

KODIAK/ALEUTIANS SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL Meeting Minutes

Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge Visitor Center
Kodiak, Alaska
March 4 – 5, 2026

Invocation:

Pat Holmes provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order Wednesday, March 4, at 9:07 am. Council members Rebecca Skinner, Coral Chernoff, Daniel Smith, Brett Richardson, Jeff Wasley, Sam Rohrer, and Natasha Hayden were present in person. With eight out of eight seated Council members present (Council has two vacant seats) the quorum was established.

Attendees:

** Indicates attending via MS Teams*

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): ***Leigh Honig, Scott Ayers, Anna Senecal, Dr. Jason Roberts, and Kevin Foley****
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): ***Mark Witteveen and Brianna Woolever***
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): ***Jon Gerken, Danielle Fujii-Doe, Joy Erlenbach, Maria Fosado*, Allison Williams*, and Jeff Kalin****
- Bureau of Indian Affairs: ***Dr. Glenn Chen***
- Tribal representatives and local organizations: ***Matt Van Daele (Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak), Kristi Tapio-Harper (Native American Fish and Wildlife Society), and Paul Chervenak (Kodiak Fish and Game Advisory Committee)***

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Rohrer, seconded by Member Wasley, to adopt the agenda with the following amendments:

- Action Item 11 was reordered to address fishery closure reviews prior to development of new fishery proposals; any closure reviews requiring new regulations would be considered concurrently with associated proposals.
- Summers Bay and Morris Lake (Item ii) was moved to follow McLees Lake.
- Alaska Board of Game proposals were scheduled for consideration following lunch (time certain), with a request for a summary from the local Advisory Committee Chair.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Election of Officers:

Ms. Rebecca Skinner was elected the Council's Chair.

Ms. Natasha Hayden was elected the Council's Vice Chair.

Mr. Daniel Smith was elected the Council's Secretary.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Member Richardson, seconded by Member Hayden, to approve the Fall 2025 meeting minutes with the following amendments:

- Correction to Council member report: 5 fledglings survived at Pasagshak and 2 at Kalsin Spit (revised from 21).
- Correction to Council member report: 24 confirmed gray whale strandings, revised to reflect equivalence to numbers during the previous Unusual Mortality Event.
- Clarification requested by Member Holmes to reflect his vote in opposition to WP26-34 (sale of handicrafts from brown bear byproducts).
- Request by Member Hayden to amend the minutes to include more detailed transcript content from the Federal Subsistence Management Program (FSMP) discussion; the approved minutes include language directing readers to the full meeting transcripts for additional detail.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Daniel Smith of Kodiak reported a shearwater mortality event observed in Pasagshak Bay and Ugak Bay area in fall 2025 was attributed to emaciation, likely due to limited food availability rather than disease or toxins. A striped dolphin stranding at Chiniak, one of the farthest north locations that a striped dolphin had been reported, highlighted changing ocean conditions. Additionally, increased humpback and gray whale strandings in 2025 were noted, reaching levels comparable to the recent Unusual Mortality Event. Despite this, approximately 200 gray whales remained in the Kodiak area through the summer, suggesting potential changes in migratory behavior.

Coho Salmon runs were generally reported as stable to strong, with Buskin and Pasagshak systems meeting escapement goals, though questions remain regarding late-season Coho Salmon returns and final escapement estimates. Concerns were raised about increasing mink populations and their potential impacts on native bird species, including Aleutian terns.

Winter conditions in 2025 were colder than recent years, affecting wildlife distribution and survival. Increased ice influenced emperor goose movements, and observations suggested some localized deer mortality following severe weather events. Waterfowl populations, including sea ducks, Steller's eiders, and trumpeter swans, appeared stable or increasing, with notable growth in overwintering swan numbers.

Patrick Holmes of Kodiak noted generally healthy deer populations, with some observed mortality along local beaches. He also remarked that gray whale presence appears to fluctuate with food availability, recalling periods of higher abundance in Kalsin Bay when prey resources were more plentiful. Overall, he reported that subsistence conditions were generally good, with a particularly strong berry harvest in the fall and an overall fair season for local users.

