

Alaska Salmon in Crisis:

A report on the Regional Advisory Council Chairs' workshop, August 3, 2026

“Don’t take all of the salmon out and go away and leave the empty river to your children and children’s children.”

Theodore Roosevelt¹

Introduction

Alaska has long been a stronghold for wild salmon, but this stability is rapidly eroding. Rural Alaskan communities are increasingly unable to meet their subsistence needs. This is particularly true along the Yukon River where salmon harvest has been severely limited and subsistence lifeways have been put on hold. This shift has left a whole generation of children disconnected from their ancestral foods and cultural traditions forcing them to rely on costly, hard to source, and highly processed store-bought food alternatives. Other regions are experiencing declines in salmon numbers and sizes to varying degrees, and subsistence users have been raising alarms about these trends.

Management of fisheries in Alaska is complex, involving multiple agencies with different management mandates, jurisdictions, and decision-making structures. Freshwater fisheries are managed by the State of Alaska and DOI/USDA, nearshore marine fisheries by the State of Alaska, and offshore fisheries by the Department of Commerce. Additionally, the Yukon River and Taku, Stikine, and Unuk rivers in Southeast Alaska are transboundary systems with obligations negotiated through the Department of State between the U.S. and Canada under the Pacific Salmon Treaty.

Many Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils (Councils) have been requesting a new salmon management approach because they describe the current system as fragmented, slow, and ineffective in preventing continued declines of salmon. The Councils emphasize the need to take actions towards a coordinated, cross-jurisdictional framework that jointly manages salmon populations across ecological and political boundaries to support both salmon recovery and the continuation of subsistence uses of salmon in Federal public waters under Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act.

¹ <https://www.presidency.ucsb.edu/documents/remarks-the-alaskan-reception-seattle-washington>

In response to the complexity and gravity of the salmon crisis, Council Chairs requested a focused workshop be held in conjunction with the 2026 Federal Subsistence Board (Board) summer work session. On August 3, 2026, Council Chairs gathered for the first time to discuss a singular topic: the Alaska Salmon Crisis. The intent of the meeting was to gather a diverse set of experiences and find common ground among Council perspectives. Workshop participants explored the idea of working together to address the salmon crisis and, potentially, other similarly challenging topics, representing the whole of rural Alaska.

The meeting was facilitated and supported by the Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) staff. Council Chairs worked together to compare the state of Alaskan salmon and federal subsistence today to a sustainable and successful future. They also discussed strategies for how to get there. This document provides a summary of meeting deliverables and potential next steps. In order for any of the ideas discussed at the Chairs' workshop to be actionable; however, they must first be taken up by full Councils.

Meeting Outcomes

WORKSHOP PURPOSE

To foster a strong (durable and resilient) collaborative and positive inter Councils team to work on critical issues such as salmon and caribou declines affecting rural Alaskans.

DIALOGUE AGREEMENTS - guidelines for respectful engagement, established by the group

- Our gatherings are open forums
- We speak truth
- We listen actively
- We communicate and disagree with respect
- We hold space for safety

CURRENT SITUATION (SWOT - Strengths Weaknesses Opportunities Threats Analysis)

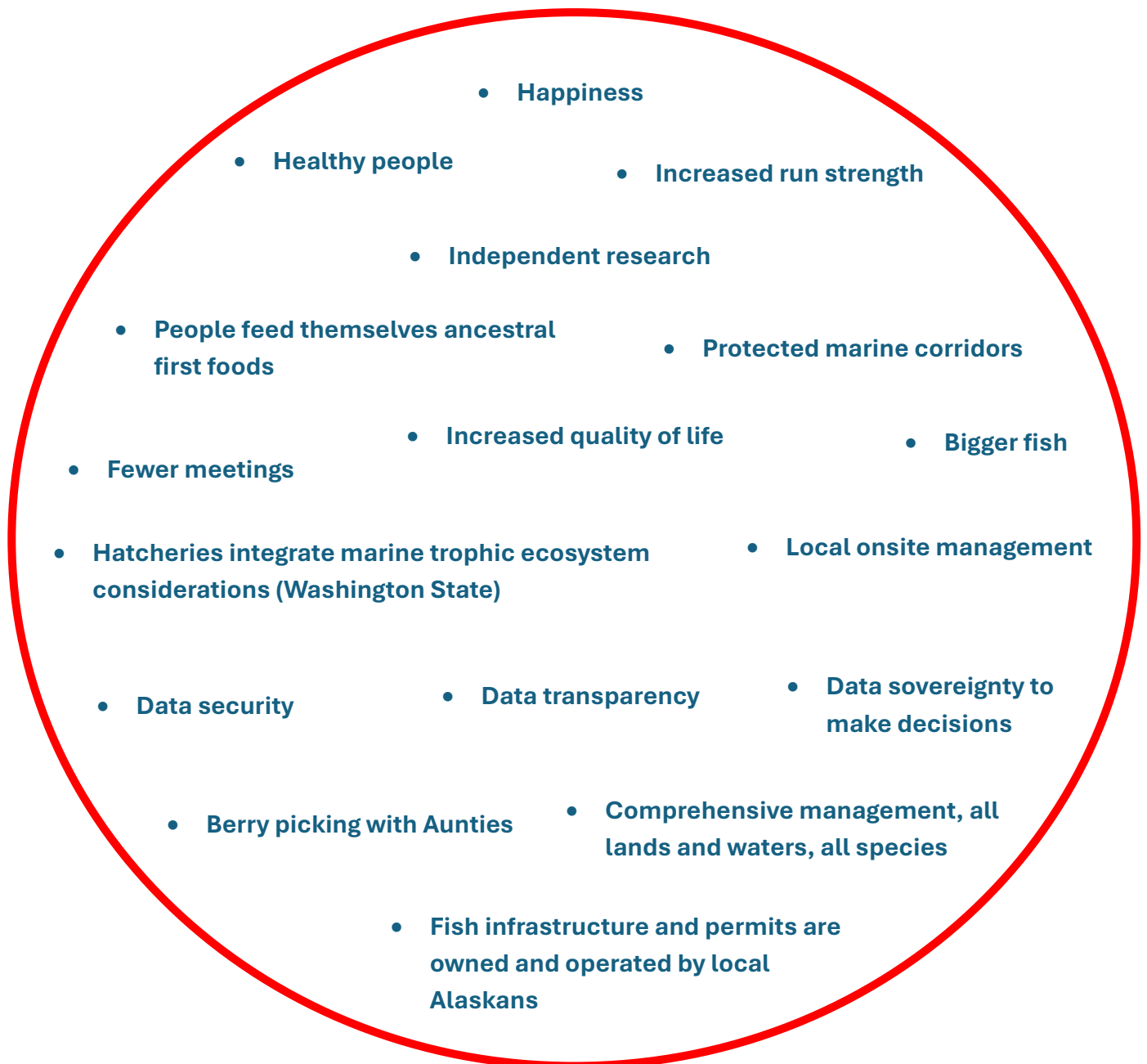
This exercise described the current situation according to Council Chairs. They listed the strengths and weaknesses of Councils. They also described threats and opportunities posed by the environment and systems external to Councils.

