

WESTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Wedgewood Resort
Fairbanks, Alaska
December 18, 2025

Invocation

Council member Jenny Pelkola provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Wednesday, December 18, 2025, at 9:10 am. Council members Jenny Pelkola, Donald Honea, Jr., Robert Walker, Tommy Kriska, Pollock Simon, Sr. and Chair Jack Reakoff were present in-person and Member Tim Gervais attended online. Darrell Vent, Sr. was absent and excused. With seven out of eight seated Council members present, a quorum was established. There are currently two vacant seats on the Council.

Attendees

* *Denotes attended virtually*

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Nissa Pilcher, Brent Vickers, Grace Cochon, Kristen Morrow, Brian Ubelaker, Robbin La Vine*, Kevin Foley*, Janel Day*
- Secretary of the Interior's Office: Sara Taylor*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Regional Office – Jill Klien*; Kanuti/Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex – Jeremy Havener, Tina Moran, George Yaska*; Yukon Delta NWR – Christian Alexi*, Emmit Nicorri*; Northern Alaska Fish and Wildlife Field Office – Keith Herron*, Shane Ransbury*
- National Park Service (NPS): Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve – Matt Cameron
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Erin Julianus, Craig Townsend*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Glenn Stout
- Tribal and Native Organizations: Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission – Jazmyn Vent; Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association – Olivia Irwin; Tanana Chiefs Conference Tribal Resource Stewardship Department – Krystal Lapp

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Pelkola, to adopt the agenda with the additions found below. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

- Review of Joint Council letter to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) Chum Salmon Bycatch Draft Environmental Impact Statement*

- Review of Joint Council letter to the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) regarding proposal comments*
- Review of Joint Council letter on Secretarial Review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program (Program)*
- Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program (Partners) update for the Kuskokwim Drainage

* The Eastern Interior Alaska Regional Advisory Council (EIRAC) and this Council met jointly on December 17th. Due to weather delays, the Council was unable to make quorum until December 18th. These were agenda topics that the EIRAC and Council discussed jointly that were action items.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Kriska, to approve the Winter 2025 Council meeting minutes as written. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Council Member and Chair Reports

Pollock Simon, Sr. of Allakaket reported that again there was no salmon to harvest in the Yukon, and people were depending on whitefish like Sheefish, which must be harvested carefully to avoid harming that population. He noted that this year was difficult, as when it was time to put out the whitefish nets in August there was a lot of rain which raised the river level and also brought down debris. The rain was bad enough that some in Allakaket had to evacuate, including himself and his wife. This will mean that it will be a hard winter with no dry or frozen fish put up for people or dogs. Member Simon noted that the caribou have not returned to Allakaket for 50 years, and that the moose population seems to be depressed, and there doesn't seem to be any black bears anymore either, which was an important food resource. He reported that grizzly (brown bear) numbers are up, and they eat moose calves and also denning black bears in the fall and they are depending more on these animals now that there are no more salmon. Member Simon further noted that the blueberries have had a poor crop the last few years due to the cold spring and that has further exacerbated this issue. Member Simon concluded his report by saying that he lives in Allakaket because it is his home, and not because he has nowhere else to go, and he is concerned with both the dwindling subsistence resources and development that will further impact these resources.

Robert Walker of Anvik reported that more nonlocal hunters have been coming into Unit 21E to hunt for moose, which is concerning as this leaves less for locals and the population is starting to show signs of decline. He expressed concern over actions taken by some of the hunters, as well as some of the residents of the subregion he lives in that are assisting these hunters, but there is no law enforcement officers that are stationed anywhere near Anvik and there is also a deep distrust in both law enforcement officers as well as the legal system. Member Walker noted that many members of our communities are being forced to resort to breaking the law to have food to eat, and others are then forced to pretend they don't see. Food at the local stores is expensive, although people are starting to utilize other resources such as rabbits, grouse, and geese. He questioned whether Chinook Salmon will ever be declared endangered, as that action would greatly impact those that benefit commercially from the ocean. Our way of life has

undergone dramatic changes, and the younger generation is losing touch with traditional skills, such as cutting fish, which is deeply saddening. Among our elders, we have discussed these changes and the need to adapt, and despite these challenges, we remain resilient and committed to survival.

Jenny Pelkola of Galena reported that high water in the fall limited many people's ability to get moose, and that a major wind event hit the middle Yukon area hard. She informed the Council that she had to get Chinook Salmon from Washington this year just to have a taste of it, noting that it tasted close to Yukon fish, and that she is worried about the lack of food security many are now facing. Member Pelkola expressed sadness that the lack of salmon is also causing a loss of culture, explaining that although she still goes to her fish camp in the summers, there are now empty smokehouses, no people bustling around like bees, no more kids running around joyfully as they help and learn. She said that we have been fighting for so long for our salmon, and those that future generations will have to continue that fight, but it feels like there will come a point when the youth won't even know what a moose or a salmon look like. Member Pelkola concluded her report by thanking those members and the public who attending the meeting, and expressed appreciation for the Joint EIRAC meeting held the day before.

