

**YUKON-KUSKOKWIM DELTA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY
COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes**

Orutsararmiut Native Council Multi-Purpose Building
Bethel, AK
April 4-6, 2023

Invocation:

Father Martin Nicolai provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order Tuesday, April 4, 2023, at 9:22 AM. Council Chair Raymond Oney and Council members Henry Parks, John Andrew, Jaqueline Cleveland, Richard Slats, and Wassily Alexie were present in person. Alissa Rogers, Myron Naneng, Sr., and Norma Evan attended via teleconference. With 9 of 13 Council members present a quorum was established. James Landlord was delayed by weather and joined in person the afternoon of the first day. Robert Hoffman, Walter Morgan, and Phillip Peter Sr. were absent and were excused.

Attendees:

* Denotes attended telephonically

- Yup'ik Interpreter: Joann Andrew
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Brooke McDavid, Orville Lind, Pippa Kenner, Tom Plank, Kevin Foley*, Robbin La Vine*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Regional Office – Sara Boario*, Jill Klein*; Fisheries & Ecological Services - Gerald Maschmann; Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) – Boyd Blihovde, Laurie Boeck, Aaron Moses, Christopher Tulik, David Therchik*, Christian Alexie, Jr.; Togiak NWR – Andy Aderman*
- Department of the Interior: Wizipan Garriott, Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
- U.S. Forest Service: Greg Risdahl*
- Bureau of Indian Affairs: Glenn Chen
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Wildlife Conservation - Mark Burch*, Luke Rogers
- NOAA Fisheries: Mike Cameron
- Orutsararmiut Native Council (ONC): Delen Hooper, Janessa Esquible*, Mary Mathias
- Calista Corporation: Mary Martinez*, Rose Bennett*
- Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission: Andrew Magel
- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA): Gabe Canfield *

- Kwethluk Inc.: Nick Ayapan*
- Native Village of Napaimute: Dan Gillikin*
- Association of Village Council Presidents: Paige Peterson, Ashley Johnson, Edward Corb
- Public: Timothy Andrew, Martin Nicolai

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Naneng, seconded by Member Andrew, to adopt the agenda as presented and be accommodating as time certain items arise. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Election of Officers

Members Oney and Naneng were nominated for Chair. Member Naneng rescinded his nomination. Mr. Oney was re-elected as Chair on a unanimous vote.

Member Naneng and Andrew were nominated for Vice Chair. Member Naneng was re-elected Vice Chair on a vote of 8-1.

Member Slats was nominated and re-elected Secretary on a unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Vice Chair Naneng, seconded by Member Alexie, to approve the fall 2022 meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Wassily Alexie of Russian Mission reported that he was happy to finally attend his first in-person meeting with fellow Council members. He stated that it was pretty tough the last couple of years without salmon fishing. Everyone is struggling to get food to replace the salmon that people cannot go out and get. Member Alexie hopes for better salmon returns so people can go out and get fish for themselves.

Richard Slats of Chevak reported on the difficulty of the salmon closures for his community over the last three years. He stated that prior to three years ago they were never closed for fishing on the coast near Chevak, even when Yukon River fishing was restricted. He said it has never been proven by any scientific study that the salmon in the local coastal rivers are Yukon River fish, and additionally, local knowledge suggests they are different fish. Yukon kings (Chinook Salmon) are rich, while the local ones are not. Secretary Slats said there needs to be more studies documenting the salmon in coastal rivers. He expressed frustration that subsistence fishers are bearing the brunt of conservation measures and being restricted from salmon fishing when subsistence users are not the cause of the crash. He said people are trying to just do what they can to get through the winters.

John Andrew of Kwethluk reported that he has been a salmon fisherman since before 1976 and noticed salmon declines starting in the 1980s. He said that intercept fisheries and marine bottom-trawl fisheries have really impacted salmon returns over time. He said that they stopped commercial fishing in the Kuskokwim River area first and that commercial fishing in marine waters and intercept fisheries were allowed to continue. Now even subsistence fishers cannot fish, but commercial fishing is still allowed elsewhere. It affects all of the Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) Region. Member Andrew said that this winter there was a hard fight with the Alaska Board of Fisheries to reduce interception of AYK salmon in False Pass and Unimak areas. He said every time subsistence fishers try to fight the intercept fisheries they lose. He stated that some members of the Alaska Board of Fisheries are pro-commercial fishing and pro-intercept fisheries, and it almost feels like they do not care if subsistence fishers starve. In recent years, no one in the AYK region has met their Amounts Necessary for Subsistence salmon and it is very hard on people, especially those who live in very rural villages where the cost of living is over 200% compared to Anchorage. Mr. Andrew said the salmon fishing restrictions are causing some tensions between upper river and lower river residents.

