

Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

Meeting Materials

EASTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Egan Center
Anchorage, Alaska
March 10, 2016
8:30 am – 12:30 pm

TELECONFERENCE: call the toll free number: (866) 864-5314 then when prompted enter the passcode: 3091862

PUBLIC COMMENTS: Public comments are welcome for each agenda item and for regional concerns not included on the agenda. The Council appreciates hearing your concerns and knowledge. Please fill out a comment form to be recognized by the Council chair. Time limits may be set to provide opportunity for all to testify and keep the meeting on schedule.

PLEASE NOTE: These are estimated times and the agenda is subject to change. Contact staff for the current schedule. Evening sessions are at the call of the chair.

AGENDA

*Asterisk identifies action item.

- 1. **Roll Call and Establish Quorum** (*Secretary*).....EI-3
- 2. **Invocation**
- 3. **Call to Order** (*Chair*)
- 4. **Welcome and Introductions** (*Chair*)
- 5. **Review and Adopt Agenda*** (*Chair*)EI-1
- 6. **Election of Officers**
 - Chair (*DFO*)
 - Vice-Chair (*New Chair*)
 - Secretary (*New Chair*)
- 7. **Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes*** (*Chair*)EI-5
- 8. **Reports**
 - Council Member Reports
 - Chair’s Report
- 9. **Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda Items** (available each morning)
- 10. **Old Business** (*Chair*)
 - a. National Park Service Proposed Rule on Subsistence Collections*218

11. New Business (Chair)

- a. Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Regulatory Proposals * (*OSM Fisheries*).....225
- b. Develop Priority Information Needs for FRMP* (*OSM Fisheries*)
- c. Approve FY2015 Annual Report* (*Council Coordinator*) EI-16

12. Agency Reports

- a. USFWS Refuges – Update on Proposed Rule on Hunting
Unless a special report is requested by the Council, all agencies should be prepared to only provide written reports for this meeting...... EI-20

13. Future Meeting Dates*

- Confirm date and location of Fall 2016 meeting235
- Select date and location for Winter 2017 meeting236

14. Closing Comments

15. Adjourn (Chair)

To teleconference into the meeting, call the toll free number: (866) 864-5314, then when prompted enter the passcode: 3091862

Reasonable Accommodations

The Federal Subsistence Board is committed to providing access to this meeting for all participants. Please direct all requests for sign language interpreting services, closed captioning, or other accommodation needs to Eva Patton, (907) 786-3358, eva_patton@fws.gov, or 800-877-8339 (TTY), by close of business on February 20, 2016.

REGION 9
Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

Seat	Year Apptd Term Expires	Member Name Community
1	2001 2016	Susan Louise Entsminger Mentasta Pass Chair
2	2007 2016	Andrew Paul Firmin Fort Yukon Secretary
3	2010 2016	Larry Williams Sr. Venetie
4	2007 2016	Lester Charles Erhart Tanana
5	2005 2017	William L. Glanz Central
6	2002 2017	Andrew W. Bassich Eagle
7	2014 2017	Rhonda O. Pitka Beaver
8	2012 2018	Will M. Koehler Horsfeld
9	2009 2018	Donald A. Woodruff Eagle
10	2001 2018	Virgil Umphenour North Pole Vice Chair

**EASTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes**

October 22-23, 2015
Pike's Waterfront Lodge
Fairbanks, Alaska

Council Members Present:

Sue Entsminger, Chair
Virgil Umphenour
Andrew Firmin
Bill Glanz
Larry Williams
Donald Woodruff
Andy Bassich
Will Koehler
Rhonda Pitka

Lester Erhart attended by teleconference for a portion of the meeting

Agency Staff:

Eva Patton, Council Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management
Chris Mckee, Wildlife Division Chief, Office of Subsistence Management
Amee Howard, Policy Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management
Lisa Maas, Wildlife Biologist, Office of Subsistence Management
Pippa Kenner, Anthropologist, Office of Subsistence Management
Don Rivard, Fisheries Biologist, Office of Subsistence Management
Glen Chen, Interagency Staff Committee, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Trevor Fox, Interagency Staff Committee, US Fish and Wildlife Service
Joanna Fox, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge
Heather Tonneson, USFWS, Regional Office Anchorage
Greg Dudgeon, Superintendent, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve and Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve
Marcy Okada, Yukon Charlie Rivers National Preserve
Barbara Cellarius, Wrangell St. Elias National Park and Preserve
Amy Craver, Denali National Park and Preserve
Matt Cameron, Technician for Yukon Charlie and Gates of the Arctic, National Park Service
Greg Ausceo National Park Service
Vince Mathews, Refuge Coordinator, Yukon Flats, Arctic and Kenuti NWR
Steve Berendzen, Refuge Manager Yukon Flats NWR
Mark Bertram, Wildlife biologist, Yukon Flats NWR
Nathan Hakaluk, Wildlife Biologist, Yukon Flats NWR
Jerry Hill, Deputy Manager Tetlin NWR, Tok,
Jeremy Havener, Refuge Subsistence Coordinator for Koyukuk, Nowitna, and Innoko National Wildlife Refuges
Fred Bue, Yukon Subsistence Fisheries Manager, USFWS Fairbanks
Jeremy Mears, Yukon Subsistence Fisheries Biologist, USFWS Fairbanks
Stephanie Schmidt, Yukon Fisheries Research Biologist, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Sabrina Garcia, Summer Season Yukon Fisheries Manager, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Alida Trainor, Subsistence Division, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game

Beth Lenart, Wildlife Biologist, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Joe Gustafson, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Christy Gleason, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Jeff Wells, Assistant Area Biologist, Tok Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Seth Wilson, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Jeff Gross, Wildlife Biologist, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game, Tok
Beth Lenart, Wildlife Biologist, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Nissa Pilcher, Board Support, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Doreen Parker McNeill, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game

Via teleconference:

Wayne Jenkins, Yukon River Fisheries Drainage Association
Mitch Ellis, Chief of Refuges, USFWS Anchorage
Jill Klein, Special Assistant to the Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Drew Crawford, Subsistence Liaison lead, Alaska Dept. of Fish and Game
Robbin Lavine, Anthropologist, OSM
Karen Deatherage, Council Coordinator, OSM
Dan Sharp, Interagency Staff Committee, BLM
Mary McBurney, Interagency Staff Committee, NPS

Tribes and Native Non-Profit Organizations:

