

SEWARD PENINSULA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via Teleconference due to COVID-19
October 26 and 27, 2021

Invocation

Council member Leland Oyoumick gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Tuesday, October 26 at 9:09 AM. Council members Louis Green, Jr. (Chair), Tom Gray (Vice-Chair), Elmer Seetot, Jr. (Secretary), Deahl Katchatag, and Leland Oyoumick were present via teleconference at the start of the meeting. A quorum was established with 5 of 9 seated Council members participating by phone. Council members Martin Aukongak and Ron Kirk were able to join the meeting later. Council members Lloyd Kiyutelluk and Charles Saccheus did not participate.

Attendees

Karen Deatherage, Office of Subsistence Management (OSM), Fairbanks
Tom Kron, Hannah Voorhees, Pippa Kenner, Brian Ubelaker, Karen Hyer, Lisa Grediagin, Katya Wessels, OSM, Anchorage
Patricia Petrivelli, Bureau of Indian Affairs, Anchorage
Jeanette Koelsch, Ken Adkisson, Nicole Braem, Letty Hughes, Mike Thompson, Nome, Bering Land Bridge National Preserve (BELA), Nome
Victoria Florey, Kim Jochum, National Park Service (NPS), Anchorage
Will Deacy, Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve (GAAR), Fairbanks
Hannah Atkinson, NPS, Kotzebue
Tom Sparks, Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Nome
Chris McKee, Walker Gusse, BLM, Anchorage
Kevin Clark, Bill Dunker, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Nome
Carolyn Brown, Brendon Scanlon, ADF&G, Fairbanks
Ryan Scott, ADF&G, Juneau
Rick Merizon, ADF&G, Anchorage
Frank Katchatag, Jerry Ivanoff, Unalakleet

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Aukongak, seconded by Mr. Seetot, to adopt the agenda with WP22-50 moved to the end of the proposals and closure reviews and removal of Bering Land Bridge discussion on caribou calf harvest. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Katchatag, seconded by Mr. Gray, to approve the winter 2021 meeting minutes as written. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Deahl Katchatag of Unalakleet reported that there were few fish last summer and very few Chinook Salmon. There have been changes in the river and permafrost.

Leland Oyoumick of Unalkleet reported that there were few Coho and Chum salmon last summer. There were lots of Pink Salmon. People got almost 50 moose and are happy about that. He noted that he didn't see any bears. They are dealing with the weather.

Tom Gray of Nome noted that they had horrible salmon runs. Last summer would have been the normal big year for Pink Salmon in the odd-even year cycle, but even the numbers of this species were down. Last summer was the first year that no one made dry fish. It rained and rained. The Silver Salmon run was dismal. He doesn't understand why ADF&G allowed commercial salmon fishing, despite the poor salmon returns and poor subsistence fishery. Subsistence is the priority. He said that there were a few more crabs, but they have been small. He said that he lost 5 crab pots due to ice conditions. There were caribou on the north side, but they didn't come down. They had high water all summer. They harvested seals and beluga. He noted that his clients harvested 9 bears and that he harvested one. It was a tough year.

Martin Aukongak of Golovin worked in Whittier half of the summer. It was difficult picking berries because of the rain. He was able to put up very little dry fish. Thin ice has been dangerous. There were lots of bears, wolves, and wolverines.

Elmer Seetot, Sr., of Brevig Mission noted that there was limited fishing due to wet weather last summer. There were less Pink Salmon and lots of sick sea birds on the beach. Berry picking was limited due to the rain. Salmon berries were plentiful on the west side. They had hunted beluga last month when the whales came in near shore to feed. They finished harvesting caribou in May. They are having problems with phone lines.