Raymond Oney of Alakanuk reported that things have been hard for everyone because of the salmon harvest restrictions and the unpredictable weather. In the past, elders could predict the weather patterns for the coming season and also the salmon returns, but it is not possible anymore. He expressed concern that more severe storms like Typhoon Merbok may occur in the future. Chairman Oney recalled living a semi-nomadic life when he was younger, traveling between spring camp, fish camp, and winter camp. His family went to fish camp at Ingriiguk about 20 miles up the Yukon River from Marshall and it was a tent city with lots of families fishing and sharing fish wheels. Everyone fished to feed their dog teams, and there were no restrictions for subsistence. They stopped fishing when they caught what they needed. Even in the winter people traveled by dog team to fish. He recalled that Koyukuduk was a popular place to fish for pike to feed themselves and dogs. Chairman Oney said that every year he sets a net right before freeze-up to catch *imarpinraq* (Bering Cisco). After freeze-up he sets a net under the ice for Sheefish and whitefishes. He uses the same holes and changes the nets to larger mesh sizes as the winter goes on. He is concerned because this winter he caught much fewer fish than he usually does. He also caught Coho Salmon for the first time ever in winter and wonders if the warmer water temperatures are changing their run timing. Chairman Oney thanked everyone from all the regions who testified at the Alaska Board of Fisheries meeting in support of Proposal 140. He agreed with Member Andrew that it feels like subsistence users are at the bottom of the totem pole and decision makers do not care about the people who have been living off the land since as far back as anyone remembers. Chairman Oney said there is still so much to learn about fisheries in terms of what is happening in the marine environment and along the coast. He has heard about fish moving north into the Arctic, bird populations dwindling, and habitat being affected by climate change. He encouraged the Council to stay on top of these important issues and for everyone to work together to try and find what is causing all these declines for the resources that people heavily depend on.

Jacqueline Cleveland of Quinhagak reported that her aunt caught a chrome silver (Coho salmon) while ice fishing the day before this Council meeting. She said this is very weird and unordinary. She shared that people in her community are currently eating trout, smelt, ptarmigan and rabbits, and that some folks are

starting to go seal hunting. She said that overall the salmon harvest for Quinhagak last season was under what people needed. There was an abundance of reds (Sockeye Salmon), but the kings (Chinook Salmon) were few in number and small in size. There was almost no Chum Salmon until the end of July when the run showed up very late. That was the first time the Chum Salmon run showed up that late, and some families she spoke with did not meet their subsistence needs for Chum Salmon. Silvers (Coho Salmon) in the Kanektok River were low but they were reportedly okay in the Arolik River. There were no commercial fisheries last year. Member Cleveland reported that their bay and rivers are sort of the last standing fishery of this region and her community is trying to be proactive rather than reactive given the crash of species around the region. Native Village of Kwinhagak submitted two proposals to the Alaska Board of Fisheries: one about sportfishing in the Kanetok and one about subsistence and commercial fishing in the bay. The one about the fishing in the bay was lost by ADF&G and not found until after the AYK meeting cycle. She let the Council know that there will be a special meeting for Proposal 173 and that it is on the agenda if the Council wants to comment on it. She also said that Native Village of Kwinhagak submitted a Temporary Fisheries Special Action request (FSA23-01) to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) because their Federal proposal to mirror the State sportfishing proposal did not make the deadline. FSA23-01 is also on the agenda for the Council to discuss. Member Cleveland shared that Native Village of Kwinhagak is also looking into funding for salmon assessment projects in hopes of improving in-season counts. She ended by saying that Native Village of Kwinhagak will be submitting a Federal wildlife proposal to extend moose hunting season in the Quinhagak area until October 15.

