

NORTHWEST ARCTIC SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Northwest Arctic Heritage Center
Kotzebue, AK
January 7-8, 2026

Invocation:

Clyde Raymoth provided an invocation.

A moment of silence was held for Pete Schaeffer.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order on Tuesday, January 7, 2026, at 1:03 pm. Council Chair Thomas Baker and Council members Michael Kramer, Clyde Ramoth, Sr., and Verne Cleveland, Sr. were present in person. Council member Karmen Monigold attended telephonically; Member Elmer Armstrong, Jr. was present in-person on the first day, but absent and excused on the second day; and Member Tristen Pattee was absent and excused on the first day, but present in-person on the second day. The Council has two vacant seats. With six out of eight seated Council members present each day, quorum was established.

Attendees:

*Asterisk * identifies if present remotely.*

- Secretary of the Interior's Office: Sara Taylor*
- Bureau of Indian Affairs: Alaska Region Branch of Natural Resources – Rosalie Debenham
- National Park Service (NPS): Regional Office – Eva Patton*, Kim Jochum*, Victoria Florey*; Western Arctic Parklands – Jeanette Koelsch, Annie Carlson, Emily Creek*; Bering Land Bridge National Preserve – Nicole Braem, Ken Adkisson; Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve – Marcy Okada
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): Regional Office – Jill Klein*; Selawik National Wildlife Refuge – Wil Wiese, Brittany Sweeney, Bill Carter; Northern Alaska Field Office – Ray Hander*
- U.S. Forest Service: Regional Office – Greg Risdahl*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Commercial Fisheries Division – Luke Henslee*, Kevin Clark*; Sport Fisheries Division – Brendan Scanlon*; Subsistence Division – Marianna Mallory*, Helen Cold*; Wildlife Conservation Division – Christie Osburn, Alex Hansen, Deb Lawton*, Sara Henslee*, Carmen Daggett*, Alicia Carson*
- Alaska Department of Public Safety: Division of Alaska Wildlife Troopers – Steve Cantine

- Other Organizations: Timothy Smith – Maniilaq Association; Caitlin Luby, Todd Brinkman – University of Alaska Fairbanks; Lori Petruski, Hannah Golden*, Kaitlyn Demoski* – Native American Fish and Wildlife Society; Matt Anderstrom* – Alaska Native Brotherhood; Desiree Hagen* – KOTZ Radio
- North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council: Leonard Barger of Point Hope
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Nissa Pilcher, Katerina Wessels, Thomas Plank, Grace Cochon, Hannah Voorhees*, Kevin Foley*, Robbin La Vine*, Orville Lind*, Anna Senecal*, Janel Day*, Lisa Grediagin*, Brent Vickers*, Leigh Honig*
- Public: Lennie Henry, Lance Kramer, Willie Towksjhea of Kotzebue; Margaret Schaeffer* of Wasilla; Percy Ballot* of Buckland; Wilfred Ashby* of Noatak, Raymond Lee, Jr. of Buckland*

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Kramer, to adopt the agenda with the following changes:

- Move NPS Report on Update on Guides and Transporters in the Western Arctic National Parklands after Agenda Item 10.b.
- Add NPS Gates of the Arctic (GAAR) Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) Update under Agenda Item 14.f.

The motion passed unanimously.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Cleveland, to approve the winter 2025 meeting minutes with the following correction.

- Correct the spelling of FWS staff Brittany Sweeney

The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Verne Cleveland of Noorvik reported that climate change is impacting everything in the region, especially the migration of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (caribou), which is now happening later and later each year, making it more difficult for him to go hunting because of the cold. He was barely able to harvest caribou, which were mostly rutty already. The caribou were currently moving between Noorvik and Kiana, and he heard they were healthy. He noted that he has been seeing earlier breakups in May, high water during summer storms, increased river erosion, shifting river channels, and later freeze ups. During caribou hunting season, he was stranded at hunting camp for seven days due to the high water. Member Cleveland reported that he attended the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group meeting last month in Anchorage where they discussed these changes, in addition to concerns over declining caribou numbers. He noted that for now, the only option is to adapt and carry on. Member Cleveland concluded his report by noting that in the fall, fishing was good, salmon berries were plentiful, but moose were not, and he was unsuccessful despite spending extensive time moose hunting.