Ben Stevens, Tanana Chiefs Conference
Brian McKenna, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Fisheries Biologist (Wildlife and Parks Dept.)
Kelda Briton, CATG, Fort Yukon
Victor Lord, Nenana Native Council
Rondell Jimmie, Nenana Native Council
Peter Demoski, Nulato Tribal Council
Arnold Demoski, Nulato Tribal Council
Leo Lolnutz, Koyukuk Tribal Council
Birdie Billie, Beaver Tribal Council
Walter Peter, Fort Yukon Tribal Council
Alfred Demientieff, Holy Cross Tribal Council
Margoni Gemmill, Artic Village Council
Speedy Sam, Huslia Tribal Council
Jane Brandy, Northway
Buddy Peter, Tribal Member, Venetie

Public:

Carrie Stevens, Fairbanks, UAF
Kevin Illingworth, Fairbanks, UAF
Buddy Peter, Venetie
Gary Laurence, Fort Yukon
Micheal Peter, Fort Yukon
Darrell Vent, Huslia
Margoni Gemmill, Artic Village Council
Nicole Farnam, Fairbanks TCC/UAF
Shirley Fields, Fort Yukon
Janet Woods, Rampart
Don Honea, Jr. Ruby
Dorothy Shockley, Manley Hot Springs

Brook Wright, RMP
Rick Wilbur, Fairbanks
Al Barrette, Fairbanks
Leona Long, TBF

Roll Call and Establish Quorum: Nine Council members present, quorum established. Lester Erhart excused absence and was able to call in by teleconference to participate for part of meeting.

Review and Adopt Agenda*

Council adopted the agenda with modifications to the order accommodate participants. The Council added crossover wildlife proposal WP16-39 and discussion of sheep working group to the agenda.

*Asterisk identifies action item.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes*

No corrections were found and previous meeting minutes were approved by unanimous vote.

Length of Service Awards

Five-year service awards were presented to Council members Larry Williams, Sr. and Bill Glanz

Council Member Reports

Rhonda Pitka (Beaver) reported successful moose harvests for two funerals in town. They are still concerned about Chinook returns even though escapement was met this past summer. Wants to see more research on the species and that rural users should not have to bear the brunt of fishing restrictions. The village would like to see more moose studies to get better information on numbers; predator control is also needed as they are moving closer to the village (particularly wolves). Last summer was a bad year for berry crops.

Will Koehler (Horsfeld) thinks the WRST backcountry management plan has the potential to benefit subsistence users but needs to have more input from those users as there are concerns about it restricting their practices. He reported that a local user wants a later start to the winter moose season in his area.

Larry Williams (Venetie) reports a successful moose season but is very concerned about Chinook Salmon returns. Wants to make sure there is tribal participation in decisions made about salmon management. Larry hared that Arctic Village had the fall caribou migration come through the village with successful hunting.

Virgil Umphenour (North Pole) reports attending the Yukon Salmon panel meeting in Whitehorse. Virgil reported that fall chum salmon in the Porcupine River drainage has become more unpredictable. Has concerns about the impact bears and wolves have on salmon populations. Feels there is a need for predator management to lessen the impact of this fishery. Quality of the Chinook escapement was low (lots of small fish on the spawning grounds).

Andrew Firmin (Fort Yukon) reports good moose hunting success with very little user conflicts. Several moose harvested for funerals this past season with lots of moose harvested close to the village. Andrew is

concerned about harvest of Chum Salmon and the lack of some remote rural users ability to harvest the resource given the limits imposed. He doesn't feel the level of harvest by rural users justifies any closures on the Yukon tributaries.

Donald Woodruff (Eagle) complimented efforts by UAF on their class to educate people about the Federal subsistence program. He has concerns about Chinook escapement and that one good year is not reason for increasing harvest in the immediate future.

Bill Glanz (Central) is very concerned about the number of predators in his area.

Andrew Bassich (Eagle) reports that the price of store bought foods in remote areas is becoming ever more expensive and that subsistence foods are more important than ever. Fall Chum have been doing well in his area but that there are warning signs about future returns. This fishery has become critical with the decline in Chinook. Lots of hunting pressure from outside users. Folks in Eagle did do well with moose and caribou harvest this year. Climate change is having a greater impact on subsistence resources and that we need to be proactive to respond to it. Wants to make sure monies are being spent to put more Chinook salmon in the river to allow for greater harvest.

Chair's Report

Sue Entsminger (Mentasta Pass) says that 40 mile caribou were seen on the road system. The NPS backcountry wilderness plan is concerning to subsistence users. Folks are worried about NPS mandates and that trust is lacking. Sue reported successful moose hunting this past year in her area.

Federal Subsistence Program Updates:

Chris McKee briefed the Council on the rural determination process update and on the RFR on WP14-51 to open Red Sheep/Cane Creek to non-Federally qualified users.

Federal Subsistence Board Annual Report Reply and Identify Issues for FY2015 Annual Report*

The Council reviewed the FSB reply letter brought up issues for their next annual report.

Topics included:

1. promoting education about not harvesting lead caribou during migration and the impact that harvesting these animals has on migration and the impact it has had on rural users. Education needs to be done on both the State and Federal side of things.
2. Tribal consultation improvement,
3. Inclusion of TEK in wildlife proposal analyses.
3. Making sure the government has a contact with the RAC's when big topics like the proposed rule are first brought up as a possibility.
4. Porcupine River closures with respect to fall chum fisheries management; there need to be individual subsistence permits for people living in remote areas since this resource is so important to their livelihoods.

Appointment of Wrangell-St. Elias Subsistence Resource Commission member*

Barbara Cellarius discussed the appointment of a member to the WRST SRC. A motion was made to reappoint Sue Entsminger to the SRC. The motion was supported by the Council 8-0 with one abstention.

Appointment of Denali National Park Subsistence Resource Commission member*

A motion was made to reappoint Lester Erhart to the Denali SRC. The motion was supported 9-0.

Federal Subsistence Wildlife Proposals* OSM Wildlife biologist Lisa Mass presented proposals with brief overview of the analysis and OSM preliminary conclusion for each of the following proposals:

Regional Proposals:

WP16-55 – Change trapping season dates for Coyote in Unit 25 A motion was made to adopt WP16-55. Council would like the State to reinstate the sealing requirement for coyotes to better track harvest. The Council states that there doesn't appear to be a conservation issue. The Council voted 9-0 to support the proposal.

WP 16-56 – Change in season date and harvest limit for Beaver in Unit 25A, B, D A motion was made to adopt proposal WP16-56. The Council feels that this would allow for more opportunity for Federal users. Council also felt there are no conservation concerns for the species. The Council voted to 9-0 to support the proposal.

