

WESTERN INTERIOR ALASKA
SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes

Pikes Waterfront Lodge, Fairbanks, Alaska
March 2-3, 2020

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Monday, March 2, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. Council members Jack Reakoff, Jenny Pelkola, Timothy Gervais, Pollock Simon Sr., Donald Honea Jr., Tommy Kriska, and Goodwin Semaken were present in person. A quorum was established with 7 out of 7 seated Council members present (Council has three vacant seats).

Attendees

In person:

Office of Subsistence Management (OSM):

Fairbanks: *Karen Deatherage*

Anchorage: *Frank Harris, Tom Kron,
Tom Doolittle*

Bureau of Indian Affairs:

Anchorage: *Glenn Chen*

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS):

Fairbanks: *Vince Mathews, Gerald
Maschmann, Jan Conitz*

Koyukuk Nowitna Innoko National Wildlife

Refuge (NWR): Galena: *Bob Rebarchik*

Kanuti NWR: Fairbanks: *Tina Moran,*

Joanna Fox, Chris Harwood

Togiak NWR: Bethel: *Kenton Moos*

Yukon Delta NWR: Bethel: *Aaron Moses*

Bureau of Land Management (BLM):

Fairbanks: *Jen McMillan, Erin Julianus*
Anchorage: *Bruce Seppi*

Gates of the Arctic (GAAR) National Park and

Preserve: Fairbanks: *Greg Dudgeon*

GAAR Subsistence Resource Commission

(SRC): Fairbanks: *Marci Okada*

GAAR: Fairbanks: *Will Deacy*

Village of Rampart: *Charlie Wright*

Alaska Department of Fish and Game

(ADF&G): Fairbanks: *Caroline Brown,
Brooke McDavid, Glenn Stout*

Galena: *Sarah Longson*

Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC): Fairbanks:

*Pollock Simon Jr., Eric Row, Brooke Woods,
Dr. Jim Simon*

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association

(YRDFA): *Catherine Moncrieff*

Via teleconference:

OSM: Anchorage: *Lisa Maas, George Pappas*

USFWS: Anchorage: *Carol Damberg*

Koyukuk Nowitna Innoko NWR: Galena:

Jeremy Havener

National Park Service (NPS): Anchorage:

Joshua Ream

ADF&G: Palmer: *Mark Burch*

Anchorage: *Deanna Jallen, Jeff Estensen,*

Bobette Dickerson

YRDFA: Homer: *Wayne Jenkins*

TCC: Fairbanks: *Brooke Woods*

Aniak: *Dan Gillikan*

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion made by Mr. Honea, seconded by Ms. Pelkola, to adopt the agenda as amended with the following additions:

- WP20-36/37 Update (OSM)
- Fisheries Program Update (OSM)
- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association Update
- Tanana Chiefs Conference Report
- Report on the 23 year Review of the East Fork Andreafsky and Gisasa River Weir (USFWS)
- Gates of the Arctic Subsistence Resource Commission Report (NPS)
- Central Yukon Resource Management Plan Update (BLM)
- Pitka Fork Weir (ADF&G telephonically)
- Wood Bison Reintroduction Program Update (ADF&G)

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Elections

Ms. Pelkola nominated Mr. Reakoff for Chair. Seconded by Mr. Gervais. Mr. Reakoff was selected as Chair by a unanimous vote.

Ms. Pelkola nominated Mr. Gervais for Vice-Chair. Seconded by Mr. Simon. Mr. Gervais nominated Ms. Pelkola for Vice Chair. Seconded by Mr. Simon. Ms. Pelkola was selected as Vice-Chair by a 6-1 vote.

Ms. Pelkola nominated Mr. Gervais for Secretary. Seconded by Mr. Simon. Mr. Gervais was selected as Secretary by a unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Ms. Pelkola, seconded by Mr. Kriska, to approve the winter 2020 meeting minutes with the following modifications:

- Change spelling of Mr. Woodworth to Mr. Whitworth from McGrath
- Specify law enforcement with respect to harassment issues in Mr. Simon's report
- Add that the Mulchatna Caribou Herd (MCH) is below management objectives and needs further restrictions under the MCH discussion.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Jenny Pelkola of Galena reported that the area had a lot of snow and there is concern over high water and floods. Ms. Pelkola also expressed frustration over the low number of Council members and the difficulty of working with no representation from the Kuskokwim and Grayling/Anvik/Holy Cross/Shageluk areas. Ms. Pelkola stated that moose were dying right in Galena. There were no wolves around. The elders say that the trees are too coated with thick ice and causing the moose to starve. Trees are hanging over and cold temperatures and ice are killing moose calves.