Elmer Armstrong of Noorvik reported slow salmon fishing last July, leading to a longer netting period due to the fishery closure in Kotzebue. High water from typhoon remnants made netting difficult, and salmon were notably late this year, with some caught under ice after spawning. He noted that in October, he set out his net under the ice for whitefish but was too late to harvest egg-bearing fish. Member Armstrong reported that he did not find caribou at Hunt River and only saw a small herd near Noorvik late in December. However, moose hunting in the lower Nazuruk area was successful. Member Armstrong concluded his report by noting that weather changes and high water are increasingly making it harder to adapt and hunt or fish successfully.

Clyde Ramoth of Selawik expressed gratitude for FWS for their ongoing consultations with the Tribes and their assistance in holding the annual culture camp and elder camp. He thanked the representatives from Maniilaq present at the Council meeting and shared that he is eager to involve students in more traditional activities. Member Ramoth related that this fall, people were able to catch fish and gather berries and other edible plants. There were low caribou and moose numbers, but people were able to occasionally harvest a caribou or moose, even for elders. Member Ramoth noted that there have been no signs of rabbits lately, and lynx populations, which also cycle every seven years are currently scarce. He relayed that high water levels have brought challenges, although beavers seem to be thriving despite the high waters and despite the climate changes the region is experiencing. He further explained that beavers are not being harvested like they once were, and many struggle to encourage the next generation to trap them. Member Ramoth concluded his report by noting that there's much the Council could discuss, but today he would like to focus on the decline in caribou numbers.

Michael Kramer of Kotzebue shared that due to climate change, the community has lost two skilled subsistence users, which has significantly affected the community. He reported that thinner ice and frequent warm spells have increased risks on rivers and the ocean, with surface and subsurface melting making travel and harvesting dangerous. Member Kramer noted that he learned valuable lessons from elders growing up; the current changing conditions mean he now takes fewer risks, and he encourages the younger generations to be cautious and adapt to these new challenges. Member Kramer expressed great concern over the sharp decline in caribou populations, noting the unsustainable harvests highlighted on social media. With caribou numbers dropping and higher costs of living, their protection is increasingly important. Member Kramer concluded his report by noting that he did not go hunting moose this year, and he had not taken any caribou. However, his family harvested some salmon, which was slow, and the berry picking appeared to be productive.

Karmen Monigold of Kotzebue echoed the comments from Member Kramer on the loss of two highly experienced hunters and providers recently and shared that their passing was a profound shock and a great loss for everyone. She noted that water levels were exceptionally high in the fall during hunting season, although the water levels receded quickly when levels started to drop. Despite the high water, many people had successful moose hunts, but she reported not seeing any caribou during that time. Member Monigold informed the Council that salmon were scarce this year, and for the first time that she is aware of, packs of wolves were coming near her subsistence camp this summer where she also experienced a notable fire season. Member Monigold noted that currently, there is not enough snow on the ground

despite a cold snap that persisted for some time, and the lack of snow limited subsistence activities. She concluded her report, noting that caribou were migrating through the area and that reports indicate the animals harvested are healthy.

Tristen Pattee (*this report was given on the second day of the meeting*) of Ambler reported that for the first time in several years, caribou migrated through Ambler in early October before the Kobuk River froze, which resulted in a significant increase in boat traffic near Onion Portage. Migration coincided with a large storm front, which made the river conditions rough and dangerous, but despite this, many took advantage of the opportunity to harvest caribou. He informed the Council that fishing success was mixed, with sheefish harvest being generally good, but salmon harvest was not as strong, which may have been due to high water levels. Member Pattee expressed concern that wolf activity near Ambler is increasing, with recent incidents involving wolves attempting to enter food storage areas and coming close to attacking dogs. Member Pattee noted that these events have raised safety concerns, particularly for children, and wolves seem to be targeting dogs due to a lack of food—possibly linked to the declining caribou herd, and posing a significant risk to both residents and domestic animals.

Thomas Baker of Kotzebue noted that all of the Council members had voiced concern over the declining caribou population; he emphasized that this recurring concern reflects the region's deep worry about the continual decline of the herd. He noted the ongoing population decline highlights the necessity of exploring additional strategies to protect the herd, including predator control. Chair Baker noted it is essential to ensure that through this process—and all related processes—we are doing everything possible to protect the caribou; the herd represents a lifeline for their region, and continued efforts are necessary for its preservation. He also noted that the changing climate is a reality, and its impact is evident in many subsistence resources, including the caribou and their migration timing and routes. Chair Baker reported that recent videos of wolves caught in snares along the bank of the Kobuk in Shungnak, in addition to reports of wolves sighted in Selawik and other villages, make it crucial for village residents to report additional instances of predators entering their communities – sharing these occurrences is vital to assist in understanding why this may be occurring.