WP 16-57 – Change in trapping season date for Lynx in Unit 25 A motion was made to adopt proposal WP16-57. The Council feels there is no conservation concern for lynx in the area. Will allow for high quality harvest of fur and increase opportunity for Federal users. The Council supported the proposal 9-0.

WP 16-58 – Change in trapping season date for Wolverine in Unit 25C A motion was made to adopt the proposal. The Council didn't feel that there is a conservation concern for the species despite possibly slightly higher use pressure. Concerned about the possibility of incidental harvest if 16-57 is adopted but this proposal isn't. Don't want trappers to get into trouble. They also felt an extension of the season for one month should not pose an issue for the species as trapping pressure probably wouldn't increase substantially as a result. The Council supported the proposal 9-0.

WP16-69 – Change in season dates for Moose in Unit 20E remainder A motion was made to adopt proposal WP16-69. Some on the Council feel that Federally qualified users are still having a hard time competing with outside hunters with respect to harvest of moose. A longer season would help give more opportunity to Federally qualified subsistence users. Other Council members had concerns about opening the season earlier given the warmer weather during this time of the year. Still others were

concerned that the proposed season would be into the rut. The Council voted to support the proposal 5-3 with one abstention.

WP16-70 – Change in method and means for Brown Bear in Unit 25D A motion was made to adopt the proposal. Lots of discussion about how populations are estimate in this area (extrapolations based on other areas and/or harvest reports). Some Council members pointed out that he cultural knowledge section was lacking in terms of the number of people interviewed to come to the conclusions in that section. Also discussion about the amount of harvest in household surveys increasing was likely a result of increased effort to interview people. Others did not think there are enough people baiting to lead to human safety concerns. Some Council members feel that there was inadequate tribal consultation by OSM and that locals need to be consulted more about bear numbers in the area. Several Council members feel that this is a methods and means issue and that rural users should have every tool at their disposal. The Council voted to oppose the proposal 0-9.

Crossover Proposals with Southcentral Region:

WP 16-60 – Rescind closure for Caribou in Unit 12 Barbara Cellarius (WRST) also assisted in the presentation. Council decided to defer further discussion until representative from Northway can come to the meeting to testify. Nobody from the community spoke about their opposition. A motion was made to adopt the proposal. An amendment was made to support the proposal as modified by OSM. Council members stated that the herd is very difficult to access and some were worried about users harvesting a Mentasta caribou instead of an animal from the CCH, though the Council felt that this shouldn't be much of a concern. Allowing all qualified Federal users to harvest the CCH would only add about 200 to the eligible list. There doesn't appear to be a conservation concern and it would be beneficial by allowing more opportunity. The Council voted 9-0 to support the proposal as modified by OSM.

WP16-67– Change in trapping dates, method and means for Beaver in Units 12 and 20E.

A motion was made to adopt proposal WP16-67. Council would like the State to initiate sealing requirement in Units 12 and 20E to get better harvest information. Harvest has been relatively low in the area and the population is seen to be increasing. Market value for beaver pelts is low. Most use of the species is for personal use. The Council felt it would be very beneficial to Federal users. The Council voted to support the proposal 9-0.

WP16-68 – Change in trapping season dates and harvest limits for Lynx in Unit 12 and 20E. A motion was made to adopt proposal WP16-68. The Council stated that hare and lynx populations in some areas are increasing. Good to keep State and Federal seasons aligned. The Council voted to support the proposal 9-0.

WP 16-16 – Proposed Closed Use Area in Unit 13 A motion was made to adopt proposal WP16-16. Council had concerns about the number of local residents who support the proposal. However, the increased opportunity for Federally qualified users was seen as a good thing if the area were to remain open. The Council voted to oppose the proposal 1-7 with one abstention.

WP 16-17 – Remove restrictions in Unit 13 to hunt Caribou within the pipeline ROW. A motion was made to adopt proposal WP16-17. Council felt this was more of a housekeeping proposal. The Council voted to support the proposal 9-0.

WP 16-18 – Change in season date and methods and means for Brown Bear in Units 11 and 12. A motion was made to support proposal WP16-18. Council voiced support for the proposal but that there is a steep learning curve to baiting grizzly bears. The issue of “spot and stalk” is not relevant in areas like this with lots of tree cover. Others feel that there is no conservation concern for the species and that it is a customary and traditional practice by rural users. The Council voted to support the proposal 9-0.

WP 16-20 – Change in harvest limit for Sheep in Unit 11

A motion was made to support proposal WP16-20. Barbara Cellarius (WRST) gave some updated sheep survey estimates indicating that the population is stable to increasing. She also explained the DRM hypothesis that WRST and ADF&G are going to start studying in the near future. Some of the Council feel that the sheep populations need more time to recover from recent winter losses and that it shouldn't impact Federal users if some restrictive measures are taken now to assure future harvest. The Council voted to support the proposal 9-0.

WP16-39 - Open all Nowitna National Wildlife Refuge lands downstream of Little Mud River Drainage in Unit 21B for moose hunt during Sept. 5 – Oct. 1 season. A motion was made to support the proposal as written. The community of Tanana has C&T for moose in Unit 21 and are known to utilize this hunt area. Council members felt that this would help Federally qualified subsistence users in Tanana. Council member Lester Erhart of Tanana expressed that this would be a great help to Tanana to be able to hunt there as they had in the past. There does not appear to be a conservation concern and the only concern expressed was to be aware of checkerboard ownership of State and Federal lands in this hunt area with differing regulations.

The Council voted 10-0 to support the proposal as submitted (Lester Erhart from Tanana joined in to vote by teleconference).

WP16-37 Change caribou harvest regulations across the range of the Western Arctic and Teshekpuk Caribou Herd including Units 21D, 22, 23, 24, 26A and 26B.

This proposal has very little overlap with the Eastern Interior Region and the Council had no indication that the two closest communities (Stevens Village and Tanana have C&T for all of Unit 24) would be affected by any change to this hunt area. The Council defers to the Western Lisa presented proposal WP16-37. Since the proposal is only a XO due to Tanana and Stevens Village having C&T. The Council made a motion to take no action. The Council voted 9-0 to take no action.