Pollock Simon, Sr. of Allakaket reported cold temperatures since mid-December with -50 degrees off and on throughout the winter. Temperatures were at -65 degrees for five days with -72 degrees recorded as the low. Mr. Simon stated there were no caribou again this year, including near Bettles. The moose population is also very low, especially with the deep snow. The salmon population was good this year except for a low fall Chum Salmon run. The king salmon population is still very low. Mr. Simon shared that some freezers in the area are empty of meat this year.

Timothy Gervais of Ruby shared concerns about moving the Council meeting from February to March. Mr. Gervais stated that March is a busy fishing month for him and it takes a lot of extra work and presents an economic burden to delay or cancel fishing due to schedule changes. Mr. Gervais also noted that the schedule change prevented the Council from submitting on time comments to the Alaska Board of Game (BOG). Mr. Gervais encouraged rural residents to participate in the U.S. Census. Alaska's population has grown from 200k in the 1970s to over 700k in 2018. This incredible growth will affect subsistence activities in the state. Mr. Gervais reported that the lack of ice formation on the Bering Sea last fall put a lot of moisture into the weather system and brought more snow to the region. The lack of ice also stimulates more algae and plant organisms in the water. These changes will affect salmon and Sheefish habitat in interior Alaska. Mr. Gervais shared that Alaska was in an ecological starvation event from 2014 to 2018. Cod is 18% of what it should be and salmon are being impacted by a lower nutritional value of food. Despite these extraordinary warming events, the National Marine Fisheries Services (NMFS) still manages for maximum sustained yield. Mr. Gervais volunteered to draft a letter to Mr. Chris Oliver at NMFS regarding these concerns.

Mr. Gervais encouraged the Council to consider fair chase for BOG proposals. Otherwise, there will be more wounded animals and less efficiency. Mr. Gervais also remarked on the 700 million Pink Salmon released from hatcheries and their impacts on the ecosystem, most notably their strong appetites and fast growth cycle. Mr. Gervais shared concerns about PFAS (polyfluoroalkyl substances) chemical contamination and requested that Angela Matz from the USFWS speak to the Council about potential hazards from these permanent toxins in the region. Lastly, Mr. Gervais shared concerns from the Ruby Fish and Game Advisory Committee (AC) regarding the sale of moose antlers by individuals in the region. A small number of individuals are hunting on proxy tickets and harvesting large healthy bulls because they get paid by the pound for antlers. Customarily, subsistence hunters take smaller bulls for the high quality meat and to preserve the large breeding bulls for moose conservation and recruitment. In addition, the Ruby AC discussed the harvest of king salmon to generate income. While a family should

be able to process 20-50 king salmon, some families are taking 200-400 king salmon for the customary bartering market. This type of harvest is excessive and damaging to the resource. Mr. Gervais would like to hear from YRDFFA, TCC and others who are interested in looking into this type of harvest.

Donald Honea, Jr. of Ruby shared his gratitude for being able to travel early from Ruby to this meeting. Travel from Ruby is particularly difficult during the winter. Mr. Honea expressed frustration with not getting timely Council member appointments, including his own appointment this past cycle. Mr. Honea also reported that moose in the area were bunching up because of the deep snow. Mr. Honea remarked later that he would like to discuss a requirement to cut antlers for the August–October Federal season moose hunts. Mr. Honea believes proxy hunters are taking too many prime bulls in order to make money on the antlers, and that this will harm the moose population in the area.

Tom Kriska of Koyukuk reported that fishing was good and everyone got their fish this season. The weather conditions were concerning with cold temperatures bad traveling conditions. Mr. Kriska remarked there were a lot of wolves but costs to travel hundreds of miles for hunting were high. There were lots of moose observed losing their calves from 4 to 5 feet of snow. Adult moose were starving due to ice on the willows. Mr. Kriska shared concerns about spawning areas as some areas of the Koyukuk River appeared to be frozen to the bottom. There was a lot of bear sign in Kaiyuh Flats but Mr. Kriska didn't see any bears. The wolves, fox and lynx are feasting on moose. Mr. Kriska also remarked on Council appointments and would like to know what happened to the applicants.

Goodwin Semakan of Kaltag repeated Council members' concerns regarding moose and snow depth, as well as wolves. Three wolves were killed outside of Kaltag. There are lots of moose gathering on the Island because the snow is so deep. Mr. Semakan would really like to see a moose survey around Kaltag and believes it would be helpful to understand what is going on with the population.