Brett Richardson of Unalaska reported a longer, warmer summer and extended fall, resulting in an excellent berry season. Salmon returns were mixed, with strong early Sockeye returns, low early Pink Salmon that improved later in the season, and generally decent Coho returns. Halibut harvest improved farther offshore, rockfish were abundant, octopus appeared to be increasing, and cod availability was low. Overall, most users were able to meet their subsistence fishing needs.

He also reported healthy bird populations, including ducks, geese, and bald eagles. Winter conditions included severe windstorms that limited access to Dutch Harbor, followed by periods of unseasonably warm temperatures and low precipitation. He noted increasingly intense wind events despite intermittent favorable weather.

Coral Chernoff of Kodiak provided a report reflecting on the importance of subsistence resources and access. She noted that time spent outside of Alaska highlighted the unique connection Alaskans have to the land and local food systems. She emphasized the value of subsistence practices for personal, family, and community well-being, and expressed appreciation for the Council's role in protecting access to these resources.

Natasha Hayden of Kodiak reported limited observations of buck deer during fall hunting despite extensive effort, along with observing high number of does and fawns. She also described a particularly severe winter with sustained cold temperatures and snow conditions.

She highlighted a successful traditional foods gathering hosted in partnership with Kodiak Area Native Association, which showcased a variety of locally harvested foods and emphasized the abundance of regional subsistence resources. Member Hayden also reported attending the FSMP review open house in Anchorage, noting strong participation but limited opportunity for extended public comment; she encouraged awareness of upcoming tribal consultation opportunities for the FSMP review.

She concluded by noting the seasonal return of migratory birds, signaling the onset of spring and the anticipated return of fish.

Jeff Wasley of Cold Bay reported an excellent berry season and a strong Coho Salmon return, while Sockeye Salmon remained below average. Halibut fishing was reported as very good, cod availability was average, and ptarmigan populations have remained strong for several years. Waterfowl harvests were also reported as excellent, particularly for puddle ducks.

He noted continued conservation concerns, including closed emperor goose harvests and a restrictive brant season due to low population numbers, which is expected to continue for several years. Observations of sea duck abundance were strong, though additional concerns included toxin-related die-offs in fur seals in the Pribilofs and a recent vessel grounding with potential environmental impacts.

Weather conditions included a mild fall followed by a volatile and colder-than-average winter, which may have influenced bird distribution in the region. Overall, he characterized the year as positive for subsistence and sport harvest, while noting potential future impacts related to the proposed Izembek Road.

Sam Rohrer of Kodiak reported there was strong deer populations in recent years following recovery from the 2016 winter die-off, though the current winter has been severe and may impact deer survival during the late winter period. Increased hunting pressure from transporters was also identified as an ongoing management concern.

Salmon runs on the west side of Kodiak were reported as strong, with an especially strong Coho Salmon return and solid Pink Salmon run. Berry production was exceptionally high, influencing bear distribution and resulting in fewer observations of bears in typical river and alpine areas.

He also noted the upcoming Alaska Board of Game meeting in Kodiak, highlighting several local proposals of interest, including a proposal related to mink management.

Rebecca Skinner of Kodiak provided a Chair's report, noting that the fall government shutdown limited some Council-related activities. She reported signing several letters on behalf of the Council, which were addressed under the correspondence update. She also noted recent cold and windy winter conditions in Kodiak and observed higher numbers of emperor geese in Womens Bay, including a group of approximately 200 birds in early January.

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda Items:

Mr. Van Daele (Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak) expressed concerns regarding the FSMP review and the need for greater tribal consultation. He also provided updates on increased whale mortalities and ongoing crayfish suppression efforts in the Buskin watershed, noting funding and management challenges.

Full testimony is available in the meeting transcript.

Action Items

Call for Federal Fisheries Proposals

Anna Senecal, OSM Fisheries Biologist, announced the call for proposals to change the Federal Subsistence Fisheries Regulations for the 2027 - 2029 regulatory cycle.

Kodiak Area Salmon Customary and Traditional Use Determination

Member Smith made a motion, seconded by Member Holmes, to modify the Customary and Traditional Use Determination for salmon in the Kodiak Area (except the Mainland District) to use the Kodiak Station Census-Designated Place (CDP) in place of the Kodiak Coast Guard Base. The modification would include off-base U.S. Coast Guard housing areas (e.g., Nimitz, Lake Louise, Aviation Hill), while exempting residents of Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge facilities. This change aligns with previous Council action for Unit 8 brown bear customary and traditional use determinations and is intended to better reflect original regulatory intent.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote

Fisheries Closure Review

Ms. Senecal provided an overview of the fisheries closure reviews (FCR) to the Council.