Henry Parks of Nunapitchuk reported that he is a fisherman, hunter, trapper, and berry picker. He does not like to sit around but he is starting to slow down as he gets older. He said that people on the Kuskokwim and Yukon are trying to survive without salmon by relying on other things off the land. He said one big issue is the False Pass intercept fishery because it takes a lot of fish that should come up the Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers. He said he gets a jealous feeling because the marine trawlers and Area M commercial fishers get to fish, but local subsistence and commercial fishers do not. He feels that those regions should be restricted just like in the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. He said he hears they make a lot of money off the intercept salmon, but local people haven't been able to fish for a long time. He is also concerned about bycatch and how many families that bycatch could feed if subsistence fishers were allowed to fish for the food they need to survive instead of commercial trawlers. Member Parks also expressed concern about declining numbers of tomcods (Saffron Cod).

Myron Naneng, Sr. of Bethel thanked Member Richard Slats for the work Chevak did to get the customary and traditional use of all Yukon River salmon recognized for Chevak, Hooper Bay, and Scammon Bay. Vice Chair Naneng reported that he attended the AYK Alaska Board of Fisheries meeting. He noted that he was upset that one of the Alaska Board of Fisheries members asked about the status of a subsistence fishing citation because it indicates that people are being criminalized for trying to put food on the table while commercial fishing still continues. He said it is unfair that commercial fishing in Area M can continue intercepting AYK salmon while subsistence fishers are restricted. He stated that an elder from the village made a comment, 'Do not disturb the land because the land is your food source, it's your plate'. He said they take that very seriously and hope that both the U.S. Fish and Wildlife

Service and ADF&G work with them instead of trying to criminalize people for trying to harvest food. He noted that Hooper Bay has had issues with law enforcement since the salmon restrictions went into place a few years ago. Vice Chair Naneng shared that Hooper Bay has been working to protect migratory bird nesting habitats. Residents are concerned about the proposed King Cove road and the potential impacts to Black Brandt and Emperor Goose habitats. Some migratory birds are starting to overwinter in the area. The community implemented restrictions on local all-terrain vehicle travel across the tundra in 2013 and the number of nesting pairs has significantly increased since then. He also shared that Typhoon Merbok completely flattened the sand dunes along the coast that helped protect Hooper Bay and that now the community will be even more at risk for future storm damage. Vice Chair Naneng agreed with Member Parks that there are less tomcods (Saffron Cod) than their used to be. He said that Halibut sizes have decreased significantly and attributes it to bycatch in the Bering Sea. Vice Chair Naneng continues to be frustrated when he hears agency and appointed Alaska Board of Fisheries members refer to traditional ecological knowledge and the teachings of elders as “anecdotal” and they refuse to believe it until it is verified by a study and put in writing by someone who went to college. He ended by thanking everyone for attending the meeting and shared his hope that the Council can come with ideas that can be beneficial to protect the resources people rely on for food. Later, Vice Chair Naneng added to his report that the State of Alaska has not been meeting its treaty obligations with Canada for escapement of salmon on the Yukon River. Given this, he does not understand why commercial fisheries that are intercepting Yukon River salmon are still allowed to operate but subsistence fishing is shut down.

Alissa Rogers of Bethel reported that she has gotten reports from across the region, from the headwaters of the Kuskokwim to the mouth of the Yukon, about how difficult subsistence living has been for people recently. Typhoon Merbok, salmon closures, COVID-19, and increasing prices and inflation have all contributed to this. She noted that the weather over the past winter made it very difficult to go out on snowmachines because of environmental conditions. There was a lot of freeze and melt that made trail conditions bad. Member Rogers also reported on strong wind conditions that ruined some dry meat and fish she was trying to make. She noted an increase in the number of ravens being a nuisance. After two years of unsuccessful hunts, her family finally harvested a moose over the winter and was very grateful to fill their freezer since prices for meat at the store have been insanely high. Member Rogers received several reports of salmon being caught under the ice throughout the winter and into March. This occurred in both the Kuskokwim, Yukon, and coastal areas. She has noticed a lot of jackrabbits (Arctic hares) this spring and thinks they may be at a peak in their cycle; however, she said there is a need to conserve them and not overhunt them. She also noted a need to conserve Snowy Owls and do more research on their population status in the Delta region. Member Rogers and her family fished for Blackfish and noticed they were skinnier than usual. They did not harvest as many as they would have liked but were glad for the food they did catch. She reported that ptarmigan hunting was not very successful because they were hard to access due to the poor snow conditions. Member Rogers ended her report by paying tribute to the late Bob Aloysius who previously served on the Council and who passed this year.

