

NORTHWEST ARCTIC SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via teleconference
February 14-15, 2022

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Monday, February 14, 2022 at 9:00 am. Council members Thomas Baker, Barbara Atoruk, Elmer Armstrong, Vern Cleveland, Wilbur Howarth, Michael Kramer, Calvin Moto, Robert Schaeffer, Enoch Shiedt, and Hazel Smith Harris were present via teleconference. The Council has no vacant seats. A quorum was established with 10 of 10 seated Council members participating by phone.

Attendees:

Via teleconference

Tribal Organizations: Damon Schaeffer, NANA Regional Corporation

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS):

- Jill Klein, Anchorage
- Ray Handler, Fairbanks
- Will Wiese, Kotzebue, Selawik NWR
- USFWS Genetics Lab, Anchorage: Penny Crane and Evangeline Dooc

Office of Subsistence Management (OSM), Anchorage: Karen Hyer, Orville Lind, Robbin La Vine, Lisa Grediagin, Dr. Hannah Voorhees, Tom Plank, Kendra Holman, Eva Patton

National Park Service (NPS):

- Letty Hughes, Nome
- Western Arctic National Parklands, Kotzebue: Hannah Atkinson, Raime Fronstin, Carlos Paiz, Justin Young, Marsha Fronstin, Mark Dowdle
- Nikki Braem, Bering Land Bridge National Preserve
- Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Fairbanks: Jeff Rasic, Marcy Okada, Kyle Joly

Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Anchorage: Tom Sparks, Chris McKee, and Bruce Seppi

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G):

- Mark Burch, Palmer
- Division of Wildlife Conservation, Kotzebue: Nicole Edmison and Christie Osburn
- Division of Sport Fisheries, Fairbanks: Brendan Scanlon and Joe Spencer

US Forest Service, Anchorage: Greg Risdahl

Bureau of Indian Affairs, Anchorage: Dr. Glenn Chen

Alaska State Troopers:

- Maggie Stang, Nome
- Steve Canteen, Kotzebue

Public:

- Cyrus Harris, Kotzebue
- Martin Robards, Wildlife Conservation Society

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Armstrong, seconded by Mr. Shiedt, to adopt the agenda as presented.

The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Officers

Mr. Thomas Baker was elected the Council's Chair.

Mr. Mike Kramer was elected the Council's Vice Chair.

Ms. Hazel Smith Harris was elected the Council's Secretary.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Ms. Atoruk, seconded by Mr. Cleveland to approve the Fall 2021 meeting minutes with a modification to correct the spelling of Council Member Howarth's last name.

The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Enoch (Attamuk) Shiedt, Sr. of Kotzebue reported that he saw some caribou this year, but not nearly as many as past years. The caribou population is declining and there are increasing numbers of bears and wolves taking caribou. There were hardly any salmon this past summer, but there were a lot of berries.

Vern Cleveland, Sr. of Noorvik reported that no caribou were near Noorvik until freeze-up this year, which was a hardship for local people. He also stated that caribou are deflected by the Red Dog Mine road. He is concerned about the effects of climate change, weather events, and even avalanches on the caribou. At present, a lot of caribou are near Shungnak. Rain in January created crust on the snow, making it difficult for the caribou to feed. Mr. Cleveland is also concerned about people knowing when and where they can hunt, especially on National Park lands, because some subsistence hunters have been ticketed. Mr. Cleveland reported that wolves and bears are abundant. He noted that the Kobuk River has really changed due to erosion, becoming much straighter in some places. He also stated he would like information on the current location of the Teshekpuk Caribou Herd.

Wilbur Howarth, Sr. of Noorvik reported that he saw on Facebook that there are a lot of caribou near Shungnak now, and some on the [Baldwin] Peninsula toward Selawik and Buckland. There are continuing problems with lots of wolves and bears. He saw a lot of moose cows with twins and considers it a good

sign. The weather has been cold this spring making it difficult to dry fish. Mr. Howarth is part of the Subsistence committee for the Ambler mining district road and provided a report on their first meeting. He also said that several people fell into creeks on snowmachines this winter because the creeks are just covered by snow [not ice].

Robert Schaeffer of Kotzebue reported that he would like to know how the Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) Ambler subsistence committee was formed. He expressed many concerns about global warming, particularly the massive amounts of erosion in the Upper Kobuk and on the Baldwin Peninsula, decreasing sea ice, melting permafrost that releases methane and carbon dioxide, increasing willows, and the tremendous amounts of rain and storms last year that caused high water in rivers all summer long. Mr. Schaeffer also noted the earlier snow melt in the spring affects caribou migration as caribou are slowed down by the melting snow and water, increasing their energy expenditure and their likelihood of dying before reaching their calving grounds.