FCR27-04: Unalaska Lake drainage

The Council discussed salmon closures in the Unalaska area, emphasizing concerns about small and vulnerable salmon populations, degraded habitat, and enforcement challenges. Members noted that existing closures were originally supported by the local community and remain appropriate given current conditions. Input from the local Advisory Committee and subsistence users indicated strong support for maintaining closures, particularly due to limited harvest opportunities, proximity to population centers, and the need to protect spawning fish. Overall, the Council expressed support for retaining the closures moving forward.

FCR27-06: Unalaska Bay freshwater streams

The Council discussed the Unalaska Bay freshwater salmon closures, including potential impacts of rescinding the closure. Key considerations included the risk of overharvest under standard Federal subsistence regulations, jurisdictional differences between Federal and State fisheries, and the need to maintain conservation protections for local salmon runs. Members noted that the in-season manager could institute restrictions to provide protection to the resource if closures were lifted but also emphasized the importance of maintaining conservative harvest approaches.

Regulatory Proposal Development:

Motion by Member Richardson, seconded by Member Chernoff, to develop a fisheries proposal to rescind the closure (FCR27-06) and align Federal subsistence regulations with State of Alaska sport fishing regulations for select Unalaska Bay freshwater systems, including rod-and-reel gear restrictions, harvest limits, and boundary markers. The intent is to provide limited subsistence opportunity while maintaining conservation protections.

The motion passed without objection.

FCR27-07: McLees Lake drainage

The Council discussed the McLees Lake drainage closure, focusing on data limitations in salmon escapement estimates and the reliability of aerial surveys compared to weir counts. Members emphasized the importance of accurate monitoring methods and noted environmental factors that affect survey accuracy. Questions were also raised regarding permitting requirements and differences between State and Federal subsistence frameworks.

Regulatory Proposal Development:

Motion made by Member Richardson, seconded by Member Chernoff, to allow federally qualified subsistence users fishing in the McLees Lake drainage by mirroring State of Alaska sport fishing regulations. The proposal would provide limited harvest opportunity under existing sport fishing limits and methods while maintaining overall subsistence permit requirements.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

FCR27-08: Kodiak Area King Crab

The Council received an overview of the Kodiak Area king crab closure to non-federally qualified users, including ongoing conservation concerns and consistently low population levels. Members discussed the lack of stock recovery, the importance of nursery areas such as Womens Bay, and observations of limited crab abundance in recent years. Questions were raised regarding available survey data and localized population information. Overall, the Council expressed general support for maintaining the closure.

Alaska Board of Game, Southcentral Region – proposal Council discussion and comment formation

Mr. Chervenak, Kodiak Fish and Game Advisory Committee (AC) Chair, provided an overview of the AC's actions on Alaska Board of Game proposals. He emphasized the AC's focus on balancing conservation with local opportunity. Key actions included efforts to increase local access to elk permits, maintaining current bear management to avoid increased harvest (particularly of sows), supporting increased opportunity for mountain goat hunting through season extensions, and opposing increases to nonresident deer bag limits to address user pressure. The AC also supported reducing nonresident sea duck limits, expanding trapping opportunities for mink to control an introduced species, and opposed the use of infrared and artificial light devices for trapping due to conservation and fair chase concerns.

