cod. Seals and whales seem healthier than they were about five years ago. Seal hunters have reported changes in the sea ice over time and last year it was open water all winter. Member Agayar also noted that the weather has been unusual and unpredictable this winter, creating a lot of unsafe traveling conditions.

John Andrew of Kwethluk reported that right after the subsistence moose hunt he fished for whitefish with a 4.5 inch mesh setnet. He caught four or five per day, and a few incidental pike, coho, and late run reds. Then he moved his net and continued to catch pike and small sheefish. He shared the fish with people who wanted them and dog mushers. Member Andrew reported that freeze-up was very, very late and ice and snow conditions were so poor it was unsafe and difficult to travel anywhere for most of the winter. He hopes that it will be colder next winter and freeze earlier so people can safely do subsistence activities. He has been seeing more rabbit tracks and people snaring them. When caribou come near the community, the wolves and coyotes follow them.

Wassily Alexie of Russian Mission reported that they had an early spring on the lower Yukon River. When the birds arrived, it was not safe enough to go out on the river to hunt them on the ice like they usually do. Member Alexie said that they were grateful to be able to fish for some Chum Salmon last year but only some people have dipnets and with the short openers it limited their ability to get what they need. His mother and mother-in-law who are in their 80s were happy to be able to cut some fish though. He noted that fall weather was quite warm and rainy. The eels ran in November and the ice was barely safe to catch some. Member Alexie noted that the river is changing, channels are shifting from erosion and new sandbars forming. This is impacting the route that fish and eels migrate upriver, so people have to adjust where they fish to try to find them. He noted that blackfish were very large and abundant this year and when the blackfish become large it can indicate change or that they might decline. Member Alexie would like to see restrictions changed so that they can use six-inch mesh nets to catch large nonsalmon fish in streams where salmon do not migrate.

Francis Prince Jr. of Kotlik noted that he was excited about his first Council meeting and honored to be chosen to serve as a member. He reported that after the 2024 break-up there was a good whitefish run. He sets a net under the ice in the wintertime and noticed a lot of pike between December and March. Someone in the community caught 88 pike in one day. He is concerned about the increasing number of pike; even though they are a native species they are similar to an invasive species because they start to take over and might be impacting the small salmon. Member Prince said that the moose population is thriving, and people are able to hunt near to the community instead of traveling far upriver in search of moose. It's been harder for Kotlik residents to go out subsistence hunting because the price of gas and a lot of hunters are going together and camping longer. People in Kotlik love to hunt snow geese, and there was a good migration of birds last year. There has been a lack of berries the last couple of years. The

community deals with flooding a lot more frequently than they used to. Every fall it gets scary with high water before things freeze up, but they are also seeing spring and summer flooding now too.

Frederick Beans of Mountain Village reported that he has been a subsistence user his entire life. He used to commercial fish in the past until it was closed down. He has seen king salmon get smaller and smaller across his lifetime and he is concerned for their long-term sustainability. He is also concerned about big game hunters that target only moose antlers and waste the meat. Member Beans has been frustrated by the salmon fishing closures because subsistence users only take what they need. He said it would be appreciated to be able to harvest some fish earlier in the season when the weather is good for drying.

Norma Evan of Marshall reported that they had a very warm fall and winter in her area with a lot of rain. People had to wait until February to be able to set nets under the ice because of poor ice conditions early on, but once fishing commenced, there was a successful harvest of burbot and whitefish. There was no eel harvest in November. Member Evan thinks that because the river is changing so much, with lots of erosion forming new sandbars and channels, that the eels shifted their migratory route and passed by Marshall. She noted that moose, ptarmigan, and lynx numbers are up and that grouse numbers are average. There has been an increase in wolf sightings near the community, but the poor snow and ice conditions have made it difficult for trappers to target them. Member Evan also reported that Marshall residents continue to be concerned about the bycatch of salmon in pollock trawl fisheries. Those commercial fisheries intercepted our salmon before they ever make it back to the Yukon River. There are products in the local grocery store made of pollock and cod and she said it is difficult to see the local wild caught subsistence salmon replaced by the very fish from the commercial fisheries that are impacting our salmon returns. She also shared that she heard a report that the Alaska Food Bank is going to buy \$50 million of pollock for 2025.

Jacqueline Nalikutaar Cleveland (Chair) of Quinhagak introduced herself to the new Council members and thanked everyone for voting her in as the new Chair. She reported that Quinhagak had a slower silver salmon (*Coho) season last fall due to high water but that most people were still able to get what they needed. They were thankful for the moose hunting season extension which allowed more opportunity and for more people to meet their needs. The waterfowl season was not quite as productive as it usually is. Chair Cleveland said that an increased number of storms may have altered their flight paths away from some of the regular places they are hunted. Salmonberry harvests were good, but blackberry harvest was poor. Mousefoods harvest was also good until fall flooding happened. Quinhagak residents continue to be concerned about increasing numbers of Northern pike which seem to be displacing sought after species of trout and char. There was an ice jam at the mouth of the Kanektok in February that resulted in major flood damage in the community and to fish camps. The environment continues to change with a lot of coastal and riverbank erosion happening, as well as permafrost melt.