Norma Evan of Marshall reported that they did not get eels (Arctic Lamprey) in Marshall, but the surrounding villages did. She thinks that changes to the channel from erosion may have impacted their migration route past the community. She noted that moose hunting was very successful in her area this

last year and that surveys this winter showed good numbers. Due to deep snow levels, more moose have been seeking refuge near town. Wolf numbers are rising, and Marshall residents sometimes hear them howling. Member Evan noted that the ice was thicker than last year. People fishing under the ice reported decent catches of whitefishes, Sheefish, and Northern Pike. The first Sheefish was harvested February 21. Pikes were larger sized than normal. She also noted the rabbit (hare) population is high. Member Evan expressed concerns about the impact of mining in the Fairbanks area on salmon fry. She is also concerned about the impact of increased methane emissions on salmon and their ecosystems.

James Landlord of Mountain Village reported that there was no fishing this summer, not even for Chum or Coho salmon. He had good news to report about eels (Arctic Lamprey). People in Mountain Village started checking for eels using sticks and little baskets right when the ice started to form. After one day, they started catching a lot of eels and it was the first good return in the last six years. St. Mary's and Pitka's Point residents came down and dipped for eels in front of Mountain Village. He said that everyone was grateful to get eels again.

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda Items:

Tim Andrew of Bethel shared his concerns about the continuing low salmon returns, smaller burbot, erratic Arctic Lamprey returns, lower numbers of Blackfish, and low numbers of Kilbuck caribou. He said that moose and beaver numbers are high at least. He said that people are really missing the salmon as a major contributor to their diets, and it is affecting their hearts and souls. Mr. Andrew shared information about the *Forrer v. State* lawsuit relating to Yukon and Kuskokwim salmon management. He informed the Council that he is drafting a resolution for Tribes and the Association of Village Council Presidents to consider that asks the ADF&G to do genetic sampling of Chinook Salmon caught in the Area M intercept fishery in addition to sampling of Chum Salmon. He also informed the Council he is drafting an Alaska Board of Game proposal for a mainland Unit 18 muskox hunt.

Martin Nicolai of Kwethluk shared his concerns with the Council regarding the failure of Proposal 140 before the Alaska Board of Fisheries. He is concerned about some Board of Fisheries members and appointees to the Governor's Bycatch Advisory Council being biased and putting commercial fishing over subsistence fishing. He encouraged everyone in attendance to not be defeated by the decision but to continue using their voices to fight for subsistence salmon.

Chris Tulik of Bethel raised concerns about the low salmon returns. He spoke about the depth of knowledge that is gained from living a lifetime out on the land practicing subsistence and how that knowledge and the teachings of elders is important for understanding what is happening to our changing environment. Mr. Tulik agreed with others' concerns regarding the subsistence priority not being upheld when commercial fishing is allowed but subsistence fishing is closed.

Mary Matthias of Bethel expressed concerns about commercial fishing being prioritized over subsistence and the failure of Alaska Board of Fisheries Proposal 140. She also shared concerns about Donlin Mine and the impacts it may have on subsistence resources and the environment. She encouraged everyone to remain united in the fight for subsistence rights.

Old Business:

The Council received presentations on the following topics:

- North American Caribou Workshop and Arctic Ungulate Conference update by Tom Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist
- Council Correspondence update by Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator
- Council Correspondence Policy update by Robbin La Vine, OSM Policy Coordinator
- Update on Federal Subsistence Board Actions by Brooke McDavid
- Update on Alaska Board of Fisheries Actions by Brooke McDavid
- WSA22-04 Special Action update by Tom Plank

New Business:

2021 Council Charter Review

The Council reviewed their Charter as required every two years by the Federal Advisory Committee Act. The Council discussed adding a non-voting youth seat in the Council Membership section of the charter.

- Motion by Member Alexie, seconded by Member Cleveland, to amend the charter and add a nonvoting youth seat to the Council.

The Council feels it is extremely important to get youth involved in subsistence and on the Council. This seat would help young people understand the Federal Subsistence Management Program regulatory process and what it means to be a Council member. It will benefit youth in the region by helping educate them about issues related to subsistence and the resources local people rely on.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

- Motion by Member Cleveland, seconded by Vice Chair Naneng, to set an age range for the youth seat to be between 18 to 25 years.

Motion passed on a vote of 6-3.

- Motion by Member Andrew, seconded by Member Cleveland, to approve the Charter as presented with the amendment request to add a youth seat.

Motion passed on a vote of 8-1.