Jack Reakoff of Wiseman delivered the Chair's report. Mr. Reakoff reported on a phone call with the Bristol Bay and Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Council Chairs on the Mulchatna Caribou Herd (MCH) and WSA19-07. The discussion focused on the need to appoint an in-season manager to monitor the herd and to eliminate the cow caribou harvest. Mr. Reakoff stated that the priority for this Council meeting will be the BOG proposals. Mr. Reakoff will share the GAAR SRC and Koyukuk Fish and Game AC recommendations during the Council's deliberation on these proposals. Mr. Reakoff said he participated in the Wood Bison Reintroduction meeting update, and shared information with the Council on this experimental population of animals. Mr. Reakoff also worked with Mr. Rebarchik on winter moose hunts in Units 21D and 24D. The bull/cow ratio is poor, the population was on a downturn and with deep snows, a winter hunt would be detrimental to the conservation of the herd. Mr. Reakoff reported that although there are typically lots of wolves in the Upper Koyukuk River, they have disappeared. He only saw two sets of tracks on his trip down from Wiseman. He thinks the wolves may be following the caribou to the northwest. There was an end of October rain on snow event that pushed out the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Mr. Reakoff measured about 40" of snow in Coldfoot, with deeper snow seen as you move south. The sheep are struggling with the deep snow on top of the mountains. Big winds ripped off the snow at the very top, but Mr. Reakoff only saw one sheep cross Wiseman Creek. Sheep are also

doing poorly on the south side where there is considerably less snow but better than last year. Mr. Reakoff reported lots of lynx recruitment and a healthy population with big litters expected next year. Mr. Reakoff echoed the concerns of other Council members that Council member appointments are not being made by Washington D.C. as statutorily required under Sections 808 and 805 of Title VIII of ANILCA, putting a huge limitation on the effectiveness of this Council.

Agenda Change Request

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Simon, to add the following items to the agenda.

- Add a special action request for the Mulchatna Caribou Herd
- Add three special action requests for the Kuskokwim River salmon fisheries
- Add a USFWS Service report on the 2020 Yukon River Salmon Fisheries.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Public and Tribal Comments on Non-Agenda Items

Pollock Simon, Jr., reported on behalf of TCC. Mr. Simon was concerned about the impacts of deep snow and a long cold winter on Brooks Range sheep populations. TCC opposes starting an archery only sheep hunt, stating an additional hunt will create conflict with local users. The Bering Sea is bringing in a lot of snow, with 8" observed above 4400 feet where there is usually barren ground in April. The Alatna and John rivers have been hunted by Allakaket people for thousands of years. Continued harsh winters and increased hunting would devastate this sheep population. The Kanuti River has been difficult to access due to climate change. Mr. Simon expressed hope for a Controlled Use Area (CUA) in the Kaiyuh Flats. The Koyukuk CUA has protected moose for everyone. Mr. Simon stated opposition to changing the Dalton Highway Management Area, as there is a good balance now. He expressed concerns about the potential for 5-7 thousand more people using the Haul Road (James W. Dalton Highway) from Eielson Air Force Base due to the new F35 aircraft.

Old Business

WP20-36/37

Lisa Maas, OSM, reported that when the Council deliberated WP20-37 at the last Council meeting in October 2019, it did not specifically ask for a State registration permit, nor was the proposed area fully delineated for a December hunt.

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Pelkola, to modify WP20-36 by requiring a State registration hunt permit for the Koyukuk CUA. Requiring a State registration permit simplifies regulations by aligning State and Federal permitting and reporting requirements, and provides a reliable way for users to obtain permits and report harvests.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Honea, to modify WP20-36/37 by delineating the area proposed for a winter moose hunt in Unit 21D. The area depicted in the map would prohibit moose hunting from Nulato upstream toward Koyukuk and Galena because of the low bull/cow ratio in the northern portion of the hunt area. A copy of this map will be provided to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) and BOG for their deliberation on Federal and State proposals.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

New Business

Alaska Board of Game Interior and Eastern Arctic Wildlife Proposals

The Council deliberated on 58 BOG proposals and submitted extensive comments to the BOG for their March 6-15, 2020 meeting in Fairbanks. A copy of the comment letter submitted by the Council to the BOG is available by request from OSM.

Fisheries Program Update

The Council was informed that there will be a request at the fall 2020 Council meeting for Priority Information Needs (PINs) for the 2022 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP). Mr. Gervais, Mr. Semaken and Mr. Kriska agreed to prepare a list of PINs for consideration at the fall meeting. OSM staff also delivered updates on the FRMP and Partners program.