2016 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Projects* Don Rivard and Pippa Kenner briefed the Council on FRNP projects. Council members discussed what they thought the project priorities should be. The Council discussed the importance of long term salmon data that contributes to management decision making and also ongoing concerns about increasing importance of whitefish and other species

for subsistence with decline in salmon returns. Overall the Council was pleased to see Bering cisco and Burbot projects supported in addition to long term salmon monitoring since the FRMP grants are one of the few sources of funding to focus on non-salmon fish species very important to subsistence that otherwise would not receive funding elsewhere.

Council review and recommendation on relevant 2015-2016 Alaska Board of Fisheries proposals*

The Council discussed and made recommendations on the following State Fisheries proposals:

A motion was made to adopt Proposal #114 (Require subsistence salmon fishing permits in Yukon District 5 and set permits for King Salmon during times of King Salmon conservation). Stephanie Schmidt discussed the proposal. The Council voted 2-7 to oppose.

Motion to adopt State fisheries proposal #110 (Increase the commercial fishery threshold trigger in the Yukon River Drainage Fall Chum Management Plan). The Council supported the proposal 9-0.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries proposal #184 (Repeal the current South Unimak and Shumagin Islands June Salmon Management Plan and readopt the management plan in place during 2003-2004). The Council voted to support the proposal 9-0.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #135 (Prohibit the use of set lines in Grizzly and Jack Lakes; specifically burbot set lines). Dave Sarafin (WRST fish biologist) gave a short overview of the proposal. Some Council members felt that the fishery concern was due to one isolated incident and that it would be best to be careful not to pass this regulation until more time passes, while others stated that the burbot population had declined by 50% in the last few years (according to NPS). The Council voted to oppose the proposal 0-9.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #112 (Allow all gear used in Yukon Area commercial fisheries to be allowed in Yukon Area subsistence fisheries). Some Council members felt subsistence users should be able to use the same gear as commercial fisherman do. The Council voted 8-1 to support the proposal.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #115 (Allow for the retention of Chinook Salmon less than 25 inches in length in Yukon Area fish wheel subsistence fisheries). The Council voted 9-0 to support the proposal.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #116 (During times of salmon conservation in the Yukon Area, require fish wheels with live boxes to be manned and require immediate release of the specified salmon). The Council voted to support the proposal 9-0.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #120 (Allow subsistence fall Chum salmon fishing seven days per week in District 5 of the Yukon Area once a fall Chum Salmon commercial fishery is opened). The Council voted 7-1 with one abstention to support the proposal.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #126 (Add purse seine gear as an allowable commercial salmon fishing gear to target summer Chum Salmon in districts 1-3 of the Yukon River during times of Chinook

Salmon conservation). Concern from some Council members about possible fatal harm being done to Chinook Salmon while in purse seine nets. Research needs to be done on Yukon to reach definitive conclusions on this matter. The Council voted 0-9 to oppose the proposal.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #127 (Expand the commercial fishing area of Yukon Area District 1). The Council voted 0-9 to oppose this proposal.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #128 (Extend commercial fishing three miles offshore and north to Point Romanoff in District 1 of the Yukon Area). The Council voted to oppose the proposal 0-9.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #125 (Establish gillnet gear provisions to allow a directed Pink Salmon commercial fishery in districts 1-3 of the Yukon Area). The Council voted to oppose the proposal 0-9.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #108 (Reduce management triggers in the Yukon River Summer Chum Salmon Management Plan based on the run size of summer Chum Salmon). The Council voted 0-9 to oppose the proposal.

Motion to adopt State Fisheries Proposal #111 (Eliminate the use of GHL's in the Yukon River King Salmon Management Plan). The Council voted 0-9 to oppose the proposal.

Agency Reports

Refuges Proposed Rule on Hunting* Heather Tonneson and Nate Hakaluk briefed the Council on the Refuges Proposed Rule, provided a handout of the most recent language on the proposed rule and walked through a power point on the specific proposed regulation changes. Refuges Director Mitch Ellis also called in via teleconference to answer questions from the Council. They discussed some of the changes made to the proposed regulation based on comments received from the scoping period.

The Council discussed comments they would like to include in a letter for the public comment period on the proposed rule. The Council made a motion to have the transcript excerpt of their full discussion (with a cover letter) of the meeting be sent to all of the higher level staff at the USFWS, NPS and as formal comment when the proposed rule was posted to the Federal Register. The Council voted 9-0 to support the motion.

ADFG Sheep Working Group. The Council reviewed the letter from ADFG about the formation of a sheep working group to address concerns and conflicts and the invitation for RAC representatives to serve on the Working Group. The Council made a motion to nominate Sue Entsminger to represent the EI RAC at the Sheep Working Group meeting. The Council voted 9-0 to support.

2014 Yukon River In-Season Salmon management review (USFWS /ADFG joint presentation) Fred Bue and Stephanie Schmidt provided an overview of the 2015 Yukon River Summer Inseason management for Chinook and Chum Salmon fisheries. Fred and Stephanie asked for feedback and the Council discussed conservation management tools, communications on closures to fall Chum for the

Porcupine River and also Yukon District 5 subsistence fishing opportunities that were implemented this year.

Native Organizations:

Tanana Chiefs Conference - Brian McKenna with Tanana Chiefs Conference gave an update on their fisheries research and education initiatives on the Yukon River drainage.

Tribal Governments: Kelda Briton provided the Council with an overview of CATG Natural Resources activities and projects as well as initiatives with the Tribal leadership in their member communities.

ADF&G Subsistence Division: Alida Trainor (ADF&G Subsistence Division) discussed several projects Subsistence Division is currently working on including local traditional knowledge of freshwater salmon ecology on the Yukon River, customary trade, and patterns of subsistence use in the areas around the Alaska LNG project.

ADF&G Wildlife Division: Jeff Gross (ADF&G Area Biologist for Tok) gave a brief overview of the fall 40-mile caribou hunt.

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association: Wayne Jenkins, Deputy Director, gave an update on YRDFA projects and overview of their inseason Yukon salmon management teleconferences.

US Fish and Wildlife Service:

Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge Jerry Hill and Nate Berg gave an update on Tetlin National Wildlife Refuge activities and provided a handout summary report for the Refuge.

Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge Steve Berendzen and Mark Bertram gave an update on Yukon Flats Wildlife Refuge activities and provided a handout summary report for the Refuge.

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge Joanna Fox and Steven Arthur gave an update on Arctic National Wildlife Refuge activities and provided a handout summary report for the Refuge.

National Park Service:

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Barbara Cellarius gave an update on Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve activities.

Yukon Charley Rivers Park and Preserve Marcy Okada and Kyle Jolly gave an update on Yukon Charley Rivers Park and Preserve activities and provide a summary handout on park activities and reports.