Barbara Atoruk of Kiana reported that fishing was good last year, but the river got really high and it was the first time she ever saw it go over its banks. The blueberries and salmonberries were good, but there were no cranberries. There are lots of wolves around, but they rarely come into the village. Recently there have been hardly any foxes. The caribou came really late and were stuck in the Squirrel River drainage for a while. At the last moment, the caribou started crossing the Kobuk River and hunters went up but the river froze and the hunters were barely able to make it back home. Then the river thawed out and hunters went back up and caribou were still crossing so they were able to harvest some. This is the coldest winter they ever had, and it was foggy.

Elmer Armstrong, Jr. of Noorvik reported that whitefish by Kiana were good, but some fishers missed them by the time they put out their nets. Younger kids and elders put hooks out for burbot. Some hunters got caribou on the peninsula. People are seeing more lynx, perhaps because of the high rabbit cycle. Mr. Armstrong noticed caribou foraging through crusty snow near Kotzebue.

Hazel Smith Harris of Kotzebue reported that there was too much water to harvest berries last year. Her family couldn't get caribou in freezers until last month. Ms. Harris received reports from others that the fish run was okay, but not as abundant as the past. People could not dry *oograk* and fish because weather was either too hot or too rainy. She would like to hear more reports on beavers as they are overpopulated and causing problems. Ms. Harris is disappointed that the WACH Working Group did not support the special action (WSA21-01). She has seen on Facebook that a lot of people are hungry because they don't have caribou. Food insecurity is increasing across the region because of COVID-19 and high prices. Her family usually harvests ptarmigan and rabbits, but they have not been finding any, potentially because there are a lot of lynx.

Calvin Moto II of Deering reported that muskox are hanging out near Deering due to increasing wolf, bear, and wolverine numbers. Some control of muskox is needed because they are a nuisance, disrupting cemeteries and airplane runways. Some hunters have gone out to harvest them, but he feels the Park Service or the State should also help control them. Mr. Moto has noticed that caribou are lean due to unusual rain

in December, which froze the ground and makes it hard for caribou to reach their food. He reported that hunters have had to travel further this year to find caribou. Global warming is resulting in rain instead of snow, affecting the caribou decline. He stated that there was good fishing this year and that he is looking forward to spring bird and *oogruk* hunting.

Thomas Baker of Kotzebue reported that there were some caribou harvested this year in Kotzebue, but he did not see a big migration across Kobuk Lake like it typically occurs in November or December. This is possibly due to rain in December, which threw things out of whack. Mr. Baker has heard a couple reports of wolves near Kotzebue, even circling people when stopped on snowmachines. He stated that this is another winter when there is not much to be hunted, but there are a lot of people trying to go out and subsist. He is hopeful for spring hunting.

Tribal and Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Cyrus Harris of Kotzebue commented that he thought the meeting topics were very interesting and important. He appreciated hearing discussion of Alaska Native and subsistence lifestyle, Ambler Road, and resources such as muskox and caribou.

Martin Robards, Regional Director for the Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), let the Council know that WCS is in the early stages of planning a project about large predators in the Arctic in which they would like to conduct focus groups in communities throughout the region with hunters and trappers. The purpose of the focus groups would be to share previous study results with community members and also to document local perspectives on predators. It would also be a chance for local people to ask questions and suggest topics that they would like more information on.

Old Business

Deferred Wildlife Special Action Request WSA21-01

Dr. Hannah Voorhees presented an updated analysis of deferred temporary Wildlife Special Action WSA21-01 to the Council. The updated analysis included a summary of additional stakeholder input that was gathered by OSM and new population data for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. The analysis was split into two parts: (a) caribou, and (b) moose.

- Motion by Ms. Atoruk, seconded by Mr. Shiedt, to **support WSA21-01(a)**. Newly available population estimates show that the Western Arctic Caribou Herd has declined significantly, and the Council continues to support this special action request that they submitted in order to protect the herd. The Council is very concerned about the Western Arctic Caribou Herd's population decline because it seems to be declining much faster than it has in the past. The special action request will help protect the herd during this upcoming hunting season, and there are few other ways to meaningfully conserve the herd while also preserving the continuation of subsistence uses. The Council noted that if only Federal public lands in Unit 23 were closed, it would just push non-local

hunters to the North Slope and adjacent areas. They supported a more unified approach in the closure. The Council also acknowledged that decreasing cow harvest is important for the herd's conservation. They said that residents will need to sacrifice the amount they are able to harvest, and that more education across the region is needed to raise awareness of the status of the herd. The Council stressed that caribou are a critical subsistence resources and discussed the need for restrictions on State lands as well as possibly on Federally qualified subsistence users. They also asked that law enforcement and Federal agencies listen to the local people who live in the area year-round.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote with one member absent.

