

Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
c/o Office of Subsistence Management
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In Reply Refer To:
RAC/NWA.23015.LHS

Anthony Christianson, Chair
Federal Subsistence Board
c/o Office of Subsistence Management
1011 E. Tudor Road, MS 121
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199

Dear Chairman Christianson:

The Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) appreciates the opportunity to submit its FY-2022 Annual Report to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) under the provisions of Section 805(a)(3)(D) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). At its public meeting held in Kotzebue on October 31 – November 1, 2022, the Council identified concerns and recommendations for this report. The Council approved this Annual Report at its March 6-7, 2023, public meeting held in Kotzebue. The Council wishes to share information and raise a number of concerns dealing with implementation of Title VIII of ANILCA and the continuation of subsistence uses in the Northwest Arctic Region.

1. Understandable information reaching to and from the village level

The Council expressed concerns that information that Federal agencies provide to communities in their region, and which is posted on the Federal Subsistence Management Program website, is often not expressed verbally, or written in ways that are understandable to community members, particularly to elders, bilingual, and Iñupiaq speakers. In addition, the Council expressed the need for resource managers and other relevant agency staff to visit the communities, hold meetings there, and gather information from and listen to village level concerns.

2. Federal, State, and cross regional coordination of caribou management that engages Tribes and communities

The Council acknowledges that scientific and Traditional Ecological Knowledge research continues to be conducted on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) and recognizes the importance of the WACH Working Group, for which the Council now has representation at. In addition, many of the communities and local subsistence hunters are volunteering to take fewer animals than they need in an effort to help reduce the decline of the herd. However, the Council

expressed the need for cross regional coordination of caribou management between the Federal and State agencies that better engages the local Tribes, regional Native organizations, and communities.

3. Concern for the declining caribou herds, diseases of caribou, and other causes of mortality

The Council appreciates that the Board recognizes residents of most communities in their region have been unable to harvest caribou during the traditional harvest period due to changes in migration patterns and other stressors on the caribou population. The Council would like to see continuing research and findings communicated to them on causes of caribou mortality, including diseases, starvation, predation, calf survival, hunting pressures, and effects of climate change. The Council received a report from the Alaska Department of Fish and Game at their fall 2022 meeting that the Western Arctic Caribou Herd was estimated at 164,000 caribou in July 2022, a decline of 24,000 from the 2021 population count. The Council members are extremely concerned regarding this report's findings and want additional research conducted on the causes of this decline. With caribou being a primary resource utilized by all the communities in the region, and with the herd size now below sustainable management goals, the Council is concerned that this will decrease food security and increase health problems in their communities as well as lessen their ability to use and teach traditional practices for obtaining, processing, preserving, sharing, and consuming this vital resource.

4. Climate change effects on local resources and access for subsistence

The Council continues to have many concerns over climate change causing anxiety about food security and food sovereignty in the region's communities. The Council is very concerned over the notable effects of climate change over the last few years to the environment, especially on the local fish, wildlife, and plant resources utilized for subsistence. The Council also noted that the weather has become unpredictable with less freezing of sea and river ice, warmer temperatures year around, increases in severe storms causing erosion to beaches and coastal communities, and thawing of the permafrost. They've also noticed colored mineral seepage into local streams and are worried that it may be harmful for fish populations. Changes to the environment and unpredictable weather make it more difficult and dangerous for subsistence users to access traditional hunting, fishing, and gathering areas. The Council has also noticed the damage climate change is having on caribou and local take of caribou. For example, freezing rain has become more common, and when it freezes on top of the tundra, it is difficult for caribou to feed, leading to starvation or out-migration.

5. Full Council membership including alternates and better geographic distribution

The Council continues to be concerned about vacancies on the Council and is hopeful that it will have full membership in 2023. While the Council appreciates all members, they expressed concern over the lack of representation from many of the communities within the region. The Council would like to see additional outreach conducted in unrepresented communities, particularly personal visits, to provide information on the Federal Subsistence Management Program and the Council. The Council also would like to have alternate Council members that

could serve at the meetings in the event a Council member could not attend or resigned before their term ended.

6. Predator concerns, interfering with subsistence activities and safety of communities

The Council has concerns about a notable increase in bear and wolf populations in the area, and their impact on the declining caribou population. In addition, communities are reporting more and more encounters with bears in their communities, which is a safety concern particularly for their children. The Council would like to see more research conducted on predators and their effects on subsistence resources, increased predator management, and more bear hunting opportunities. The Council would like to see more research on best management practices.

The Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council appreciates the Board's attention to these matters and the opportunity to assist the Federal Subsistence Management Program in meeting its charge of protecting subsistence resources and uses of these resources on Federal public lands and waters. The Council looks forward to continuing discussions about the issues and concerns of subsistence users in the Northwest Arctic Region. If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact me via Lisa Hutchinson-Scarborough, Council Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management, at lisa_hutchinson@fws.gov, or 1-800-478-1456 or 1-907-310-4097.

Sincerely,

Thomas Baker
Chair

cc: Federal Subsistence Board
Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
Office of Subsistence Management
Interagency Staff Committee
Benjamin Mulligan, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Mark Burch, Special Projects Coordinator, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Administrative Record