Louis Green, Jr., of Nome noted that he has been spending time in both Nome and Palmer. His son is in a wheelchair in an extended care facility in Palmer. They normally get sunshine in June and can put up dry fish, but last year was a bad year for salmon. He isn't happy that there was commercial salmon fishing in Norton Sound last summer. There were hardly any Chum, Silver, or Chinook salmon in Norton Sound. Sockeye Salmon numbers at Salmon Lake were down too. There were no King Crab buyers, so there was not a commercial King Crab fishery. There were no crab for subsistence. The caribou have stayed way up north, and they have had to hunt moose longer. A lot of families didn't get a moose this fall. This was a very bad year for subsistence. There are empty rivers and an empty ocean; things need to change.

Ron Kirk of Stebbins noted that Stebbins had been hit hard by COVID-19. There were low salmon returns last summer. They are starting to get some whitefish now. They have gotten some seals, a walrus, and some geese. There are no COVID-19 cases in Stebbins now, and there isn't much activity.

Council Member Awards

Mr. Kron presented the awards. Mr. Green received a 2021 USFWS Native Leader/Elder Conservation Hero award last spring. Mr. Green also received a 10-year Council service award. Council members Oyoumick and Kirk received 5-year Council service awards. OSM will be mailing Council service awards.

Old Business

2021 805(c) Report Summary

Ms. Deatherage provided a summary of the Board's 2021 805(c) Report to the Council.

Board's FY2020 Annual Report Reply Summary

Ms. Deatherage provided summary of the Board's FY-2020 Annual Report Reply.

New Business

Wildlife Proposals and Closure Reviews

Regional:

- Alex Hansen (ADF&G) gave an update on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. This herd numbered 490,000 animals in 2003 but has declined by about half of that recently. They completed another photocensus last summer, but don't have the final numbers yet. They have had high calving rates (67-68%) the past couple years. Survival of cow caribou went up in 2015 and 2016, but then started to go down. In recent years, caribou have not been crossing the Kobuk River as in the past, so they weren't able to radio collar them at the river crossing. As a result, they have switched to using a helicopter to capture caribou for radio collaring. This fall, a lot of caribou crossed the Kobuk River; this was a very different migration pattern than they have seen the past five years. They want to understand the harvest better and have questions about the average age of females and mortality.

WCR22-47: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this proposal. Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Mr. Seetot, to support WP22-47, allowing caribou calf harvest in Unit 22. The Council voted to support this proposal as it increases harvest opportunity for Federally qualified subsistence users. However, as hunters do not specifically target calves, no impacts to the calf population or herd recruitment are expected. Supporting this proposal will also align Federal and State regulations.

The motion passed unanimously.

WP22-48: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this proposal. Motion by Mr. Oyoumick, seconded by Mr. Kirk, to support WP22-48, which would revise the Unit 22A hunt area boundaries. The Council supports the proposal as the change would better align current hunt area boundaries with traditional hunting areas. This proposal would also increase hunting opportunity for Federally qualified subsistence users in the Shaktoolik area with no impact on the moose population. It would also align Federal and State hunt area boundaries.

The motion passed unanimously.

WP22-49: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this proposal. Motion by Mr. Seetot, seconded by Mr. Oyoumick, to support WP22-49 to rescind the Unit 22A moose hunting closure for non-Federally qualified users. The Council opposes this proposal because the idea of opening Federal land to non-residents, if locals are not able to hunt there (due to access difficulties), does not favor the subsistence user. The population estimate is not based on data from Unit 22A north, but rather is extrapolated from data from the neighboring hunt area (Unit 22A central). The Council considers it wiser to protect resources for subsistence uses until proven they can support sport uses.

The motion failed unanimously.

WCR22-09a: The Council concurred with Ms. Grediagin and Mr. Ubelaker that WCR 22-09a was resolved under WP22-49.

WCR22-09b: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Mr. Oyoumick, second by Mr. Seetot, to maintain status quo for the Unit 22A Closure to Moose Hunting in the Unalakleet Drainage except to Residents of Unalakleet. The majority of the Council felt that the residents of Unalakleet rely the most on moose in Unit 22A central; therefore, they deserve the majority of the harvest. Moose harvest is improving for residents of Unalakleet, but still is not like it was historically. The Council also noted that the improvement in moose populations in the area is largely due to a self-imposed moratorium on moose hunting by subsistence users from Unalakleet.