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda Items

Day 1:

- Beverly Hoffman of Bethel spoke about the need to retain protections for ANCSA D-1 lands

- Evan Waska of Bethel commented on overfishing in the ocean and the prioritization of commercial fishing over subsistence
- Robin Masterman with the Yukon Kuskokwim Health Consortium provided information about food security initiatives
- Walter Jim, ONC President, spoke about the importance of protecting the peoples' abilities to harvest subsistence foods and how they cannot be replaced by store bought food
- Martin Kelly of Pilot Station commented on the heavy reliance on salmon by rural communities and the hardships they are facing due to fishing closures
- Stanislaus Sheppard of Mountain Village shared his concerns about bycatch and interception of salmon in commercial fisheries and his desire to be able to use six-inch mesh nets in non-salmon streams along the lower Yukon River
- Michelle DeWitt with the Bethel Community Services Foundation commented about food security issues and subsistence food distribution programs to those in need
- Father Martin Nicolai of Kwethluk shared his concerns about the length of time studies have been conducted about why salmon numbers are declining without any action such as the shutting down or reducing of commercial fisheries in False Pass or the Bering Sea
- Robert Hoffman of Bethel shared his frustrations about how salmon are being managed by the State and Federal governments
- Timmy Vaughn of Bethel expressed his desire to be able to fish with longer nets and the need to limit trawlers instead of subsistence fishing

Day 2:

- George Smith of Scammon Bay commented about the importance of traditional knowledge and shared some of the important lessons that were passed down to him from his elders
- Patrick Samson of Bethel discussed the need for a beaver control program to help mitigate impacts to salmon habitat
- Beverly Hoffman of Bethel commented on the unfairness of subsistence users being restricted while allowing commercial fisheries to continue to operate and intercept salmon, and about the unsustainable nature of the commercial fishing industry
- Walter Jim, ONC President, commented on the impacts of trawl fisheries to subsistence users and the need to adjust the Kuskokwim River fishing openers to reduce combat fishing
- Martin Kelley of Pilot Station discussed the severe hardships that Yukon River residents are facing from the lack of salmon and how unfair it is that the commercial fishing continues in marine waters
- Evon Waska of Bethel talked about salmon and halibut bycatch and the impacts of trawl fishing to the ecosystem and subsistence users
- Alex Nick of Bethel shared his concerns about increasing numbers of nonlocal hunters trespassing on Native allotments and corporation lands, as well as increased reports of wanton waste from poor meat care and prioritization of trophy antlers

The Council also received two written comments during the meeting about the need to protect ANSCA

D-1 lands and one request to allow community organizations, such as food banks or tribes, to receive moose hunting tags.

Council Member Training on Federal Proposals to Change Subsistence Regulations

Tom Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist, gave a presentation to the Council about the Federal proposal process that included how to submit proposals and examples of types of proposals that can be submitted.

Action Items

Deferred Wildlife Proposal WP24-01 – Statewide sale of brown bear hides

Pippa Kenner, OSM Cultural Anthropologist, presented the revised analysis and OSM recommendation to the Council.

Motion by Member Rogers, seconded by Member Peter, to support WP24-01 with the revised OSM modification. *The motion passed on a vote of 7-3.*

The Council noted that this proposal with the new modification would better align Federal and State regulations and create more opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users. There was discussion about whether it was culturally appropriate to sell the bear hides, but ultimately the Council felt that individual hunters could make that determination.

Call for Federal Wildlife Proposals

Tom Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist, announced the call for proposals to change Federal hunting and trapping regulations for the 2026-2028 regulatory years. The Council voted to submit four proposals.

1. Extend cow season to open July 16 in Lower Yukon hunt area

Motion by Member Beans, seconded by Member Rogers, to submit the proposal as stated. *The motion passed on a vote of 7-3.*

The Council noted that salmon fishing on the Yukon River has been restricted for a number of years and has created severe food security issues. At the same time that salmon have declined, moose numbers in Unit 18, remainder have increased and are approaching levels that pose concerns for habitat degradation. With the current abundance of moose, additional harvest can be supported without conservation concerns in Unit 18, remainder. This proposal would create additional opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users.