Donald Honea Jr. of Ruby shared that he has not attempted to fish this year—or in the past several years—and described the decline in once-productive fishing areas as devastating. He also noted that he was gifted a moose this fall, which he greatly appreciated, as he has been unable to harvest one himself in recent years and made full use of the meat. Member Honea concluded his report by expressing appreciation for previous day joint meeting with EIRAC, noting the significant overlap in land and resource use and the value of collaboration.

Tommy Kriska of Nulato shared that recent personal losses have led him to reflect more, and he is concerned that as salmon fishing can no longer occur, it has affected community attitudes. This year, poor weather and high water levels have complicated hunting and trapping, with moose increasingly scarce and delayed river freeze-ups hindering travel and trapping. Member Kriska expressed concern about state-issued moose permits near Nulato, and he questioned the moose surveys that indicate a healthy and abundant moose population, as that is not what he is observing in the field. With the lack of salmon and lower moose numbers, he expressed concern that children are losing traditional knowledge as lifestyles change, and he fears that further proposed development, such as the Ambler Road, poses even more threats to the continued erosion of culture. He also noted frustration over reports of waste going unaddressed and expressed a desire that enforcement officers show greater understanding and compassion to local residents, especially during the current times of resource shortages. Member Kriska noted that he believes that Councils should meet with neighboring Councils every other year or so – noting there is a lot of overlapping concerns and good discussions that can be had. He concluded his report by noting that despite frequent discussions and consultations on our subsistence resources, it often feels like the outcomes only tighten restrictions on us.

Tim Gervais of Ruby expressed gratitude for federal workers who went through furlough and appreciated everything that they do to help keep the subsistence economy viable. He then relayed a story from a friend of his on the west coast who's village flooded after Typhoon Halong, and that while we are all

experiencing different things that affect us in different ways, that when our families are safe and warm, when we have the opportunity to feed them and provide for them, that there is more good than bad in our lives. Member Gervais noted that the lack of salmon on the Yukon, and to a lesser degree the Kuskokwim, has been devastating in every aspect to the region, and he hopes that elders will be around to pass down their knowledge one day to the younger generations. Yet just last week, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) approved a 1.4 million metric ton quota for the Bering Sea/Aleutian Island Trawl fleet for pollock. This is not a sustainable level of harvest. While the oceans are vast, that level of biomass removal is not sustainable and the NPFMC is violating several National Standards that were put in place by the Magnuson-Stevens Act to protect fisheries as it is apparent that there is not enough salmon returning to even meet minimum escapement numbers. He noted that he believes the Solicitors should become involved in this discussion so Councils and subsistence users can find out what actions are available to them to make the Department of Commerce to stop the regulatory violations on these standards, and that the NPFMC does not seem to care about what they are doing to the subsistence resources and users, but are just taking just enough action to say they are doing something without enacting meaningful actions. He expressed concern over the NPFMC members putting too much stock in how good the fleets are doing on an economic standpoint, instead of considering the sustainability of their harvests or the impacts on other resources, such as salmon. He expressed concern over the Ambler Road, and the impact it will have on subsistence resources and caribou migration patterns if it actually does get put in, and that the general population doesn't seem to understand the value in having a large area that does not have industrial development on it. Member Gervais finalized his report by noting that the payout for the disaster declared in 2021 for salmon are expected to be out by the end of the year.

Jack Reakoff of Wiseman updated the Council on the activities of the Koyukuk River Fish and Game Advisory Committee and the GAAR Subsistence Resource Council, both of which he sits on. He informed the Council that in his part of the region, they had a deep snow year and then a late spring, which was hard on [Dall] Sheep and caribou - the bull caribou he harvested in mid-May showed signs of nutritional stress, indicating a very tough winter. That was on the back of a very hot summer, which is also taxing for them. Then the rains started in August and flooded everything out, including the few salmon redds in the Jim River – the whole south edge of the Brooks Range flooded, as was noted in other members' reports. The floods were also detrimental to whitefish and [Arctic] Grayling; they wash into the woods and get stuck when the waters recede, and floods are disruptive to their spawning, which occurs in the fall. He noted that he didn't even put out a fish net because of the high water and the material and mud being flushed down the rivers in the summer. The fish also must contend with iron oxide causing the waters to turn orange in creeks – Wiseman Creek was gin clear and since a storm on July 7, 2017, the water now looks like Tang. Chair Reakoff noted that this last hunting season there was so much rain and flooding that the moose were up in the mountains – it was the first year in 34 years that he was unsuccessful in harvesting a moose. Chair Reakoff reported that he was able to harvest another caribou in the fall, although the fat layer was not adequate for the animal to be heading into winter. He finalized his report by noting that this winter there has been much less snow which is a needed reprieve for the caribou so they can get to their food easier and be able to run from the wolves.