- Motion by Mr. Schaeffer, seconded by Mr. Howarth, to **support WSA21-01(b)** in order to protect the moose population and continue the opportunity for subsistence hunting of moose in the region. The Council also noted that moose experience high predation rates by wolves and bears, and deep snow exacerbates this.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote with one member absent.

New Business

Overview of 2021 Council Charter Changes

Ms. Eva Patton provided an overview of 2021 Council Charter changes. Changes to the charter included:

- Addition of a clause on carryover terms in Section 12 to avoid temporary vacancies on the Council when member terms expire and Secretarial appointments have not yet been made
- Removal of two clauses in Section 4 with no relevance to the Council's duties and authorities under Title VIII of ANILCA

Ms. Patton also advised the Council that the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) did not support the addition of two more seats to the Council, as requested by the Council. The Board cited a need for further justification from the Council and increasing costs for Council travel.

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Update

Ms. Karen Hyer presented the Council with an update on the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) and asked if any Council Members would like to volunteer to help develop priority information needs for the next call for proposals. Mr. Schaeffer and Ms. Atoruk volunteered to help. Council members also recommended that OSM staff get in touch with the Environmental Coordinator in each Tribal Office in the region to get their input on priority information needs. The Council discussed fisheries related issues such as beavers cutting off spawning streams, increasing water temperatures affecting salmon, herring die offs, increasing rain affecting salmon and char spawning, and bycatch by commercial trawlers in marine waters.

Mr. Brendan Scanlon and Mr. Joe Spencer gave a presentation titled “Dolly Varden Life History and Mixed Stock Analysis” as an update to the Council on the FRMP Noatak Dolly Varden Char project. The Council discussed the presented results and asked follow-up questions. They expressed appreciation for being presented with information on fisheries studies and encouraged the results to also be shared with Tribal Councils.

Ms. Evangeline Dooc presented a report on Dolly Varden Char genetics research in Togiak National Wildlife Refuge.

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Proposals

Ms. Karen Hyer informed the Council that the Board will soon be accepting proposals to change Federal regulations for the subsistence harvest of fish and shellfish on Federal public lands and waters for the 2023-2025 regulatory years. The call for proposals will be open for a period of at least 30 days upon the publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register. The Board will consider proposals to change Federal subsistence fish and shellfish seasons, harvest limits, methods, and means related to taking of fish for subsistence uses, as well as customary and traditional use determinations. The Council did not develop any fisheries proposals for submission.

Call for Non-rural Determination Proposals

Dr. Hannah Vorhees informed the Council that the Board will soon be accepting proposals to change community statuses in Federal regulations from non-rural to rural or from rural to non-rural. The call for proposals will be open for at least 30 days. Non-rural determination proposals are accepted every other fisheries regulatory cycle (every four years). The Council did not develop any non-rural determination proposals.

Review and approve FY2021 annual report

Ms. Eva Patton provided a summary of the draft annual report to the Council and requested feedback from the Council on any changes or additions to the report.

- Motion by Mr. Cleveland, seconded by Mr. Howarth, to **approve the annual report as amended**. Amendments included:
 1. Topic 1 about caribou: add a paragraph about the recent decline of the herd, and the Council’s disappointment in the Board’s inaction on WSA22-01
 2. Topic 7 about Maniilaq food distribution programs: ask how much money Maniilaq receives from Federal grants to provide food for elders

The motion passed on a unanimous vote with 3 members absent.

Federal Subsistence Board Annual Report Reply Process Review and Revision Discussion and Council comments and feedback

Ms. Lisa Grediagin notified the Council that the Board is seeking feedback on the annual report reply process. She solicited input from the Council, but Council members did not feel prepared to address this topic. The Council requested revisiting this issue at their Fall 2022 meeting and that written information be included in their meeting materials so that they have time to review and think about it ahead of time. The Chair asked the Council Coordinator to summarize the Council's discussion for review at their next meeting.

The Council expressed some concerns about the annual report process being a protocol to follow without much follow-up action. They also shared concerns about a disconnect existing between the Board and the Regional Advisory Councils. There was a request to receive an overview presentation about the Board's jurisdiction and authority under ANILCA at a future meeting, as well as suggestions for more training for Board and Council members.