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda items:

Day 1

Clyde Ramoth, representing the Native Village of Selawik, supplied oral comments regarding the community's concern over predator numbers and their presence near Selawik.

State Wildlife Trooper Cantine, assisted by ADF&G Biologists Christie Osburn and Alex Hansen, supplied information to the Council on regulations concerning the general take of wolves and bears, as well as on the take of predators in defense of life or property. Additional information was supplied by the ADF&G staff, FWS staff Wil Wiese and Brittany Sweeney, and NPS staff Annie Carlson on options on State and Federal lands regarding the take of predators.

Day 2

Matt Anderstrom, representing the Alaska Native Brotherhood, supplied written and oral comments on the Secretarial Review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program.

Action Items:

Secretarial Review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program

Sara Taylor, Alaska Region Congressional Affairs and Policy Advisor with the Department of the Interior's Office of the Secretary, provided an overview of the Secretarial review and answered Council member questions.

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Cleveland, to submit comments on the Secretarial Review on the topics outlined in the scoping documents and to highlight other relevant topics. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Wildlife Proposals and Closure Reviews

Tom Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist, and Dr. Hannah Voorhees, OSM Cultural Anthropologist, presented proposal and closure review analyses and OSM recommendations to the Council.

Statewide Proposals

WP26-01 – Move authority delegated through letters to unit-specific regulations

Motion by Member Cleveland, seconded by Member Armstrong, to support Proposal WP26-01 as modified by OSM. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-01 as modified by OSM**. The Council believes that this proposal attempts to streamline the current process and make it easier for the users. Since the Tribal and Council consultations will still take place under the streamlined process, the Council supported this change as modified by OSM.

Regional Proposals and Closure Reviews

WP26-65: Unit 23 remainder muskox, establish hunt

Motion by Member Cleveland, seconded by Member Armstrong, to support Proposal WP26-65. *The motion failed with a vote of 2-4.*

The Council **opposed WP26-65**, which they submitted. After hearing population information and positions from relevant agencies, the Council believes that there are too many unknowns and data gaps to establish this hunt at this time. The Council noted that with subsistence resources across the region becoming increasingly more difficult to harvest, there may be a time in the near future when muskoxen become an important food source. However, the priority is to allow the

population to become more established and grow to support future harvests, rather than authorize a small harvest now.

WP26-66: Unit 23 wolf, increase hunting harvest limit and extend season

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Armstrong, to support Proposal WP26-66 as modified by OSM. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-66 as modified by OSM**. The Council supports the increased hunting opportunity for wolves on Federal public lands. The Council also noted that aligning the State and Federal harvest limits for wolves will remove the possibility for subsistence users to inadvertently violate the law.

WP26-67: Unit 23 muskrat, extend trapping season

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Cleveland, to support Proposal WP26-67. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-67**. The Council does not believe that this regulatory change will cause any biological concern, but it will increase subsistence opportunity as well as align State and Federal regulations, both of which are beneficial to subsistence users.

WP26-68: Unit 23 ptarmigan, increase harvest limit and extend season

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Armstrong, to support Proposal WP26-68. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-68**. The Council supports the increased subsistence opportunity as well as aligning State and Federal regulations, both of which are of benefit to subsistence users.

WP26-69: Unit 23 mink/weasel, Extend season

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Armstrong, to support Proposal WP26-69. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-69**. The Council does not believe that this regulatory change will cause any biological concern, but it will increase subsistence opportunity as well as align State and Federal regulations, both of which are beneficial to subsistence users.

WCR26-18: Unit 23 Baird Mountains sheep closure review

Motion by Member Kramer, seconded by Member Pattee, to retain the status quo for Wildlife Closure Review WCR26-18. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **retain the status quo for WCR26-18**. The Council believes that maintaining the closure to protect this subsistence resource is in the best interest of the region at this time as there are still substantial conservation concerns for sheep.

WCR26-45: Unit 23 Noatak caribou closure review

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Cleveland, to retain the status quo for Wildlife Closure Review WCR26-45. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **retain the status quo for WCR26-45**. The Council believes that it is in the best interest of subsistence users of the region to retain the status quo for WCR26-45 to help the Western Arctic Caribou Herd's population rebound. The Council noted that this closure directly protects the resource and prevents user conflict. The Council was concerned to hear that other herds across the northern regions of Alaska are also in decline, which makes it even more necessary for this closure to remain in effect at this time.