Action Items

Wildlife Proposals and Closure Reviews

Brian Ubelaker, OSM Wildlife Biologist, and Kristen Morrow, 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 Pelkola, seconded by Member Honea, to support Proposal WP26-01 as modified by OSM. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-01 as modified by OSM**. Moving delegated authority from Delegation of Authority Letters into regulation would reduce unnecessary administrative constraints and improve efficiency in harvest management. Codifying this authority would also provide a clear and transparent mechanism for modifying or removing provisions through the established regulatory process. Comments from the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission* regarding the inclusion of Tribal organizations in the consultation process should be further expanded and considered more broadly for all delegated authority.

*Comments provided at the Joint Meeting

Western Interior Region Proposals and Closure Reviews

WP26-50 – Modify the Upper Kuskokwim Controlled Use Area boundary

Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Simon, to support Proposal WP26-50 as modified by OSM. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-50 as modified by OSM**. Adopting this proposal removes a restriction that currently applies only to federally qualified subsistence users. The Upper Kuskokwim Controlled Use Area (UKCUA) that exists in Federal regulations does not apply to non-federally qualified users, and the UKCUA that exists in State regulations has a much smaller footprint and does not contain any Federal lands. Eliminating the UKCUA would further simplify and clarify the regulatory framework in Unit 19.

WP26-51 – Units 21D and 24D, muskox, establish hunts

Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Pelkola, to support Proposal WP26-51 as modified by OSM, with further modification by the Council. *The motion passed unanimously.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-51 as modified by OSM**, which they submitted, with an **additional modification to delayed implementation until a C&T Proposal is analyzed**. The Council supports this proposal, finding that a harvestable surplus of muskoxen exists and that participation in the hunt is expected to be low due to the difficulty of accessing the hunt area. The Council noted that they had no concern about guided hunting activity, as permit eligibility is limited to federally qualified subsistence

users. However, the Council recommended further modifying the proposal to delay implementation of the hunt until a customary and traditional use proposal can be submitted to requesting that permit eligibility be limited to residents of Units 21D, 24D, 22A, and the community of Ruby. The Council anticipates that the muskoxen population will continue to grow and expand further into the Western Interior Region and believes continued coordination between Federal and State management agencies will ensure the population is not overharvested.

Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Region Crossover Proposals

WP26-41/42 – Unit 18 moose and caribou, eliminate take from boat moving under power

Motion by Member Gervais, seconded by Member Honea, to **support Proposal WP26-41/42**. *The motion passed with a vote of 5-2.*

The Council voted to **support WP26-41/42**. The Council considered the proposal to be inconsequential, as it was not expected to substantially change moose harvest practices for rural users. Moose hunting from a boat on a river often occurs in dynamic conditions, which can make it challenging to assess regulatory details in real time as animals move quickly away from approaching boats. Overall, the Council concluded the proposal would not result in a meaningful change in harvest behavior.

North Pacific Fishery Management Council Chum Salmon Bycatch Draft Environmental Impact Statement

The Council received a briefing on what was discussed at the Joint Council the day prior on this topic.

Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Kriska, to support and submit comments to the NPFMC that were approved by the EIRAC during the Joint Council session the day prior. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Alaska Board of Fisheries Proposal Comments

The Council received a briefing on what was discussed at the Joint Council the day prior on this topic.

Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Honea, to support and submit Joint Council comments to the BOF that were approved by the EIRAC during the Joint Council session the day prior. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Secretarial Review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program

The Council received a briefing on what was discussed at the Joint Council the day prior on this topic.

Motion by Member Simon, seconded by Member Pelkola, to support and submit Joint Council comments on the Secretarial Review of the Program that were approved by the EIRAC during the Joint Council session the day prior. *The motion passed unanimously.*

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 nine topics for their FY2025 Annual Report:

1. Comments on the continued salmon crisis
2. Need for enforcement funding and check stations
3. Fund Wildlife Resource Monitoring Program
4. Finalize Sheep Management Strategy Guidelines

Informational Topics:

5. Evaluation of current and anticipated subsistence needs for fish and wildlife populations within the region
6. Proposed Ambler Road concerns
7. Chinook moratorium and lack of consultation/transparency by the State of Alaska
8. Continuation of Joint Council meetings
9. Frustration over lack of action or forward movement regarding subsistence resources

Motion by Member Simon, seconded by Member Pelkola, to approve these topics for the Council's FY2025 Annual Report. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed their winter 2026 meeting date as February 24-25, 2026, but requested the meeting be held out of region in Anchorage due to an overlapping BOF meeting that will also be held in Anchorage.

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program

Kristen Morrow, OSM Anthropology Intern, provided updates on FRMP and Partners programs. She gave an overview of Kuskokwim area FRMP proposals, and the Councils provided input on the projects that are seeking funding.

Other Business

- 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
- The Council requested to send a member to the upcoming NPFMC and Alaska Board of Fisheries meetings

Agency Reports:

- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association update presented by Olivia Irwin, Community Liaison
- ADF&G Agency Report presented by Glenn Stout, Area Wildlife Biologist

Nissa Pilcher, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Subsistence Management

Minutes were Chair certified for accuracy on 3/16/2026

Jack Reakoff, Chair
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its Fall 2026 meeting in Aniak, 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 Nissa Pilcher, Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9054, or email nissa_pilcher@ios.doi.gov.