U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski Addresses the Council

U.S. Senator Lisa Murkowski paid the Council a visit at the end of their first meeting day. She began her address by acknowledging the importance of subsistence in the region and throughout the state. She shared information with the Council on Federal efforts that impact subsistence users.

She noted that the Alaska Delegation has been working together to try to facilitate as much research as possible to better understand the current salmon crashes. Sixteen million dollars from the Bipartisan Infrastructure Law will go towards building the resilience of salmon ecosystems across the state, including in the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Region. She informed the Council that the Secretary of Commerce is currently working to appoint members to the Alaska Salmon Research Task Force, a new body that was created by legislative action last year. She noted that she will be traveling to Mekoryuk the next day to meet with residents and discuss ways to better facilitate reindeer husbandry, including necessary U.S. Department of Agriculture certifications to process and sell reindeer meat. Senator Murkowski noted that everywhere she travels across the state she hears food security brought up as a major issue and wants to continue exploring ways to address the problem and ensure that subsistence opportunities remain strong. She said that she was made aware of the proposal to move OSM out of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. She asked Council members for their comments on the proposal and subsistence issues.

Chairman Oney told the Senator about the devastating impacts the salmon declines have had on families in the region. He noted that salmon are a resource that people have relied upon since time immemorial but that ever since Alaska became a State their numbers have been dwindling. He highlighted the issues of salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea and interception of AYK Region salmon in the Area M fishery, which are contributing to declines. He also recognized the impacts of climate change on salmon.

Member Landlord also brought up the issue of salmon bycatch and interception. He shared that the entire AYK Region feel defeated due to the failure of Proposal 140 during the Alaska Board of Fisheries cycle. Efforts to protect salmon returns and maintain a subsistence priority are ignored and only commercial fishermen are listened to. Member Landlord said that maybe moving OSM into the Secretary of the Interior's office would help their voices be heard. He said the Federal government's help is needed because salmon do not know borders between State and Federal waters.

Vice Chair Naneng stated that salmon fisheries have been declining for decades and research has never given an answer why. He said that it is not fair for subsistence fishing to be closed on the Yukon River to meet treaty obligations with Canada, while Area M commercial fishermen continue to harvest AYK Region fish. Subsistence fishers should not be bearing the brunt of conservation measures. He noted the extremely high prices of food, fuel, and other goods in rural Alaska. He said that First Nations people are being treated like third class citizens. Member Naneng noted that the Magnuson-Stevens Act needs to be reauthorized. He requested that the Alaska delegation look at ways to change some of the management structures and to reduce bycatch and interception to allow for salmon to return to AYK Region rivers.

Secretary Slats told the Senator about the impacts that climate change is having on his community and subsistence practices. He noted the difficulty of going through the COVID pandemic and having it immediately followed by Typhoon Merbok. He shared how important salmon is as a food source for families in the region and how important salmon fishing is as a cultural practice. Member Slats wants to ensure that future generations are able to enjoy the same subsistence lifestyle.

Member Parks shared his concerns about salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea and interception of AYK Region salmon in False Pass while subsistence is restricted. He said that the salmon declines have been very hard on people, and he hopes that salmon will return.

Member Andrew echoed the testimonies of the other Council members regarding salmon. He shared the changes in salmon returns he has observed over his lifetime.

Alaska Board of Fisheries Proposal 173

Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, notified the Council of an upcoming special Alaska Board of Fisheries meeting to deliberate on Proposal 173, submitted by the Native Village of Kwinhagak, which sought to close Kuskokwim Area District 4 on Sundays and allow only one gillnet to be operated per vessel in the subsistence and commercial fisheries between June 1 and July 15. Member Cleveland provided additional background on the proposal.

- Motion by Vice Chair Naneng, seconded by Member Andrew, to support Proposal 173.

Justification: The Council supported this proposal because there have been record low returns for Chinook and Chum salmon in the Kuskokwim Management Area, and residents of Quinhagak have been observing low returns of these species in the Kanetok River. The Council agreed that only one net per boat should be allowed because conservation measures are needed to help rebuild salmon stocks.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote with one member abstaining.

Temporary Fisheries Special Action FSA23-01

Pippa Kenner, OSM Anthropologist, provide an overview of Fisheries Special Action FSA23-01 to the Council. The special action request was submitted by the Native Village of Kwinhagak after their proposal did not make the deadline to be considered during the fisheries regulatory cycle. Special Action request FSA23-01 sought to close Federal public waters of the Kanektok River drainage to the harvest of both Chinook and Chum salmon except by Federally qualified subsistence users for the month of June in 2023 and month of June in 2024.