Denali National Park and Preserve Amy Craver and Steve Arthur (formerly of DENA) gave an update on Denali National Park and Preserve subsistence activities.

Office of Subsistence Management Chris McKee gave the OSM update and overview of staffing changes.

Future Meeting Dates*

Winter 2016 All-Council Meeting Update: The council was provided with a draft agenda of the All-Council meeting planned for March 2016 and discussed training workshops and regional sessions such as all Yukon Councils meeting together to discuss salmon management.

Select Fall 2016 meeting date and location:

The Council chose October 25-26, for their fall 2016 meeting in Fort Yukon.

I certify that, to the best of my knowledge, the foregoing minutes are accurate and complete.

Eva Patton, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

Sue Entsminger, Chair
Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

*These minutes will be formally considered by the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its Winter 2016 public meeting. Any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes of that meeting.

**Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
c/o U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Office of Subsistence Management
1011 East Tudor Road, MS 121
Anchorage, Alaska 99503**

RAC EI15057.EP

Mr. Tim Towarak, Chair
Federal Subsistence Board
c/o U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Office of Subsistence Management
1011 E. Tudor Road, Mail Stop 121
Anchorage, Alaska 99503

Dear Mr. Towarak:

The Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) appreciates the opportunity to submit this annual report to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) under the provisions of Section 805(a)(3)(D) and Section 805(c) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). At its public meeting in Fairbanks on October and 23-24, 2015, the Council identified concerns and recommendations for its FY2015 Annual Report. This report was approved at the Council's winter 2016 meeting in Anchorage.

1. Fall Chum Salmon management on the Porcupine River

The Council believes that fall Chum Salmon should be managed more carefully so that the commercial fisheries harvest on the lower Yukon River does not reach levels that will adversely impact subsistence needs and compromise escapement goals. This year subsistence harvest of fall Chum was closed on the upper Yukon River and rural residents in this area did not have any harvest of fall Chum due to the run return not being as strong as forecasted prior to the prosecution of the commercial fishery.

While the Council appreciated the efforts of managers to meet with affected communities to discuss this subsistence fishery closure, there are rural residents who live remotely on the Porcupine River who depend extensively on fall Chum for subsistence but were not consulted about the closure. Council members who live in the area noted it caused great hardship for these remote residents who were unable to harvest fall Chum. Fall Chum is an important subsistence food, whether to feed families, provide food for dog teams, or use for bait on trap lines; few other resources are available at their remote residences as a replacement. The Council recommends that, at a minimum, if fall Chum Salmon is closed to subsistence harvest again in the future that some sort of permit system be in place whereby the remote residents could still have some small harvest to provide for basic needs. The Council notes that if the few people who live remotely on the Porcupine and other tributaries to the Yukon were granted permits to

Mr. Towarak

fish in time of conservation closures, it would help them greatly but likely not affect the overall escapement by their harvest of what might amount to just a few hundred fish at most.

2. Inclusion of Traditional Ecological Knowledge in proposal analyses

The Council has observed that few of the wildlife proposal analyses that were reviewed this year included much information on local or Traditional Ecological Knowledge. The Council feels consultation with rural communities and affected subsistence hunters and fishers would greatly inform regulatory proposal analyses and ensure the subsistence users' knowledge of the local area and resources were incorporated into consideration of all options and effects of the proposal. Importantly, local subsistence hunters will have ongoing observations and experience with the resources and the environment, as well as interaction of other aspects such as social and cultural elements of the harvest, timing, travel and access to hunt areas, preparation and preservation of the fish or meat, and interaction with other subsistence resources.

The Council suggests that the tribes and communities affected by the proposal should be engaged earlier as part of the analysis process rather than conducting tribal consultation after the analysis is complete. The Council also recommends that analysts call upon Council members who are knowledgeable about the resource and incorporate their information into the analysis. Also Council members can often recommend key contacts in their community or region who may be interested in contributing their knowledge to help inform the analysis. The Council feels these efforts to connect with the subsistence users themselves will better inform the analyses and lead to more effective, responsive regulations as well as serve to better engage rural residents in the Federal Subsistence Management Program and public process.

3. Tribal Consultation and Active Participation of hunters in Council meetings

The Council has reviewed and heard reports on the Federal Subsistence Board's Tribal Consultation Policy and process and is pleased there is an effort to communicate and consult with tribes on Federal subsistence regulatory proposals and policies that affect their communities. However, the Council has not seen the results of this consultation at the Regional Advisory Council meetings. The Council is concerned that no tribal comments or recommendations were received for many wildlife proposals that would have been of interest to the tribes in the region.

Additionally, the Council sees little opportunity for tribal participation at the Council meetings when the meetings are often held in Fairbanks due to ongoing budget restrictions for holding meetings outside of regional hubs. Teleconference is not an effective means of communicating with rural communities or tribes. The Council wishes to directly engage with the communities it represents. We strongly recommend holding Council meetings in rural communities to get to the "grassroots" and provide opportunity for the subsistence hunters and fishers themselves to participate in the process. The Federal Subsistence Management Program is, after all, described as a "bottom-up program." Tribal representatives would have an opportunity to participate with the Council directly in person as well when meetings are held in their community or region as often tribes do not have funds to support travel costs to attend meetings when held in the regional hub.

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The Council notes that in the past, when the meetings were held in a rural community, there was a very different level of participation with subsistence hunters, fishers, families, elders and youth, all being able to contribute and inform the Council's decision making. Overall, meeting in the rural communities would make the Federal Subsistence Management Program more accessible to the people it serves and build greater understanding about subsistence as well as provide an opportunity to consult directly with the Tribal Council.

The Council suggests it is better to connect with tribes for consultation by calling them directly and not assuming that an outreach email or fax has been received. Timing of the consultation is important to ensure it does not overlap with important subsistence and other community activities. The Council further suggest as noted in subject number two of this report that consultation with tribes occur in advance of the proposal analysis process so that information or recommendations may be considered for inclusion in the analysis.

4. Protection of caribou front runners: "let the leaders pass" – solutions sought

The Council remains concerned about disturbance to caribou and alteration of migration patterns as a result of hunters taking the lead caribou. The overall concern is that caribou are being scattered or dispersed when hunters get in front of the herd and shoot the frontrunners. Based on the experience of Council members and local observations throughout the state, if lead caribou that know the way are shot, it may cause the rest of the herd to stray from their normal migration path. The concern is for the health of the herd and also the hardship on local communities if the herd is scattered or pushed farther from their usual migration routes, requiring local hunters to travel much farther to find the herd.

