

NORTH SLOPE SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Inupiat Heritage Center
Utqiagvik, Alaska
February 24 – 25, 2026

Invocation

Billy Adams provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Tuesday, February 24, 2026, at 9:05 a.m. Council members Martha Itta, Peter Williams, Leonard Barger, Quincy Adams, and Chair Brower Frantz were present in person at the meeting. Council member Esther Hugo was present via teleconference. Council members Jenysa Ahmaogak and Wanda Kippi were absent and excused. With seven of the nine-seated Council members present (Council has one vacant seat), quorum was established.

Attendees

*Asterisk * identifies if present via teleconference.*

- North Slope Borough: Nicole Wojciechowski, Brian Pearson, Billy Adams, Todd Sformo, Lucy Leavitt, Kendra Mack, Robert Aqpik, Jr.
- Voice of the Arctic Inupiat: Frederick Brower, Jason Rexford*
- Native Village of Nuiqsut: Phillip Tony*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): George Yaska*
- National Park Service (NPS): Eva Patton*, Kyle Joly*, Marcy Okada*
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Zachary Arnold, Michael Morningstar
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Carmen Daggett, Jordan Pruszenski*
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Anna Senecal, Dr. Brent Vickers, Gisela Chapa, Tom Plank*, Dr. Hannah Voorhees*, Kevin Foley*, Janel Day*, Robbin La Vine*, Katerina Wessels*
- Members of the Public: LucyMae Nunaluk Tukle, Robers Auegrak, +19*****31*, +19*****40*, +19*****46*

Election of Officers

- Brower Frantz was elected Chair
- Leonard Barger was elected Vice-Chair
- Wanda Kippi was elected Secretary

Review and Adopt Agenda

- Motion by Member Adams, seconded by Member Barger, to adopt the agenda as presented.

The motion **passed** unanimously.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

- Motion by Member Itta, seconded by Member Barger, to approve the meeting minutes.

The motion **passed** unanimously

Council Member Reports

Martha Itta from Nuiqsut described severe and worsening changes to subsistence in Nuiqsut and the surrounding region, highlighting concerns across wildlife, safety, and industrial impacts. Hunters encountered sick caribou—several of which had to be left in the field this past winter—and though the animals appear large, they lack sufficient fat for making traditional foods like *akutaq* for cultural events such as *Nalukataq*. She also reported that migration routes have shifted dramatically, with caribou avoiding roads and pipelines, rerouting far from long-used crossings, and moving toward the Willow area instead of traditional paths near bridges and Fish Creek; large bulls and overall herd numbers are noticeably declining. Member Itta shared other wildlife changes including a sharp drop in fox populations, long-standing dens now empty, and a rare polar bear that approached the village. Additionally, fishing and whaling have become increasingly dangerous because of warm water, overflow, unstable ice, and severe storms, leading to multiple near-fatal incidents and unsafe conditions at Cross Island. She shared that the community is deeply concerned about the Willow Project and the construction of a new airport, fearing further disruption to caribou migration and questioning why existing facilities are not used. Residents feel overburdened by regulations related to industrial activity, describing Nuiqsut hunters as “more regulated than anybody else.” The speaker emphasized the need for better education and outreach for both residents and visitors regarding safe and legal hunting around infrastructure, required tools and reporting procedures, and consequences of accidental damage, citing a recent hunter ban tied to insufficient guidance rather than wrongdoing. Concerns about law enforcement were also raised, including reports of uneven policing that favors industry workers while local residents face harassment even when hunting legally, alongside slow responses to emergencies. Despite years of voicing these issues, the community sees little action from agencies such as the Borough and Iñupiat Community of the Arctic Slope (ICAS), especially after a recent industrial rig accident heightened distrust. Member Itta called for all relevant agencies to meet together in Nuiqsut, provide transparent communication about spills and incidents—rather than residents learning through Facebook—and include the community in evacuation drills and emergency planning. She concluded by thanking the Council and stressing that these concerns are urgent, longstanding, and worsening, with subsistence and safety conditions changing “day by day.”