The motion passed 4-1.

WCR22-09c: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Mr. Oyoumick, to maintain status quo for WCR22-09c for the seasonal closure to moose hunting by non-Federally qualified users. The Council felt that since population metrics from adjacent units were used to extrapolate moose population estimates for Unit 22A remainder, more time is required to assess the impacts from the regulatory changes in 2020. Maintaining status quo would be a conservative approach until more information is available on the moose population, harvest, and effects of the 2020 changes.

The motion passed unanimously.

WCR22-11/12: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Mr. Katchatag, to maintain status quo for the Unit 22B Closure, West Darby Mountains Fall Moose Season to Non-Federally Qualified Users (WCR22-11) and Unit 22B, West Darby Mountains Winter Moose Season Closed except by Residents of White Mountain and Golovin. The Council believes that since the moose population is below State management objectives and recruitment is low, Federal lands should remain closed to all but local residents. This will allow for the continuation of subsistence uses.

The motion passed unanimously.

WCR22-13: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Mr. Seetot, seconded by Mr. Kirk, to maintain status quo for the Unit 22D Closure to Moose Hunting, Kougarok, Kuzitrin, Pilgrim Drainages except by Unit 22C and Unit 22D Residents. The Council felt that with populations below State management objectives and low bull:cow and calf:cow ratios, the population in the unit is declining. And with the State managing harvest using a quota system that is usually met or exceeded, the closure should be maintained at this time.

The motion passed unanimously.

WCR22-14: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Mr. Gray, seconded by Mr. Kirk, to maintain status quo for the Unit 22D Closure to Moose Hunting, West Tisuk and Canyon Drainage except by Unit 22C and Unit 22D Residents. The Council feels that with populations below State management objectives and low bull:cow and calf:cow ratios, that the population in Unit 22D is declining. If the State is managing harvest with a quota, then the moose population is not strong enough to support removing the closure, and it should be maintained at this time.

The motion passed unanimously.

WCR22-16: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Mr. Gray, seconded by Mr. Kirk, to maintain status quo for the Unit 22E Closure to Moose Hunting by Non-Federally Qualified Users. The Council feels there is not enough information on the population increase in Unit 22E to determine whether it is from immigration or herd reproduction. More investigation is needed before any decision affecting the population should be made.

The motion passed unanimously.

Crossover:

WP22-41: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this proposal. Motion by Mr. Gray, seconded by Mr. Kirk, to support WP22-41 to Delegate Authority to Announce Harvest Limits, Set Sex Restrictions, and Open/Close Seasons for caribou in Units 9, 17, 18, and 19. The Council supports closing the Mulchatna caribou hunt to protect the herd until the population is healthy enough to support harvest. Delegation of authority will allow timely decisions to be made to respond to changing conditions of the herd.

The motion passed unanimously.

WP22-42: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this proposal. Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Mr. Seetot, to support WP22-42 to Increase Harvest Limit for Moose in Unit 18, Remainder. The Council supports this proposal because the moose population far exceeds the State management objective and may exceed the carrying capacity of the habitat. Not only will there be more subsistence opportunity with this proposal, but it may also help protect the habitat from degradation due to over-browsing by moose.

The motion passed unanimously.

WCR22-45: Ms. Voorhees presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Mr. Katchatag, seconded by Mr. Gray, to maintain status quo for WCR22-45 for the Unit 23, Noatak, Closure to Caribou Hunting by Non-Federally Qualified Users. The Council recommended maintaining the status quo because the closure is still necessary to continue subsistence uses of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd, and due to proximity of the Unit 23 closure area to Unit 22.

The motion passed 5-1.