The Council is aware that this issue is a common concern for other regions and herds across the state as well as on the Canadian migration portion of the Porcupine Caribou Herd. Protecting the lead caribou would benefit the caribou as well as support local hunters and communities.

The Council has brought this concern to the Federal Subsistence Board before, but would like to seek specific support on how to address this issue. As noted further below, the Council would like a commitment from the Federal Subsistence Management Program to help initiate a collaborative hunter outreach and education program which could also include building awareness on the importance of not hunting, disturbing, or deflecting the front of the herd. Further, the Council would like support from Office of Subsistence Management staff to explore regulatory proposal options that may be able to address the concern through hunt restrictions during the caribou migration or other possible avenues to protect the lead caribou on their migratory path.

5. Hunter ethics and education to reduce user conflict and promote understanding

The Council has heard many proposals and extensive public discussion over the years that focus on user conflicts among various resource users. The Council feels education and outreach initiatives should be developed to generate better understanding between user groups that hunt and fish common resources on Federal public lands. Proactively providing information may help avoid conflicts that stem from activity in sensitive cultural areas, Alaska Native lands, or lack of awareness of local etiquette and values when outsiders engage in hunting and fishing near rural

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communities or in traditional hunting areas. The Council would like to see the Federal Subsistence Management Program and its Federal land managers make an effort to develop educational initiatives in collaboration with the State where needed for known conflict/problem areas identified through the Regional Advisory Council meetings or Tribal consultation process. Fostering understanding and respect may help greatly in co-management efforts and reduce stress experienced by some due to conflicts around hunting and fishing activities.

The Council possesses a diverse membership and may be able to assist in developing approaches to education and outreach initiatives. The Council suggests that possible solutions include providing education materials in the Federal and State fish and wildlife regulatory books and/or education flyers that can be distributed along with relevant hunting permits. Information could include maps of Alaska Native lands, local cultural information by region, and notations regarding local etiquette, such as donation of meat to local communities and elders. Contact information for more details or questions could also be provided.

The Council met with the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council during the winter 2015 meeting cycle and worked jointly to develop ideas and solutions to address these user conflict issues. The Council also discussed these potential collaborative options with Alaska Department of Fish and Game representatives at the same meeting and has been pursuing avenues that could be facilitated by Council member involvement in other resource advisory groups. The Council has also drafted a letter outlining several suggestions, which is enclosed with this report. To have an effective education and outreach program will require the collaboration and support of the Federal Subsistence Management Program. The Councils seeks feedback and confirmation from the Federal Subsistence Management Program on what type of programmatic, technical, and monetary resources the program may be able to contribute to the effort and a plan for possible next steps in order to proceed.

6. Online submission process for Federal proposals and public comment

As noted previously, the Council held a joint meeting with the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council in winter 2015 and concurs with their expressed frustration on the difficulty to find, navigate, and submit comments or proposals through the Regulations.gov portal. It is very difficult to locate this new system and correct submission portal, as well as links to it through the Federal Subsistence Management Program website. Additionally Regulations.gov is not a satisfactory avenue for submittal due to the bandwidth limitations in rural Alaska and is not accessible or user friendly for many of the individuals, communities, and tribes that are required to utilize it to submit public comments.

The Council requests a standardized, easily downloadable and fillable form to be developed in accordance with Office of Management and Budget requirements that can then be emailed in. An online link that is simple and straightforward to use would also be helpful. A rural user should have the ability to download, complete, and submit in a straightforward, accessible, and comprehensible manner. It is imperative that when rural residents have an opportunity to comment on or submit a proposal on subsistence regulations that affect rural residents specifically, that regular access to internet and slow bandwidth in rural Alaska is not an impediment.

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7. Request for Council representative to participate in resource working groups

The Council requests to have a representative from the Regional Advisory Councils to serve as a point of contact and work with any future planning groups for large Federal policy or program initiatives that affect subsistence. Council members have been involved in similar pre-planning discussions through other working groups and it has been a very positive process to have dialog and share input that helped to fine tune policy and understand the interaction with subsistence. For example, members of the Council who serve on National Park Service Subsistence Resource Commissions have been involved in pre-scoping management discussions. A member of the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council served on the Tribal Consultation Working Group in helping to develop the Board's Tribal Consultation Policy and related Implementation Guidelines. The Council feels wide-reaching policy initiatives would benefit from Regional Advisory Council participation as part of the scoping process, help build understanding through discussion, and it would also serve to keep the Councils informed so that they are aware and engaged before a new policy is formally proposed.

Thank you for the opportunity for this Council to assist the Federal Subsistence Management Program to meet its charge of protecting subsistence resources and uses of these resources on Federal public lands and waters. We look forward to continuing discussions about the issues and concerns of subsistence users of the Eastern Interior Region. If you have any questions regarding this correspondence, please contact Eva Patton, Subsistence Council Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management, at 1-800-478-1456 or (907) 786-3358.

Sincerely,

Sue Entsminger
Chair

cc: Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
Federal Subsistence Board
Eugene R. Peltola, Jr., Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management
Acting Deputy Assistant Regional Director, Office of Subsistence Management
Carl Johnson, Council Coordination Division Chief, Office of Subsistence Management
Eva Patton, Subsistence Council Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management
Interagency Staff Committee
Administrative Record

Backcountry and Wilderness Stewardship Plan

Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve

National Park Service
U.S. Department of the Interior



Newsletter • January 2016



Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve is in the process of preparing a Backcountry and Wilderness Stewardship Plan. The purpose of this plan is to guide the management of backcountry and wilderness character and resources in Wrangell-St. Elias within the legal framework of the Wilderness Act of 1964, the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act of 1980, and National Park Service (NPS) policy and regulations.

Public scoping process

Official public scoping for the Backcountry and Wilderness Stewardship Plan occurred from May 2015 through November 2015. Public scoping consisted of three primary components – interviews held with stakeholders, public meetings, and briefings to stakeholder groups. For an in depth description of the public scoping process and analysis of comments received, see the [“Public Scoping Report”](#) released in January 2016.

The dominant themes received in public scoping were as follows: 1) there are currently very few issues or visitor impacts in the backcountry and wilderness and we should manage to keep it that way; 2) the current lack of regulations is part of the character of this wilderness and should be retained if possible; and 3) NPS administrative use contributes to impacts to wilderness character and should be acknowledged and managed.