Receiving Public Testimony Protocol – Guided Discussion

Ms. Lisa Grediagin led the Council in a guided discussion about their preferences for receiving written and oral public testimony at Council meetings. The Council suggested ways to encourage public comments and engagement in meetings. One suggestion was to make Council member contact information available to the public so anyone who has a question or comment can easily find out who to contact in their community or region. Public comment periods should be advertised in several ways including social media, websites, and local radio stations. Some Council members felt that use of Facebook to let people comment or view meetings would encourage participation. The Council suggested that more outreach should be conducted with ADF&G Advisory Councils and IRA Offices.

The Council prefers to receive public comments both in writing and orally when possible. This way they can have a written reference and also hear it directly from the commenter to better understand the commenter's thoughts and feelings. The Council noted that some people may not write well and prefer just to provide oral comments. If lengthy written comments are submitted, the Council felt it would be okay for the Council Coordinator to summarize them during the meeting instead of reading them verbatim. Written public comments should try to be submitted in enough time before the meeting so that Council Members can receive copies and review prior to the meeting. The Council feels that public commenters should be accommodated as best as possible and appreciates when the Chair allows additional periods of public comment for those people who cannot call in at the start of the meeting day.

Briefing and Council comments on proposed actions to automate Federal subsistence permits

Ms. Lisa Grediagin briefed the Council on proposed actions to automate Federal subsistence permits. The Council had no comments about automating permits, but discussed other issues related to harvest tickets and law enforcement.

Briefing on the Secretarial regulations proposing the inclusion of identified submerged lands in the Tongass National Forest

Ms. Lisa Grediagin briefed the Council on Secretarial regulations proposing the inclusion of identified submerged lands in the Tongass National Forest. The Council did not discuss the topic further as the Tongass National Forest is far from their local region, but Chairman Baker asked for information on the subject be sent to Council members so they could learn more about it and comment if they want.

Temporary Wildlife Special Action Request (WSA22-01)

Ms. Kendra Holman presented a summary of temporary Wildlife Special Action WSA22-01, which was submitted by BLM and NPS to change the Federal muskox permit system in Units 22 and 23 from a Federal registration permit to a Federal drawing permit.

- Motion by Mr. Cleveland, seconded by Mr. Howarth, to **support WSA22-01**. The Council considered this a housekeeping request to make regulations concurrent with the way the hunt is already administered and to better reflect the land status in the region.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote with 3 members absent.

Agency Reports:

- *Western Arctic Caribou Herd Migration Report* presented by Kyle Joly, Wildlife Biologist, National Park Service
- *Western Arctic National Parklands Update* presented by Joe Dallemolle, District Ranger, Western Arctic National Parklands
- *Commercial Use Authorization Statistics Report* presented by Hannah Atkinson, Cultural Anthropologist, Western Arctic National Parklands
- *Western Arctic Caribou Herd Overview* presented by Nicole Edmison, Wildlife Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- *Selawik National Wildlife Refuge Update* presented by Will Wiese, Acting Manager, Selawik National Wildlife Refuge
- *Staffing and Facilities Update* presented by Mark Dowdle, Acting Superintendent, Western Arctic National Parklands
 - Motion by Mr. Kramer, seconded by Ms. Smith Harris, to write a letter to Susan Georgette congratulating her on her retirement and thanking her for her work in the region throughout her career
- *Kobuk Valley Subsistence Resource Commission Appointments* presented by Hannah Atkinson, National Park Service
- *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve Update* presented by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator

- *2023 North American Caribou Workshop and Arctic Ungulate Conference Announcement* presented by Kyle Joly, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve
- *Bureau of Land Management Alaska Field Office Report* presented by Tom Sparks, BLM
- *Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Update* presented by Christie Osburn, Wildlife Biologist, ADF&G
- *Alaska Department of Fish and Game Commercial Fishery Update* presented by Brendon Scanlon, Fisheries Biologist, ADF&G
- *Ambler Road Update* presented by Charlene Ostbloom, Ambler Access Project
- *Office of Subsistence Management Update* presented by Lisa Grediagin, Wildlife Division Supervisor

Future Meeting Dates:

Fall 2022 meeting dates confirmed for October 31-November 1, 2022 in Kotzebue.

Winter 2023 meeting dates confirmed for March 6-7, 2023, with location to be determined.



Brooke McDavid, Council coordinator for Eva Patton, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management



Thomas Baker, Chair
Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2022 meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Brooke McDavid at 1-800-478-1456 or (907) 891-9181, email brooke_mcdavid@fws.gov.