In response to Member Itta’s comment, ADF&G Biologist Carmen Daggett asked for more information about the five sick caribou reported and encouraged hunters to take photos and, if possible, bring carcasses into Utqiagvik for examination stating that five is a notable number. Ms. Daggett also shared that flooding in Umiat prevented collaring efforts last year, but she hopes to examine any sick animals brought in. She intends to conduct more outreach to encourage this reporting. Ms. Daggett also noted that one muskox was taken recently in Nuiqsut and wanted that added to the record.

Esther Hugo from Anaktuvuk Pass stated that the community is experiencing very poor weather conditions, with blizzards and extremely limited visibility, and that few people have been able to go to camp. A persistent south wind affected conditions, thus limiting hunting. Still, some healthy *kulavaq* (caribou cows) were taken near the foothills. Member Hugo emphasized that *tuttu* (caribou) remains their

primary food source and are central to survival in Anaktuvuk Pass. She described that in the fall, many people travel to Umiat and the Dalton Highway in September during the peak of the caribou migration, often seeking animals with “big racks.” She explained that decades of increasing sport hunting pressure along the Dalton Highway during peak migration continue to diminish local access to caribou needed for the winter months, prompting frustration after many years of meetings with little change. She reiterated that the community of Anaktuvuk Pass has a deep cultural and historical connection to the caribou—they call it the place of caribou droppings—and they consider themselves the caribou people. They do not hunt moose unless caribou are unavailable. Member Hugo stressed that the community may need to consider legal action to protect their subsistence rights, noting longstanding cultural reliance on *tuttu*, declining harvest opportunities, and a sense that existing regulations disadvantage rural residents. She called for unified action among the city, tribe, and corporation to ensure protection of subsistence resources and to secure meaningful change. Member Hugo also described how the community lives and tries to cook as much as possible, and when someone passes away, they prepare meals daily until the burial. She also mentioned the high cost of living, limited local food options, and challenges with ordering from their local store and other suppliers, which makes living off the land even more important. She reiterated that the community is being heavily impacted and that these concerns need to be addressed.

To Member Hugo’s comment, Chair Frantz commented that the community of Anaktuvuk Pass is unique and very different from many other places in rural Alaska. Caribou, moose, and fish are cooked every day, and it is a tightknit community. Residents rely heavily on caribou, and the cost of living has become extremely high. Chair Frantz also shared that the winter was extreme this year and the community of Anaktuvuk Pass experienced fuel shortages. He also described issues with fly-in hunters permitted by the state, who for their hunting success set up along the valley in ways that effectively block the caribou migration. Some fly-in hunters have attempted to give the caribou meat to the community but keep the racks, but this raised health concerns because it was unclear how the meat had been processed or whether it had been contaminated. He also shared that fly-in hunter activities have occurred near Anaktuvuk Pass, approximately within 60 miles of the community, during the peak of the season, originating from places such as Happy Valley, Prudhoe Bay, and other locations. Fly-in hunts, hovercrafts, airboats, and even online advertisements for jetboat access on the Sagavanirktuk River all contribute to pressure on the area. Additionally, “Do-It-Yourself” fly-in hunters, who are less regulated, add to the impact. He emphasized that change is needed; multiple groups of hunters—hundreds, if not thousands—are present during peak migration and the Council has repeatedly asked State and Federal agencies to evaluate how commercial hunting activity is affecting migration routes.

Leonard Barger from Point Hope emphasized that there have been many meetings with little progress, and that all groups—including this Council, the North Slope Borough (NSB) Wildlife Management Department, and the NSB Fish and Game Management Committee—need to work together and act as one to address the issues impacting subsistence users of the region. He noted that the elders who have passed on always warned that things would change, to be prepared, and those changes are now happening. Member Barger reiterated, to Member Hugo’s comment, the cost of living in the region is extremely high—\$120 for a ham and \$65 for a bag of hamburger patties, and that his family relies on bartering with relatives to supplement their diet and stated that his niece in White Mountain recently sent moose meat, which he traded for muktuk and beluga. Member Barger also reported that Point Hope has not had to deal with major weather issues as of this year but that they have experienced severe storms, power outages, and strong winds. Ice conditions had been poor, with water on the shore, and he hoped that south winds would bring the ice back. Member Barger also shared that fishing has been good, and the community harvested some caribou, but the animals have since moved on toward the Kivalina and Red Dog areas.