Topic areas – as defined by public comment

The topic areas described below have been revised based on public input. Specific feedback on topics and subtopics is identified here and will correspondingly be addressed in the plan.

Airstrip maintenance and management

Identifying which airstrips are maintained, if any, and how maintenance will occur is part of this topic - for instance, if maintenance is conducted by the NPS or in coordination with commercial operators. Development of new airstrips will be evaluated in this topic, as will potential limits to establishing new airstrips. How airstrips facilitate or hinder dispersal of use across the park will be considered.

Cabin maintenance and management

How cabins are used and how maintenance should occur is the focus of this topic area. Identification of which cabins, if any, should be actively maintained by the NPS or other user groups will be addressed. How cabins are managed, including options relating to reservation systems will be considered, as will the role of cabins in providing for public health and safety.

Motorized use

Use of snowmachines, ORVs, and helicopters by visitors, local residents, and the NPS is the primary focus of this topic. How, where, and for what purposes these technologies are used will be addressed, including the recreational use of snowmachines. Based on impacts to wilderness resources and character, possible limitations will be considered to some forms of motorized use and for certain purposes.

Visitor use & impacts

This topic will address potential impacts to visitor experience and wilderness resources stemming from increased visitor use, as well as temporal and geographic concentration of use. Concerns associated with different user groups and particular types of use, such as private pilot use, base camping, and horse use will also be addressed. Evaluation of impacts will focus on social trails, campsites, campfire rings, garbage, human waste, and other similar impacts. The role of the NPS in facilitating visitor experiences relating to trails, signs, and advertising, among other factors will be addressed. Defining elements of the desired “visitor experience” and “visitor expectations” for different areas in Wrangell-St. Elias will be part of this topic.

Commercial use

It is anticipated that commercial use by air taxis, sport hunting guides, and guiding services will be addressed as separate, but interrelated uses. Self-regulation by commercial operators will be considered, as will methods for the NPS to supplement this process. An extent necessary determination, which addresses levels of use by commercial operators, will be part of the plan.

Subsistence

Subsistence use and traditional activities in backcountry and wilderness will continue to be provided for in this plan.

Cumulative effects

This topic will address how different actions and activities conducted by visitors, administrators, commercial users, and scientific researchers cumulatively effect wilderness character. The character of Wrangell-St. Elias as predominately unregulated will be considered. Contributions to cumulative effects by the other topic areas in the plan will also be addressed.

Miscellaneous

This topic will address items raised in public scoping that do not fall within one of the other topic areas. Installations in wilderness, use of modern technology, how the park is advertised, and the role of the NPS in day-to-day activities will be addressed here.



Data collection

Assessing on-the-ground impacts

Quantifiable data regarding impacts created by visitors has been collected since 2014, including information on social trails, campsites, campfire rings, airstrips, cabins, and other information. The purpose of this information is to evaluate how on-the-ground impacts are changing over time given site-specific conditions and how the impacts correlate with trends in visitor use over time.

In 2014 and 2015, a total of approximately 510 miles were traveled looking for impacts. Of this total distance travelled, approximately 72 miles were found to have discernable impacts from social trails – though most of the impacts observed have been extremely minimal. A summary of the trips conducted and impacts observed is available in Table 1.

The impact assessments conducted to date have observed relatively few impacts. As a result, Wrangell-St. Elias generally has the opportunity to make small revisions in management as necessary to preserve existing conditions.

Table 1. Summary of trips conducted and impacts observed.

Trip Location	Percent of route with discernable impacts	Condition class* and explanation of rating
Allie's Valley to Bremner	5%	1 – Essentially no impacts from modern human activity were found.
Baultoff to Horsfeld	90%	4 – Extensive horse trails, many impacted campsites, and some trash associated with camps were observed.
Black Mountain	N/A**	
Bremner to Tebay Lakes	1%	1 – Essentially no impacts from modern human activity were found.
Donoho Basin	48%	5 – Extensive social trails, trash, campfire rings, were observed, as well as instances of improperly disposed human waste.
Dadina to Sanford Plateau	1%	1 – Essentially no impacts from modern human activity were found.
Glacier Creek	12%	2 – Minimal impacts, including minimal social trails and some impacted campsites were observed on this trip.
Hanagita Lake	N/A**	
Hidden Lake to Lakina	6%	2 – Minimal impacts were observed on this trip. Impacts observed included social trails, some impacted campsites, and campfire rings.
Huberts Landing	13%	2 – Some impacts, including social trails, trash, and some impacted campsites, were observed on this trip.
Iceberg to Bremner	4%	1 – Essentially no impacts from modern human activity were found.
Jaeger Mesa	5%	1 – Essentially no impacts from modern human activity were found.
Jacksina Creek	0%	1 – Essentially no impacts from modern human activity were found.
Kotsina River	N/A**	
Nutzotin Mountains	21%	3 – A relatively high number of social trails, as well as campsites, campfire rings, and trash were observed on this trip.
Ross Green Lake	1%	2 – Minimal impacts were observed, namely impacted campsites and human waste.
Skolai Pass	9%	3 – Some social trails, campsites, and campfire rings were observed.
Skolai to Wolverine	26%	4 – Social trails, as well as campsites, campfire rings, and trash were observed on this trip.
Solo Creek to Chisana	37%	4 – Many horse trails, as well as some impacted campsites and associated trash were observed on this trip.
Steamboat Hills	0%	1 – Essentially no impacts from modern human activity were found.
Tana and Chitina Rivers	N/A**	
Wolverine to Amphitheatre	6%	2 – Minimal impacts were observed, namely social trails.
Wrangell Plateau	13%	2 – Minimal impacts were observed, namely social trails and some trash.

* Condition class is a comprehensive evaluation of the overall condition of the route/trip on a scale of 1 to 5, with 1 as the least impacted and 5 as the most impacted. This scale is relative to conditions observed here at Wrangell-St. Elias and incorporates observations of social trails, campsites, trash, human waste, and other factors.

** These trips were conducted in a way that precluded their being counted proportionately to the other trips; for instance, when the trip did not allow continuous data collection or the primary purpose of the trip was for another project.

Data analysis

Analyzing visitor use trends

The majority of access to park backcountry and wilderness is facilitated by commercial operators, including air taxis, guided recreational services, and hunting services. Commercial operators are required to submit actual use reports to the park each year. The park is currently analyzing data in these reports to determine trends in visitation, including levels of use, the popularity of various locations, and types of use, among other variables. The purpose of this information and analysis is to use trends in visitation to inform future management strategies. This project is ongoing and more results will be released in the near future.