2. Eliminate destroying beaver house restriction under trapping regs in Unit 18

Motion by Member Beans, seconded by Member Agayar, to submit the proposal as stated. *The motion passed on a 9-1 vote.*

The Council noted that removing these restrictions will increase opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users and that there are no conservation concerns for beaver in Unit 18.

3. Increase wolf hunting harvest limit to 15 in Unit 18

Motion by Member Rogers, seconded by Member Agayar, to submit the proposal as stated. *The motion passed on a vote of 10-0.*

The Council noted that this proposal would provide additional opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users and that there are no conservation concerns for wolves in Unit 18.

4. Increase coyote harvest limit to four and extend hunting season to Aug. 15-May 31

Motion by Member Rogers, seconded by Member Beans, to submit a proposal to increase the coyote hunting harvest limit to four and to extend the hunting season to be August 1-May 31. During Council discussion one member said that coyotes are skinny, and the fur is shedding in the summer; but another Council member's observation was that coyotes start to fatten up and get their new coats in August.

- Motion by Member Prince, seconded by Member Rogers, to amend the dates in the proposal to be August 15-May 31. The rationale for the amendment was that the fur would be better quality by mid-August. *The motion to amend passed on a vote of 8-2.*

The amended motion passed on a vote of 10-0.

The Council noted that this proposal would create additional opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users. Residents of Unit 18 have observed the number of coyotes to be increasing in parts of the unit. There are no known conservation concerns.

Council Charter Review

Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, provided an overview of the Council charter for review and renewal. Motion by Member Peter, seconded by Member Alexie, to adopt the charter with no changes. *Motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Annual Report

Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, presented the draft FY-2024 Annual Report to the Council which included 19 topics, four of which included requests of the Board and ten that were information items. Motion by Member Andrew, seconded by Member Peter, to approve and submit the FY-2024 Annual Report. *Motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Future Meeting Dates

- The Council confirmed its fall 2025 meeting dates as October 21-23 in Bethel.
- The Council selected its winter 2026 dates as March 17-19 in Bethel.
- The Council selected its fall 2026 dates as October 27-29 in Bethel.

The Council is still waiting to hear back on their request to update the list of approved hub communities for the region.

Outreach and Engagement Session on Chum Salmon Bycatch Management in the Bering Sea with North Pacific Fishery Management Council Members and Staff

A special outreach and engagement session was held the evening of first of the meeting day with the goal to increase awareness of Chum Salmon bycatch management measures being considered by the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) and to facilitate dialogue between members of the NPFMC and the Regional Advisory Council. The session began with a presentation by NPFMC supporting staff from the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration and was followed by a roundtable discussion between Regional Advisory Council members and the visiting guests. A few questions were taken from the public before wrapping up the evening session.

Agency and Organization Reports:

- *Chum Salmon Bycatch EIS* by Krystal Lapp, TCC Natural Resource Policy Analyst and Terese Vicente, KRITFC Policy and Programs Director
- *Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission Update* by Terese Vicente
- *Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association Update* by Jadon Nashoanak, Traditional Ecological Knowledge Technician
- *Orutsararmiut Native Council Natural Resources Program Update* by Mary Herrera- Matthias, Director, and Jacob Wade, Fisheries Biologist
- *Association of Village Council Presidents Natural Resources Program Update* by Jennifer Hooper, Director
- *Coho Salmon Radio Telemetry Project Results Presentation* by Bonnie Borba, ADF&G Research Biologist
- *Kuskokwim River Broad Whitefish Study* by Frank Harris, USFWS Fisheries Biologist
- *Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Update* by Spencer Rearden, Refuge Manager, Aaron Moses, Subsistence Coordinator, and Christopher Tulik, Lead Refuge Information Technician
- *Togiak National Wildlife Refuge Update* by Andy Aderman, Wildlife Biologist
- *USFWS Yukon River Salmon Management Update* by Keith Herron, Assistant Fisheries Manager and Tribal Liaison, and Shane Ransbury, Fisheries Biologist
- *Office of Subsistence Management Update* by Brent Vickers, OSM Anthropology Division Supervisor

Other Business

The Council received briefings on the following topics:

- Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program
- Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program
- Summary of Board regulatory actions
- Call for Alaska Board of Fisheries Proposals
- Council Correspondence
 - a. Motion by Member Rogers, seconded by Member Agayar, to send a letter to the Federal Subsistence Board requesting them to elevate the need to protect ANCSA D-1 lands for subsistence to the Secretary of Interior. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

- Non-voting Young Leader Seat
- Declining Balance Cards

Brooke McDavid, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Subsistence Management

Certified by the Chair for accuracy on 6/3/2025

Jacqueline Cleveland, Chair
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its Fall 2025 meeting in Bethel, 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 Council Coordinator Brooke McDavid at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9181, or email brooke_mcdavid@ios.doi.gov.