Crossover Proposals

WP26-53: Units 22B and 22D caribou, change seasons to may be announced

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Kramer, to defer Proposal WP26-18 to the home region. *The motion passed unanimously.*

This proposal concerns Unit 22, and the Council does not have enough local knowledge on this topic.

WP26-64: Units 22 and 23 muskox, extend season

Motion by Member Kramer, seconded by Member Cleveland, to support Proposal WP26-64. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-64**. The Council supported extending the season as it allows people to get out when conditions are safer and provides more flexibility to harvest.

Annual Report

Federal Subsistence Board FY2024 Annual Report Replies

Nissa Pilcher, Council Coordinator, provided an overview of the FY2024 replies from the Board.

Identify Issues for FY2025 Annual Report

The Council identified 4 topics for their FY2025 Report:

1. Addressing ongoing caribou population declines
2. Support additional research funding and studies to fill data gaps
3. Support the increase of hunting and trapping opportunities on wolves and bears
4. Concerns about contamination from mining and future development projects, which will be informational

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed its winter 2026 meeting dates and location as March 24-25, 2026, in Kotzebue.

The Council approved its fall 2026 meeting dates and location as October 24-25, 2026, in Kotzebue.

Reports:

The Council received updates on the following topics:

- Native American Fish and Wildlife Society report on a Beaver Workshop Opportunity presented by Lori Petruska, Senior Alaska Tribal Climate Resilience Liaison
- ADF&G Subsistence of Subsistence report on Arctic Area Subsistence Division Projects presented by Helen Cold, Subsistence Resource Specialist

- FWS Selawik National Wildlife Refuge Update presented by Wil Wiese, Selawik NWR Manager and Brittany Sweeney, Selawik NWR Assistant Manager
- NPS Report on Guides and Transporters in the Western Arctic National Parklands presented by Annie Carson, Integrated Resources Program Manager
- NPS Western Arctic Parklands Update presented by Annie Carson
- NPS Kobuk Valley SRC and Cape Krusenstern Subsistence Resource Committee update presented by Annie Carson
- NPS GAAR SRC Update presented by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator
- Western Arctic Caribou Herd Biology and Working Group update presented by Kyle Joyle, NPS Wildlife Biologist with assistance from Alex Hansen, ADF&G Wildlife Biologist
- Exploring the Changing Availability of Western Arctic Caribou and Community Implications, Master's Research Study through the University of Alaska Fairbanks, presented by Caitlin Luby with assistance from Dr. Todd Brinkman
- OSM update presented by Katerina Wessels, Council Coordination Division Supervisor

Other Business:

- The Council received an update from Kevin Foley, OSM Fisheries Division, on the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program.

Motion from Member Monigold, seconded by Member Cleveland, to draft correspondence to OSM in support of the Hotham Inlet Sheefish Harvest Survey Study that was submitted for FRMP Funds. *The motion passed unanimously.*

- The Council received an update on correspondence sent since the last meeting and an overview of their 805(c) report from the previous federal fisheries regulatory cycle

Closing Comments:

Member Monigold thanked everyone for attending and ensured that all Council business had been concluded.

Member Kramer also thanked everyone for attending and noted that he is tough at these meetings because it's sometimes necessary to fight for their subsistence rights, their people, and their resources; that is the way the elders taught him to be on the Council when he first started.

Member Cleveland thanked the agencies for their thorough reports and requested reports from Red Dog Mine and associated subsistence councils at an upcoming meeting. He also requested that all villages submit harvest reports for caribou as this is a critical piece of the puzzle.

Member Ramoth noted that the northern environment is very sensitive, and climate change is affecting them. He stressed the importance of communication and collaboration, being positive, and ensuring traditional ecological knowledge is taken into account in surveys and regulations. He thanked everyone, including presenters and the North Slope Council member for sharing their knowledge.

Chair Baker thanked everyone for sticking through the delays caused by weather and mechanical issues the first day, including those listening on the radio, and thanked KOTZ radio station for broadcasting the meeting. He appreciated the very good conversations about caribou and predator management, and the time that the Council members spend behind the scenes working with others in the region.

Member Pattee had to depart shortly before the closing comments were given.

Adjournment:

The Council adjourned on Thursday, January 8, 2026, at 5:14 pm.

Nissa Pilcher, DFO
Office of Subsistence Management

Minutes were Chair certified for accuracy on [DATE]

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 March 2026 meeting in Kotzebue, 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.