Their caribou harvests are important particularly during whaling season as they help ensure enough food is available for the community. Lastly, Member Barger mentioned that he is concerned about reports of beavers moving into the area and recommended harvesting beavers before they cause flooding and create problems for the community.

Quincy Adams from Utqiagvik shared that since the fall, the community has had a strong whaling season, landing 12 whales. They have also begun predator control efforts, with 12–13 wolves taken in Barrow and around Atqasuk, and wolverines harvested in another area. A hunter also caught a brown bear near the Chipp River—an unusual and concerning sighting, as brown bears are typically denning during winter. People were successful harvesting caribou along the Topagoruk River, but he was only able to harvest six on the Chipp River and the harvest was split between the people in his group. Muskox were abundant along the Chipp River, and Member Adams reported seeing about ten. He noted that caribou fled immediately when they saw the muskox, sprinting away from them. Fishing went well; he reported the ICAS subsistence hunters traveled through the Inaru River towards the Kugrua River, had good success fishing and shared their harvest with the community. A few foxes were observed on the edges of town. Member Adams also reported 15 seals were taken, but most were males of lower food quality and were left for polar bears. Around the point, approximately four polar bears were seen, appearing healthy. The polar bear population in that area seems to be doing well.

Peter Williams from Anaktuvuk Pass was initially delayed to the meeting and provided his regional report on the second day of the Council meeting. He reiterated the statements made the day prior to his report regarding the fuel shortages and conditions in Anaktuvuk Pass. He also stated that a lot of caribou has been hanging out by the community of Arctic Village.

Chair Brower Frantz from Utqiagvik supported Member Adam's comment that he has observed fewer caribou around the Chipp River and had to travel a long distance south to find animals. Fishing was strong; the fish they caught were full of eggs, and there were good numbers of Pink Salmon but Grayling was limited. Muskox, however, were frequently observed and in increasing numbers, with sightings in three different locations in a single day over the last few years. Chair Frantz appreciates the growing muskox population but considers them a nuisance because they scare caribou away and draw in predators and reported that he saw black wolves in the same areas where muskox were present. Chair Frantz shared that his son harvested his first seal this summer and gave most of it away, which made him proud. Walrus were observed and harvested, though he did not take one himself. He had no notable bear sightings this year—he often sees many in the Valley of the Willows, but none appeared this season, which he considered a positive change.

Moose were plentiful—a good year overall—and he harvested one young bull—the only moose he saw—but there were many signs of moose in the area, including fresh cow and calf tracks visible because the river levels rose and fell during his fall hunting trip. He also noted flooding along the riverbank and numerous signs of wolves and wolverines. He noted abundant white-fronted geese and large numbers of eiders. He did not see the *Paymaksraq* (candlefish) or another species he expected. Member Hugo followed by expressing concern about muskox, noting that they do indeed scare caribou and questioning why muskox are present in her area. She believes the population may be increasing and wondered why muskox would be introduced to a place where they were not originally found. Ms. Daggett clarified that muskox were present before statehood but had been hunted to extinction. They were reintroduced to Nunivak Island and another location, and as populations grew, they were distributed further.