- Motion by Vice Chair Naneng, seconded by Member Andrew, to support FSA23-01.

Justification: The Council supported the closure to the harvest of Chinook and Chum salmon by non-federally qualified users, including catch and release fishing, during the month of June because of conservation concerns for these runs into the Kanektok River. The Council further noted subsistence fishing should not be restricted by the special action.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote with one member abstaining.

Wildlife Closure Reviews

Tom Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist, provided an overview of the closure review process and presented the analysis for one regional and one crossover closure reviews:

- **WSA24-38** Unit 18 (Kuskokwim River hunt area) closed to moose hunting except by residents of Tuntutuliak, Eek, Napakiak, Napaskiak, Kasigluk, Nunapitchuk, Atmautlauk, Oscarville, Bethel, Kwethluk, Akiachak, Akiak, Tuluksak, Lower Kalskag, and Kalskag
- **WSA24-43** Unit 19A remainder closed to moose hunting except by residents of Tuluksak, Lower Kalskag, Upper Kalskag, Aniak, Chuathbaluk, and Crooked Creek

The Council will vote on the closure reviews at their fall 2023 meeting.

Call for Federal Wildlife Proposals

Tom Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist, presented the call for Federal wildlife proposals for the 2024-2026 regulatory years and notified the Council that the proposal deadline is April 12, 2023.

The Council voted to submit three Federal wildlife proposals:

1. Add Kwigillingok, Kongiganak, Quinhagak to the communities eligible to harvest moose within the Kuskokwim hunt area of Unit 18 under Federal regulations

- Motion by Vice Chair Naneng, seconded by Member Cleveland, to add the communities as stated.

Justification: Residents of Kwigillingok, Kongiganak, and Quinhagak hunt moose for subsistence. Although these communities are located outside of the Kuskokwim hunt area, residents of these communities do travel to hunt moose within the boundaries of the hunt area, especially in years when it is more difficult to harvest a moose near their communities.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

2. Recognize the customary and traditional use of muskoxen by residents of Unit 18 for the mainland area of Unit 18

- Motion by Member Rogers, seconded by Vice Chair Naneng, to establish a customary and traditional use determination (C&T) for mainland muskoxen as stated.

Justification: Muskoxen were re-introduced to Alaska with the intention that one day the population would grow enough that they could be hunted and provide food for subsistence. Muskoxen have migrated from the Nelson Island and Nunivak Island herd over the past twenty years to various parts of Unit 18 “mainland” and have been observed by residents across various parts of the region to be increasing in numbers and expanding their range. Much of their current habitat is on Federal lands of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. Recognizing the customary and traditional use of muskoxen by residents of Unit 18 is the first step to allow these animals to be potentially hunted by

Federally qualified subsistence users in the region. Residents of Unit 18 desire the opportunity to harvest muskoxen for subsistence whenever a harvestable surplus is identified and believe the additional opportunity could help alleviate food security concerns.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

3. Establish Federal hunt(s) for muskoxen on the mainland portion of Unit 18

- o Motion by Vice Chair Naneng, seconded by Member Alexie, to establish a mainland muskoxen hunt.

Justification: The Council would like to see mainland muskoxen hunting opportunities for federally qualified subsistence users residing in Unit 18. Muskoxen have migrated from the Nelson Island and Nunivak Island herds over the past twenty years to various parts of “mainland” Unit 18. Much of their current habitat is on Federal lands of the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge. Muskoxen have been observed by residents across the region to be increasing in numbers and expanding their range. Muskoxen were re-introduced to Alaska with the intention that one day the population would grow enough that they could be hunted and provide food for subsistence.

The Council suggests that harvest limits and seasons be based on the harvestable surpluses of the various mainland herds. Updated population assessments may need to be completed to determine these amounts. Even if the harvestable surplus numbers are low, any new subsistence hunt opportunity could help alleviate on-going food security concerns in the region. The Council wants to ensure that any permits are made easily accessible and available to hunters in the rural communities near the herds. Although there is not a current C&T use determination for muskoxen in Unit 18, the Council is also submitting a companion proposal seeking to recognize a C&T for mainland muskox in Unit 18.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Call for Alaska Board of Game Proposals for Western Region

Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, notified Council members of a call for Alaska Board of Game proposals for the Western Region. The Council did not submit any proposals.