Call for Fisheries Proposals: Frank Harris

The Council did not submit or discuss any Federal fisheries proposals.

Finalize FY2019 Annual Report

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Kriska, to add Maximum Sustained Yield Fisheries Management to the Council's FY2019 Annual Report. Member Gervais will author a personal letter to the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) and North Pacific Fishery Management Council to share concerns with the current management of Federal fisheries in marine waters. Mr. Gervais will state that the Council concurs with his concerns. The Council strongly believes that operating Federal fisheries at "maximum sustained yield" with changing ocean conditions is detrimental to fish stocks in Alaska's oceans and negatively impacts coastal and interior Alaska rural communities that rely on migrating fish for subsistence. The Council will implore NOAA and others to institute more conservative harvest strategies in response to the rapidly changing marine environment conditions, including warming waters and depleted fish and shellfish stocks.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Special Actions:

Temporary Special Action regarding the Mulchatna Caribou Herd (MCH)

Kenton Moos presented a special action request from the Togiak NWR asking to change the two caribou limit for the MCH to a season to-be-announced by the Federal in-season manager. This would include openings, closings, and age and location restrictions.

Motion by Mr. Simon, seconded by Mr. Semaken, to support giving management authority to the Togiak NWR in-season manager to protect the MCH during this time of hardship. The Council continues to express concern over the continued and drastic decline of this herd, the lack of accurate harvest reporting, and the likelihood of unreported harvests.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Fisheries Special Action 20-01, 20-02 and 20-03 for Kuskokwim River Chinook Salmon

Frank Harris presented the three special actions to the Council.

Motion by Ms. Pelkola, seconded by Mr. Gervais, to support FSA 20-01, 20-02 and 20-03 to restrict Chinook Salmon fisheries on the Kuskokwim River to Federally qualified users. The Council supports the premise of these requests. The Council stressed that FSA 20-03 looks at the issue in more detail and brings up several good points that were observed in last year's fisheries, such as risks to stock diversity from high harvest rates, significant decline in body size, impacts of climate driven heat stress on migrating salmon, and sources of uncertainty that increase risk. These details were not considered in previous special action request analyses. The Council said management actions in these requests are a high priority for residents and the Board.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Agency Reports

- 2020 Yukon River Salmon Season presented by Gerald Maschmann, USFWS and Holly Carroll (*telephonic*), ADF&G.
- Subsistence in the Western Interior Alaska Region, Brooke McDavid, ADF&G
- Pitka Fork Weir Report, Bobette Dickerson (*telephonic*), ADF&G
- 23 Year Review of East Fork Andreafsky & Gisasa River Weirs, Randy Brown, USFWS
- Kanuti NWR Update presented by Joanna Fox, Chris Harwood and Vince Mathews, Kanuti NWR.
- Koyukuk, Nowitna, Innoko NWR Update presented by Bob Ribarchik and Jeremy Havener, Koyukuk, Nowitna, Innoko NWR.
- Yukon Kuskokwim Delta NWR Update presented by Aaron Moses, Yukon Kuskokwim Delta NWR.
- GAAR and GAAR SRC Update presented by Marcy Okada and Will Deacy, NPS
- BLM Central Yukon Resource Monitoring Plan presented by Tim Hammond, BLM
- YRDFA Update presented by Catherine Moncrieff and Serena Fitka, YRDFA

- BLM Anchorage Field Office Update, Bruce Seppi and Bonnie Million (*telephonic*), BLM
- Henshaw Creek Weir, Eric Rowe, TCC
- Native Village of Napaimute Fisheries Related Projects and Outreach in 2020, Dan Gilliken, Aniak (Napaimute)
- OSM Update presented by Tom Doolittle, OSM

Motion by Mr. Honea, seconded by Ms. Pelkola, to send a letter to the USFWS Region 7 Director regarding Alaska National Wildlife Refuge staffing. The Council expressed concerns regarding Refuge position announcements that have been prepared to fill vacancies, but aren't being published for recruitment. The Council believes that understaffing of Alaska's wildlife refuges undermines subsistence rights under ANILCA as this Council and others cannot make informed decisions without data and reporting on fish and wildlife resources.

Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Future Meeting Dates:

October 14–15, 2020 in Aniak, Alaska
February 17–18, 2021 in Fairbanks, Alaska

Motion by Ms. Pelkola to adjourn. Seconded by Mr. Gervais. Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Karen Deatherage, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

Jack Reakoff, Chair
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2020 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 .