Statewide:

- Rick Merizon (ADF&G) provided information on Alaska hare and Wildlife Proposal WP22-45. He noted that locals had indicated that Alaska hare were plentiful in the 1970s and 1980s, but that this species had declined since then. Beginning in 2017, ADF&G started developing a monitoring program for Alaska hare. ADF&G submitted regulatory proposals on the State side first and is now submitting WP22-45 to the Federal Subsistence Management Program.

WP22-45: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this proposal. Motion by Mr. Aukongak, seconded by Mr. Kirk, to support WP22-45, with the OSM modification, to establish a season and harvest limit for Alaska hare in Units 18, 22 and 23. The Council supports conservation of the low Alaska hare population and eliminating hunting during the breeding season.

The motion passed unanimously.

WP22-01: Ms. Kenner presented the analysis for this proposal. Motion by Mr. Katchatag, seconded by Mr. Oyoumick, to defer WP22-01, which would Define who is/is not a Participant in a Community Harvest System, and Effects on Harvest Limits to affected regions. There are no community harvest systems in the Seward Peninsula region.

The motion passed unanimously.

WP22-02: Ms. Kenner presented the analysis for this proposal. Motion by Mr. Katchatag, seconded by Mr. Kirk, to defer WP22-02, which would Rescind Restrictions for Designated Hunters in Areas with Community Harvest Systems to affected regions. There are no community harvest systems in the Seward Peninsula region.

The motion passed unanimously.

WP22-50: Mr. Ubelaker presented the analysis for this proposal. Motion by Mr. Oyoumick, seconded by Mr. Seetot, to support WP22-50 with the OSM modification to Increase Harvest Limit to “No Limit” for Trapping Beaver in Unit 23. The Council supports this proposal because beaver are populous and expanding further northward. They are concerned the dams created by beaver will have a negative impact on salmon and salmon streams. This proposal would aid in keeping beaver populations in check, thereby helping salmon populations.

The motion passed unanimously.

Annual Report Reply Process Review Briefing

Mr. Kron provided a briefing on the Annual Report Reply Process review. The Council did not provide feedback on this briefing.

2022 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program

Ms. Hyer with OSM presented the Council with the 2022 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) Statewide and Regional overviews. The Council expressed a desire for a Pitmiktalik River salmon counting project in the future. Ms. Hughes (NPS) spoke about their FRMP project examining fish inventories in BELA. They have been gathering information on salmon and whitefish and genetic information on salmon. ADF&G spent 2 1/2 weeks in BELA and on State waters. Ms. Hughes plans to provide more information to the Council in the future.

Identifying Issues for FY2021 Annual Report

The Council identified the following topics for inclusion into the FY21 Annual Report:

- Resident Caribou Herd in Northern Seward Peninsula
- Mining near Unalakleet and Golsovia Mountains

2022 Council application/nomination open season

Ms. Deatherage and Ms. Wessels with OSM informed the Council about 2022 Council application and nomination open season that closes February 28, 2022 and requested Council's members help in reaching out to the rural communities in the region and recruit new applicants.

WSA21-01

Ms. Voorhees with OSM presented WSA21-01, Close Federal public lands in Units 23 and 26A to harvest of caribou and moose by non-Federally qualified users from August 1-September 30, 2021. Council members remarked they were supportive of actions proposed or implemented in Unit 23 to protect caribou for subsistence users.

Agency Reports:

- Letty Hughes, Nicole Braem with BELA presented an update
- Will Deacy with GAAR presented the Seward Peninsula Brown Bear survey results
- Tom Sparks with BLM presented the Anchorage Field Office report
- Kevin Clark with ADF&G presented the Norton Sound Red King Crab update
- Carolyn Brown with ADF&G presented the Subsistence Division update
- Tom Kron with OSM presented an update

Future Meeting Dates:

Winter 2022 meeting to be held March 3-4, 2022, in Nome

Fall 2022 meeting to be held October 4-5, 2022, in Nome

Karen Deatherage, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

Louis Green, Jr. Chair
Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its winter 2022 meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Karen Deatherage at 907-474-2270 or email karen_deatherage@fws.gov.

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