COUNCILS STRENGTHS	○ 30-year history and building ○ Archives of TEK, that means data ○ Board deference to TEK ○ Members are politically savvy ○ Members are experts in their fields ○ Strong relationships exist in and among communities ○ Councils represent a process for positive change ○ Diversity of membership ○ Diversity of language ○ Subsistence advocacy	COUNCILS WEAKNESSES	○ No Councils deference exists outside of the Board ○ Limited and fragmented authority to act ○ “Got no political clout” ○ Diversity of membership ○ Language barriers ○ Hard to work towards consensus ○ Over reliance on western data systems ○ Limited by single species focus
Threats to salmon and subsistence management	○ Deregulation/degrading environmental protections ○ Conflicts of interest in commercial fishing management ○ Forage fish bycatch ○ Competition for resources ○ Climate and ocean conditions ○ Lack of clarity around subsistence priority ○ Declining government budgets ○ Land grabs ○ Deep sea mining ○ Inter/national political instability ○ Alaska can’t feed the world ○ Department of seafood	Opportunities to strengthen salmon and subsistence management	○ There are preexisting models, others have gone before AK and we have information available to us (Atlantic Salmon, Columbia River, for example) ○ Coordination among Councils ○ Leaning into creation stories ○ Rethinking a future economy that works for people in place ○ It is widely accepted now that things are changing (closer to universal acceptance of climate change for example)

GOALS FOR A SUSTAINABLE AND SUCCESSFUL FUTURE

The group spent some time visualizing what it would look, taste and feel like to completely solve the salmon crisis. This circle represents the group's shared understanding of that desired future. Addressing obstacles standing between the current reality and the desired future move us closer to our goal. Some obstacles identified by the group included:

- Lack of clarity around subsistence priority
- Agency ignorance and turnover
- Lack of community health and unity
- An unclear path forward



STRATEGIC DIRECTION

In this portion of the workshop, Chairs explored ways of moving forward together. Each entry in the table below is a response to the following challenge question:

One year from today, you will know that you have made progress on working collectively across Councils to leverage your joint voice and power because you observe...

The three roll up “strategic directions” shown as table headers are group-generated summaries of column contents and represent big ideas for how Councils can effectively work together.

Building External Trust in Councils	Improving Process	Upholding Sovereignty
CHECHW TSEN (unconditional love in Tanana dialect)	Resource issues are understood and clearly communicated with gravity befitting the peril of the situation	Successful co-management
People listen to Councils	Councils coordinate before Board meetings	That subsistence is life
People ask for Councils' opinions	Councils follow up after Board meetings	Celebrations of success such as: in 2008 several Councils joined to get bycatch reduced.
Councils make solid recommendations that uphold the deference policy and are based on TEK, western science, and the effects on other users	Councils identify TEK and western science information needs	Councils engage in official, collective actions (letters, meetings, positions)
Councils maintain their integrity	Partnerships are formed	Councils are willing to self-organize
Councils increase their impact	Councils contribute to structures that support subsistence	Councils support Tribal and Alaska native Corporation co-stewardship and co-management.
	Joint Council meetings	
	Council strengths and weaknesses being addressed to increase effectiveness	

Next Steps:

SPECIFIC, MEASURABLE FIRST YEAR ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Following the workshop, Council Chairs asked the Board for a meeting between the Board, Council Chairs and the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture to discuss the salmon crisis. They further asked that the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture work with Secretaries of Commerce and State to address the issues at hand. The Board agreed to request an annual standing meeting with the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture.

Next steps for the Councils could include deciding whether they are interested in continuing collective work and, if so, how. Collective work could focus on preparing for a joint meeting with the Secretaries, it could also focus on any of multiple entries listed in the table, above. Examples of potential focus projects include:

- Planning and preparing for a Secretaries' meeting
- Exploring ways to increase Council impact
- Identifying structures that support subsistence and how to contribute to them
- Identifying Traditional Ecological and Indigenous Knowledge and western science needs (or processes to highlight these information needs)
- Exploring ways to support Tribal and Alaska Native Corporation co-management and co-stewardship
- Addressing Council weaknesses and/or external opportunities from the SWOT to work on
- Additional items not listed in the table, topics relating to caribou, FRMP/WRMP program development, what else?