Public Testimony

Billy Adams from Utqiaġvik expressed gratitude for the Council’s work and stressed the importance of Federal recognition for rural Alaska Native subsistence users, especially given that the State of Alaska often does not recognize their needs. He emphasizes that subsistence is a deeply rooted cultural and generational practice, closely tied to identity and survival. He elaborated further and provided key issues and needs in the North Slope Region:

- Many rural community members, including elders, struggle to fully understand complex regulatory systems involving multiple agencies (Federal, State, and Tribal).
- There is confusion about jurisdiction over wildlife and lands, especially the differences between Federal public lands, BLM lands, and State-managed areas.
- Communities like Nuiqsut, Point Lay, Kaktovik, and Anaktuvuk Pass face increasing difficulty accessing animals due to industry activity, weather changes, altered migration patterns, guided hunts, and declining caribou populations.
- He emphasized the need for stronger outreach, education, and community visits so residents can understand hunter responsibilities, land jurisdictions, and how the Council works.
- Better tools such as clear maps of public lands for each community are necessary to improve outreach and education.
- He expressed the need to engage communities in Council meetings, especially from areas currently affected by caribou declines.
- He discussed environmental and biological factors affecting caribou health—such as smoke from Interior wildfires, rain on snow events, predation, and weather changes—as well as the importance of predator management. He added that sick or thin caribou are not a new phenomenon, noting long-standing observations by elders about environmental impacts and vulnerability cycles of caribou.
- He drew parallels to bowhead whale management, where Indigenous knowledge transformed scientific understanding and management of bowhead whales, and suggested similar collaboration could improve management of caribou. He encouraged better use of Indigenous knowledge in wildlife management and research.
- He closed by recognizing the important role of tribal organizations and young hunters who provide Native foods to elders and vulnerable community members, and he encouraged continued positive collaboration.

To Mr. Adams’ comments, Chair Frantz then acknowledged the complexity of overlapping Federal and State management systems in Unit 26A and agreed that more education is needed, especially for new Council members and communities without representation. The Chair reinforced the importance of understanding who manages what, how enforcement works, and why processes are so difficult and slow.

Frederick Brower, the Energy Transportation Manager for ICAS, attended the meeting to represent the natural resources department and provided testimony on behalf of ICAS. Mr. Brower provided a briefing about the Hunter-Gatherer program activities over the last year. More specifically he reported:

- The Hunter-Gatherer program harvested and distributed food to elders, disabled residents, community events, and local churches for holiday feasts across the North Slope.

- Annual harvest totals of 19 male caribou harvested near the Chipp River, Peard Bay, and Tachinisok area, 450-500 whitefish, 120 eider ducks, 200 geese, 50 – 60 Grayling, and one brown bear.
- Fishing and environmental challenges during fall fishing period; fish spoilage occurred when nets were placed too close to the mouth of the Inaru River, but the issue was resolved by relocating the nets upriver. Additionally, late freeze-up and heavy snow made ice fishing difficult over the winter.
- The spoilage of stored subsistence foods after a rented freezer failed. Subsequently, ICAS secured grant funding to purchase freezers for every Tribe across the North Slope.
- ICAS had a meeting with the North Slope Borough’s wildlife department to discuss the need for education for transporters and guides regarding hunter safety.
- The Ice Cellar project aims to support long-term storage of subsistence foods and preserve the traditional taste of food. ICAS installed one thermal siphon at a local ice cellar and reported success in refreezing the ground but lost funding to continue that project for the community. ICAS continues in search of partnerships to procure or rent a drill rig to continue installations of thermal siphons.
- The ICAS conducts a Cultural Education Hunter Safety Academy with students from the communities of Wainwright and Utqiagvik to teach students about hunting and hunting safety. ICAS is working towards establishing such program across the North Slope. Additionally, ICAS has purchased a total of six snowmachines, in support of the program, of which four were delivered to Wainwright and Utqiagvik, and planned to deliver two to Nuiqsut.

Action Items

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Regulatory

Anna Senecal, OSM Fisheries Biologist, informed the Council about the upcoming Federal fish and shellfish regulatory call for proposals for the 2027 – 2029 regulatory years. The Council did not develop or submit any proposals.

Wildlife Special Actions

Tom Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist, provided an overview of Wildlife Special Action WSA26-01 to the Council.

