

Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

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APRIL 14 2026

Anthony Christianson, Chair
Federal Subsistence Board
c/o Office of Subsistence Management
1011 E. Tudor Road, MS 121
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199

Dear Chairman Christianson:

The Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) appreciates the opportunity to submit its FY-2025 annual report to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) under the provisions of Section 805(a)(3)(D) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). At its public meetings held in Kotzebue, Alaska, and via teleconference on January 7-8, 2026, the Council identified concerns and recommendations for this report. The Council approved this annual report at its March 31 – April 1, 2026, public meeting. The Council wishes to share information and raise a number of concerns dealing with implementation of Title VIII of ANILCA and the continuation of subsistence uses in the Northwest Arctic Region.

1. Addressing Ongoing Declines of Caribou Populations

The Council continues to have grave and immense concerns about the ongoing decline of caribou populations, including the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH). In the past, the Council noted recurring issues of non-resident and non-local hunters impacting WACH migrations and populations, especially on State lands, and the Council previously submitted Federal and State proposals to address these issues. The Board has taken actions on Federal lands based on Council recommendations and input from other groups, such as the WACH Working Group, to help slow declines, reduce displacement, and allow for subsistence opportunities. The Council appreciates these efforts; however, with the most recent WACH population estimate at 121,000—well below the State of Alaska’s minimum population objective of 200,000—it is imperative to do much more to support the survival of the herd.

Recommendation:

The Council strongly urges the Board to take further action, including strengthening enforcement of current harvest limits, implementing additional harvest restrictions, and working collaboratively with the State to implement similar strategies on State-managed lands. Unenforced harvest limits undermine previous conservation efforts and create a cycle of

ineffective management. To protect all subsistence resources, there must be parity in closures and regulations across both Federal and State managed lands. There must also be adequate enforcement of limits and additional restrictions implemented to support population recovery. The Council continues to highlight this critical concern in the annual report to emphasize the need for immediate, comprehensive, and coordinated action.

2. Support Additional Research Funding and Studies to Fill Data Gaps

The Council remains concerned about the availability of subsistence resources and adequate subsistence opportunities due to the changing climate and other factors. Warmer weather, storms, flooding, and other events are changing seasonal patterns, landscapes, and broader ecological conditions. This creates challenges for both subsistence users and the resources they rely on. In addition to caribou, communities have observed declines in moose, sheep, salmon, and other species. These declines have increasingly led locals to rely more heavily on other species, such as sheefish and muskox.

Recommendation:

The Council emphasizes the need for scientific studies and surveys to better understand current populations trends, especially in the context of climate-related changes and other factors. Considering population declines, the Council underscores the critical need for additional scientific monitoring, research, and proactive measures to better inform proposals and decision-making. The Council requests the Board to fund studies through the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program where possible and to encourage staff to seek other opportunities and collaborations to support further research.

3. Highly Support the Increase of Hunting and Trapping Opportunities on Wolves and Bears

The Council is extremely concerned about increased sightings of predators near communities, which pose threats to both human safety as well as to important subsistence resources. In the Northwest Arctic, wolves have been observed in proximity to several villages, seemingly targeting dogs for food, an indicator that they are not finding adequate food further afield. Safety concerns were raised when wolves were spotted shortly after schools dismissed for the day in at least one village, when children were traveling home. Bears have not yet been observed coming into the villages, but due to recent poor salmon runs they may also begin looking to replace these calories with different food sources and appear to be more frequently targeting larger mammals.

Hungry wolves and bears are putting significant pressure on already depressed moose and sheep populations and may be a significant factor contributing to the continuation of caribou population declines.

Recommendation:

To address these concerns for safety and pressure on subsistence resources, communities have begun to encourage predator harvests and village monitoring. The Council submitted previous proposals on this topic and would appreciate additional Federal assistance to further these efforts, including funding predator studies and other surveys to inform future proposals (see item #2).

The Council would like to see expanded opportunities for hunting and trapping of wolves and bears, such as longer seasons, larger bag limits, fewer restrictions, and possibly unlimited harvests. Increased take of these predators would support food security in the region where the availability of other traditional subsistence resources has declined. Subsistence users would also be able to utilize other parts of the wolves and bears, which could allow for additional economic opportunities as well.

The remainder of this report is for informational purposes only, and the Council does not request a response. However, these issues are significant and important, and the Board will benefit from being aware of them.

4. Concerns About Contamination from Mining and Potential Development Projects

The Council expressed concerns regarding contamination from current mining activities and potential impacts from future development projects in the Northwest Arctic region. Such contamination could affect important subsistence resources, including caribou, and contribute to population declines. While the Council understands contamination studies are outside the scope of the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program, it seeks additional information on this topic, including written reports and updates to Tribes throughout the region from mining operators. The Council would also like to see future studies that investigate contamination concerns in the region.

The Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council appreciates the Board's attention to these matters and the opportunity to assist the Federal Subsistence Management Program in meeting its charge of protecting subsistence resources and uses of these resources on Federal public lands and waters. The Council looks forward to continuing discussions about the issues and concerns of subsistence users in the Northwest Arctic Region. If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact me via Nissa Pilcher, Subsistence Council Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management, at nissa_pilcher@ios.doi.gov or 1-800-478-1456 or (907) 310-4097.

Sincerely,



Thomas Baker
Chair

cc: Federal Subsistence Board
Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
Interagency Staff Committee
Office of Subsistence Management
Benjamin Mulligan, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Aaron Poetter, Federal Subsistence Liaison, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Administrative Record