Council Actions on Alaska Board of Game Proposals:

Motion by Member Rohrer, seconded by Member Holmes, to support submitting comments opposing Proposals 199, 200, 201, 203, and 204 to increase nonresident deer bag limits, while supporting a one-deer limit with flexibility to allow harvest of any deer after October 1. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Member Rohrer, seconded by Member Holmes, to support submitting comments supporting Proposal 248 and opposing the use of infrared and artificial light devices for trapping (Proposals 240, 245–248). The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Member Rohrer, seconded by Member Holmes, to submitting comments supporting Proposals 220, 221, and 230 to extend goat hunting seasons. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Member Rohrer, seconded by Member Chernoff, to submit comments supporting Proposal 241 to allow a year-round trapping season for mink. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Member Rohrer, seconded by Member Smith, to support authorizing the Chair to present testimony to the Alaska Board of Game and approve submission of the Council's comment letter. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Review and Approval FY2025 Annual Report

The Council reviewed the draft FY2025 Annual Report, which highlighted key issues including the need for consistent fisheries research and weir funding, improved wildlife population data, enforcement capacity challenges, concerns with Mortensen Lagoon Sockeye Salmon returns, and declining goose populations. Members provided minor edits to improve clarity and specificity. The Council also discussed language related to declining goose populations and agreed to revise the text to focus on subsistence access and seasonal availability while avoiding characterization of user group conflicts.

Motion by Member Holmes, seconded by Member Hayden, to approve the draft FY2025 Annual Report as amended.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Future Meeting Dates

Motion by Member Hayden, seconded by Member Wasley, to confirm the Fall 2026 meeting dates and location as September 15–16, 2026, in Unalaska. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Member Wasley, seconded by a Member Richardson, to select the Winter 2027 meeting dates and location as March 10–11, 2027, in Kodiak. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Member Richardson, seconded by Member Wasley, to select the Fall 2027 meeting dates and location as September 15–16, 2027, in Cold Bay. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Fisheries Resource Monitoring and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Programs updates

Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program

Ms. Senecal provided an update on the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program, a competitive grant program supporting Alaska Native and rural organizations through capacity building, including funding for staff, internships, and science and culture camps. Three new partners were selected for funding: Bristol Bay Native Association, Native Village of Eyak, and Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission. The next funding opportunity is expected in spring 2027.

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program discussion

Ms. Senecal facilitated a Council discussion on the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP), focusing on program structure, priority information needs (PINs), and opportunities for improved Council and Tribal involvement. Members emphasized the importance of consistent funding for core monitoring projects (e.g., weirs), stronger alignment between Council-identified priorities and funded projects, and improved communication and transparency throughout the process. The Council also identified challenges related to funding limitations, lengthy timelines, and limited opportunities for meaningful input beyond PIN development, and discussed potential improvements including enhanced Council engagement, clearer proposal review processes, and greater incorporation of local knowledge.

Motion made by Member Rhorer, seconded by Member Richardson, to nominate Members Holmes and Richardson, and Chair Skinner to participate in developing PINS. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Reports

- ADF&G, Buskin River Sockeye Salmon Fishery and Stock Assessment Project Update, presented by Mark Witteveen, Fisheries Biologist
- Izembek National Wildlife Refuge Report, presented by Alison Williams, Wildlife Biologist and Maria Fosado, Refuge Manager
- USFWS, Alaska Peninsula, Bristol Bay, and Aleutian Islands Fisheries update presented by John Gerken, Federal In-Season Manager
- OSM update, presented by Scott Ayers, Deputy Director

Other Business:

Correspondence

Leigh Honig, Council Coordinator, provided an update on the correspondence sent on behalf of the Council since their fall 2025 meeting.

Council discussion: Native corporation lands and allotments on federal maps

Ms. Honig presented a request from the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council to include Native corporation lands and allotments on Federal subsistence regulatory maps to help reduce trespass issues. The Council discussed the proposal and generally questioned the utility of adding additional land ownership detail to maps intended to depict Federal public lands, noting that existing maps are not sufficiently detailed for navigation or legal use. Members also raised concerns about differentiating among private land types, the need for input from landowners, and whether other tools (e.g., mapping applications) are more appropriate for identifying land status.

Overall, the Council expressed mixed views and suggested that additional information and outreach may be more effective than map changes alone. No formal action was taken.

The meeting was adjourned at 2:30 p.m. on March 5, 2026

Prepared minutes / Signature on file

Leigh Honig, DFO
DOI Office of Subsistence Management

Signature on file

Rebecca Skinner, Chair
Kodiak/Aleutians Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were certified by the Chair for accuracy on July 7, 2026. These minutes will be formally considered by the Kodiak/Aleutians Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its September 15 – 16, 2026 meeting in Unalaska, and 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 Leigh Honig at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9053, email leigh_honig@ios.doi.gov.