Review and Approve FY2022 Annual Report

The Council reviewed their draft FY2022 Annual Report to the Federal Subsistence Board and proposed two more topics for addition.

- Motion by Member Parks, seconded by Member Alexie, to approve the Annual Report as written and to include two additional topics as follows: 1) Council member compensation and 2) increasing numbers of mainland muskoxen.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

During discussion of annual report additions, the Council also voted to write letters to the Board asking them to elevate the topics of salmon bycatch and interception, as well as Council member compensation.

- Motion by Member Andrew, seconded by Member Landlord, to write a letter to the Board asking them to elevate the topic of Council member compensation to the Secretary of Interior.

Justification: Council member compensation is determined at the Secretarial level, but the request should be sent to the Board.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

- Motion by Secretary Slats, seconded by Vice Chair Naneng, to write a letter to the Board asking them to elevate the topic of salmon bycatch and interception in commercial fisheries to the Secretary of the Interior.

Justification: Salmon bycatch and interception occur in the Bering Sea and Alaska Peninsula regions, which are outside the jurisdiction of the Board. However, this issue greatly impacts subsistence users in areas under Federal Subsistence Management jurisdiction throughout the AYK Region. This issue requires attention at the Secretarial level since all efforts by the Council to address it through the North Pacific Fishery Management Council and Alaska Board of Fisheries regulatory processes have failed. Salmon should be managed on an ecosystem scale because they do not know political boundaries.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

- Motion by Member Rogers, seconded by Member Evan, to write a letter to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council requesting reductions in Chinook and Chum salmon bycatch and to ask the other AYK Region Councils to sign and support the letter.

Justification: The Council wants the voices of AYK Region subsistence users to keep being heard on this issue until something is done about it.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) Update

Pippa Kenner, OSM Anthropologist, provided an overview of the goal of the FRMP to the Council. She let the Council know that a call for FRMP research proposals closed in February 2023 and that the proposed projects will be evaluated by the Technical Review Committee in the coming months. The Council will be presented an overview of the projects at their fall meeting.

Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program Update

Pippa Kenner, OSM Anthropologist, notified the Council that Partners Program proposals were recently evaluated by the Technical Review Committee and selections should be announced in the near future. She explained that the Partners Program aims to increase involvement by Alaska Native and other rural organizations in Federal fisheries management.

Organizations currently participating in the Partners Program gave presentations about their work. Dan Gillikin presented Native Village of Napaimute projects and Delen Hooper presented Orutsararmiut Native Council projects.

Elect Council Member to represent the Council on Wood Bison Planning Team

Luke Rogers, ADF&G Wood Bison Project Technician, provided an update to the Council about the Innoko Wood Bison Herd and the outcome of recent planning meetings. The Council elected Raymond Oney to represent the Council at future planning meetings with Wassily Alexie and Philip Peter serving as alternates.

Agency Reports:

- *Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Update* by Boyd Blihovde, Refuge Manager; Aaron Moses, Subsistence Specialist; and Laurie Boeck, Deputy Refuge Manager
- *Togiak National Wildlife Refuge Update* by Andy Aderman, Wildlife Biologist
- *Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission Update* by Andrew Magel, Fisheries Technician, Kuskokwim Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
- *Orutsararmiut Native Council Update* by Janessa Esquible, ONC Contractor
- *Gravel-to-Gravel DOI Keystone Initiative* by Sara Boario, Regional Director, USFWS
- *Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association Update* by Gabe Canfield, Policy and Program Coordinator
- *2023 Yukon River Salmon Fisheries Outlook* by Gerald Maschmann, Yukon River Assistant In-season Manager, USFWS
- *Marine Mammal Update* by Mike Cameron, Polar Ecosystems Program Manager, NOAA Fisheries
- *DOI-Indian Affairs Briefing Regarding Office of Subsistence Management* by Wizipan Garriott, Principle Deputy Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
- *Office of Subsistence Management Update* by Orville Lind, Native Liaison

Future Meeting Dates:

The Council confirmed their Fall 2023 meeting dates as October 10-12, 2023, in Anchorage.

The Council selected the March 1-5, 2024, for their preferred dates for the All Councils Meeting in Anchorage.

The Council selected their Fall 2024 meeting dates as October 15-17, 2024, in Bethel.

Brooke McDavid, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

Raymond Oney, Chair
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its October 10-12, 2023, meeting in Anchorage, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

For a more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9181, email brooke_mcdavid@fws.gov.