WSA26-01, Western Arctic Caribou harvest limit reduction

Motion by Member Itta, seconded by Member Barger, to support WSA26-01 with modification to change the caribou harvest limit to ten caribou, only one of which may be a cow, per year, per hunter, in Unit 26A west of the Colville River drainage upstream from the Nuka River and drainages of the Chukchi Sea, south and west of and including the Kuk and Kugrua river drainages (Unit 26A SW) and in Unit 23, all drainages north and west of, and including, the Singoalik River drainage (Unit 23 Singoalik). The Council supported changing the caribou harvest limits in Unit 22 and Unit 23 remainder to four caribou, only one of which may be a cow, per year, per hunter as proposed in the submitted request.

The Council stated that imposing a caribou harvest limit of four caribou per year per hunter would greatly impact subsistence users of the communities of Wainwright, Point Lay, and Point Hope and that a higher

limit is necessary to ensure their continuation of subsistence uses of caribou. Additionally, the Council stated that the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) does not generally occur in southwestern Unit 26A or northwestern Unit 23 during the primary times of cow harvest as the entirety of the herd occurs further south. This modification demonstrates the Council's willingness to address the conservation concerns of the WACH while ensuring the subsistence needs of those three communities are met despite the impacts this reduced harvest limit presents to the subsistence users of the region. The Council concluded that, when management actions are needed to ensure the viability of the WACH population, subsistence harvest limits should only be reduced after caribou harvest by non-federally qualified users (NFQUs) is addressed. To that end, the Council also decided to submit a separate special action request asking for closure of Federal public lands in Unit 26A SW to caribou hunting by NFQUs for the 2026-2028 regulatory cycle (see below).

The motion **passed** unanimously

- Motion by Member Adams, seconded by Member Itta, to submit a Special Action request to close federal public lands in the southwest portion of Unit 26A to caribou hunting by NFQUs for the 2026-2028 regulatory cycle (note, this special action request was numbered WSA26-03).

Because Wildlife Special Action WSA26-01 would greatly impact residents of the communities of Wainwright, Point Lay, and Point Hope, the Council considers the closure of federal public lands in the southwest portion of Unit 26A to NFQUs to be necessary for the continuation of subsistence uses of caribou. The Council also notes that NFQUs frequently fly into hunting sites located directly along the WACH migratory pathway and believes the closure will directly benefit the herd. The Council asserts that federally qualified subsistence users (FQSUs) should not be the only users to take action to ensure the continued viability of this caribou herd, and that subsistence uses should be given priority over the uses of NFQUs, as stated in ANILCA.

The motion **passed** unanimously

WSA26-02 closure of Federal public lands in Unit 22 to caribou hunting by NFQUs for the 2026-2028 regulatory cycle

- Motion by Member Barger, seconded by Member Williams, to support WSA26-02.

The Council stated that it is important to provide a subsistence priority to support subsistence users within the impacted region due to the decline of the WACH.

The motion **passed** unanimously

Call for Alaska Board of Game Proposals

Gisela Chapa, OSM Council Coordinator, informed the Council about the Alaska Board of Game call for proposals for the Western Arctic/Western Region and the Interior and Eastern Arctic Region, and the proposal submission deadline of May 1, 2026. The Council did not develop any proposals to submit at this time.

Review and Approve FY2025 Annual Report

Ms. Chapa presented the information contained in the Council's FY2025 draft Annual Report for their review and approval.

- Motion by Member Itta, seconded by Member Barger, to approve the Annual Report as presented.

The motion **passed** unanimously

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed their fall 2026 meeting dates and location: October 1 – 2, in Utqiagvik.

The Council selected their winter 2027 meeting date and location: February 23 – 24, in Utqiagvik.

The Council selected their fall 2027 meeting date and location: October 5 – 6, in Anaktuvuk Pass.

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Update

Ms. Senecal provided an overview of the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program to the Council. Chair Frantz Brower and Member Martha Itta volunteered to help develop the Priority Information Needs (PIN) for the Northern Area.

Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program Update

Ms. Senecal provided an overview of the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program. Council Member Itta expressed interest in the program and incorporating science-related funding and education into the school district to involve children and young adults in learning about the land, waters, fishing, and hunting—skills important for Nuiqsut's future. She also stated that the number of sick fish has noticeably declined over the past few years, with fewer reports being turned in, though the reason for the decrease is unknown. She also emphasized the importance of educating youth for safety and cultural continuity, especially as they take on more responsibilities in subsistence hunting and community support.

Council Member Itta also stated that historical documentation about subsistence history and fishing history needs to be made available to local school districts and accessible to youth. Dr. Hannah Voorhees, OSM Anthropologist, shared that this request could be supported by either the Fisheries for Resources Monitoring Program or the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program. Dr. Voorhees also stated this could be a PIN for the Northern Area.

Agency Reports

1. ADF&G Unit 26A, 2026 Spring Update presented by Carmen Daggett, Area Biologist for the North Slope
2. Western Arctic Caribou Herd Update presented by Kyle Joly, Wildlife Biologist for the National Park Service
3. Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve Spring 2026 Update presented by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator
4. Indicators of Mercury Concentration in Lake Trout presented by Sara Laske, Research Fish Biologist with the U.S. Geological Service
5. Introduction of BLM Law Enforcement Rangers Zachary Arnold and Michael Morningstar
6. OSM Winter 2026 Update, presented by Dr. Brent Vickers, Anthropology Division Supervisor

Other Business

Council correspondence update

Ms. Chapa provided an update to the Council with the following correspondence:

- Council comments on the review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program (FSMP) undertaken by the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture.
- Letter to the BLM requesting that the Arctic District Office Manager exercise their delegated authority to increase the number of Federal subsistence permits issued for muskoxen in Unit 26A and to revise the reporting requirements to ensure the harvest quota is not exceeded. Relevant to the subject, ADF&G Biologist Carmen Daggett noted that two additional muskox hunting permits will be issued under the TX109 permit in Unit 26A and that she may extend coordination to BLM, as it falls within her authority to work with the Federal in-season manager.

Land status on FSMP regulatory Maps

Ms. Chapa shared a request from the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) to solicit feedback from Regional Advisory Councils regarding a request from the Eastern Interior Council to the Board to incorporate Native corporation lands and allotments to the maps that are used in the federal regulation books to reduce trespass issues in their region.

The Council was supportive of the idea of adding Native lands and allotments on regulatory maps. The group finds the updated mapping information very helpful, noting that past maps were confusing or lacked needed details; the new materials feel like long-needed information.

Upcoming opportunities for public engagement

Ms. Chapa provided an update to the Council and the attending public about important opportunities for the public to be involved in the Federal Subsistence Management Program. More specifically, informed them of:

- Upcoming public hearing for Wildlife Special Action WSA26-01
- The process to request Tribal and ANCSA Corporations consultations
- Upcoming Board wildlife regulatory meeting.

The Council shared the need for better outreach and education to the people of the region about the Federal Subsistence Management Program and stressed the importance of public engagement and their understanding of the Federal Subsistence Management Program, the role of Regional Advisory Councils, and requested the following information be presented at a future date:

- A presentation, in collaboration with the State and other partners, that shows the map of the Region and explain “how things came to be,” aiming to address confusion between State and Federal roles in the region.
- The Chair asked for information in plain English explaining the multiple management layers (BLM, ADF&G, USFWS, North Slope Borough), dual management, who to contact for enforcement in different scenarios, and providing historical context so current and future Council members have a clear understanding.

- Council members suggested using ANCSA boundary references and referenced marine mammal harvest rules managed by USFWS as an example because those rules are straightforward, while wildlife management rules are complex.

The meeting was adjourned at 11:23 am on February 25, 2026

Gisela Chapa, DFO
DOI Office of Subsistence Management

CERTIFIED by the Chair for accuracy on May 7, 2026.

Brower Frantz, Chair
North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

This document is a DRAFT version of the meeting minutes that has been certified by the Council Chair. These minutes will be formally considered and approved by the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its October 2026 meeting in Utqiagvik, AK. Any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcripts, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Gisela Chapa at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-310-6129, or email gisela_chapa@ios.doi.gov.