Data from the past five years of visitor use facilitated by commercial operators is summarized below. In general, visitor use in the backcountry and wilderness has increased since 2010 (Figure 1). The average trip length in backcountry and wilderness areas from 2010-2014 was 4 days. Sport hunting was the activity which received the highest number of user days (Figure 2).

Top 10 most visited locations:

1. Skolai Pass
2. Iceberg Lake
3. Nizina
4. Wolverine
5. Fosse
6. Solo Creek
7. Mac Coll Ridge
8. Snag Creek
9. Lakina River
10. Glacier Creek

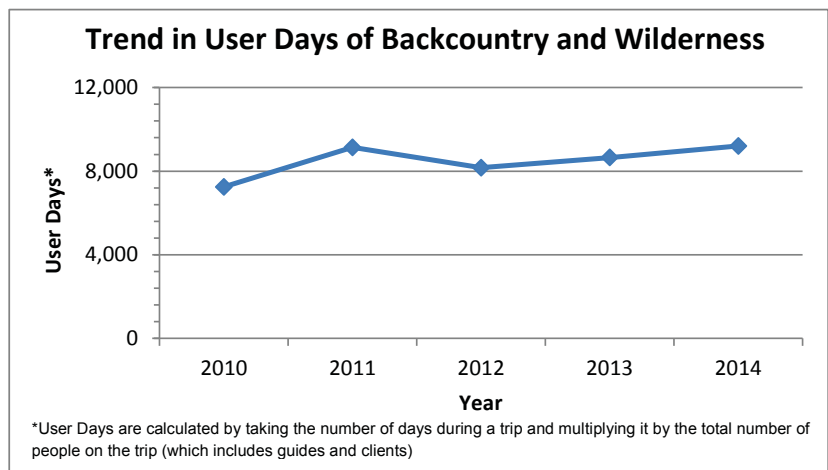


Figure 1. Trend in user days of backcountry and wilderness from 2010-2014.

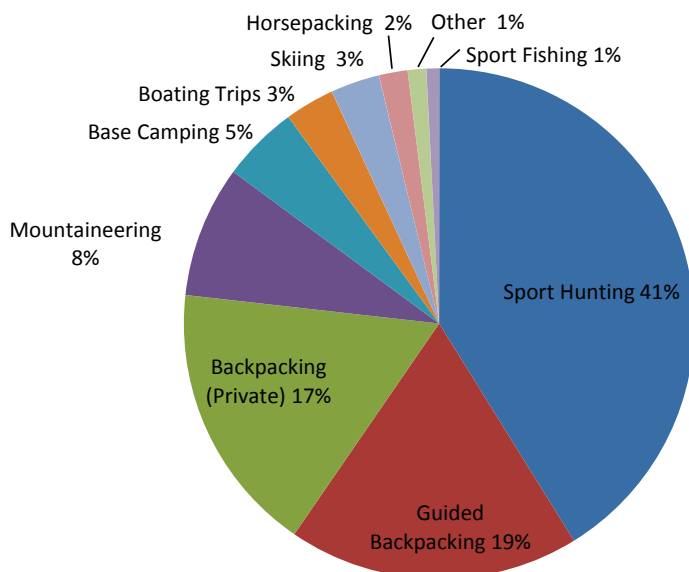


Figure 2. Summary of user days by activity, from 2010-2014.

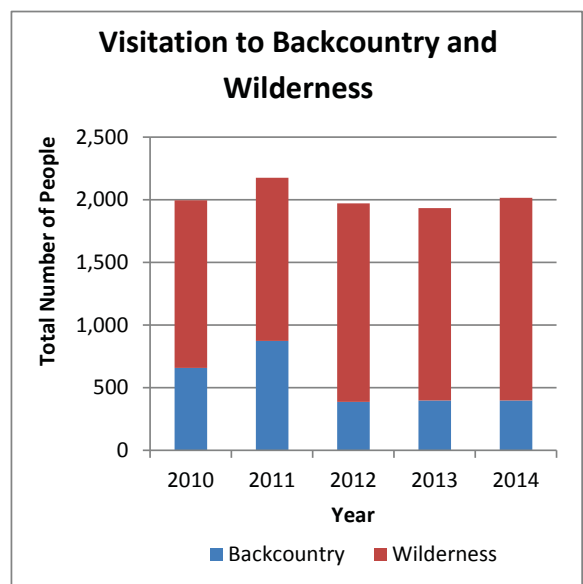


Figure 3. Dispersal of visitors across backcountry and wilderness.

Next steps in the planning process

Proposed action development

Based on the feedback received in public scoping, a Proposed Action will be developed. This Proposed Action will delineate management zones, and will identify desired future conditions, indicators, measures, standards, and thresholds for each zone. It is anticipated that the Proposed Action will be released by the summer of 2016. Public comments on the Proposed Action will be solicited.

Development of management alternatives

Based on the comments received on the Proposed Action, a suite of Management Alternatives will be developed. The Management Alternatives will articulate a variety of approaches regarding desired conditions, indicators, measures, standards, and adaptive management actions. Public comments on the Management Alternatives will be solicited.

Draft EA

Based on the comments received on the Management Alternatives, a Draft EA will be developed. The Draft EA will synthesize the management alternatives into a comprehensive document that analyzes the affected environment, impact topics, and identifies an NPS preferred alternative. Public comments on the Draft EA will be solicited.

Final EA

Based on the comments received on the Draft EA, a Final EA will be released, accompanied by a Finding of No Significant Impact statement.

How to stay involved

Staying up to date

The plan email list is the best way to make sure you are kept up-to-date about the planning process and opportunities for participation. To verify that you are on the email list or wish to receive updates via mail, please contact us at the information provided in the "Submitting Comments" section below.

Submitting comments

Official public comments will be accepted at several stages of the planning process, as outlined above. You can submit comments via email, regular mail, or on the internet at: <http://parkplanning.nps.gov/projectHome.cfm?projectID=44299>

Written comments may be mailed to:
Wrangell-St. Elias National Park & Preserve
ATTN: Bruce Rogers
P.O. Box 439
Copper Center, Alaska 99573

Comments may be emailed to:
Bruce_Rogers@nps.gov

For more information about the plan or planning process, please contact Bruce Rogers, project manager, at 907-822-7276.

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service



YUKON FLATS NATIONAL WILDLIFE REFUGE

Summary of Activities - Fall 2015 (revised Jan 2016)



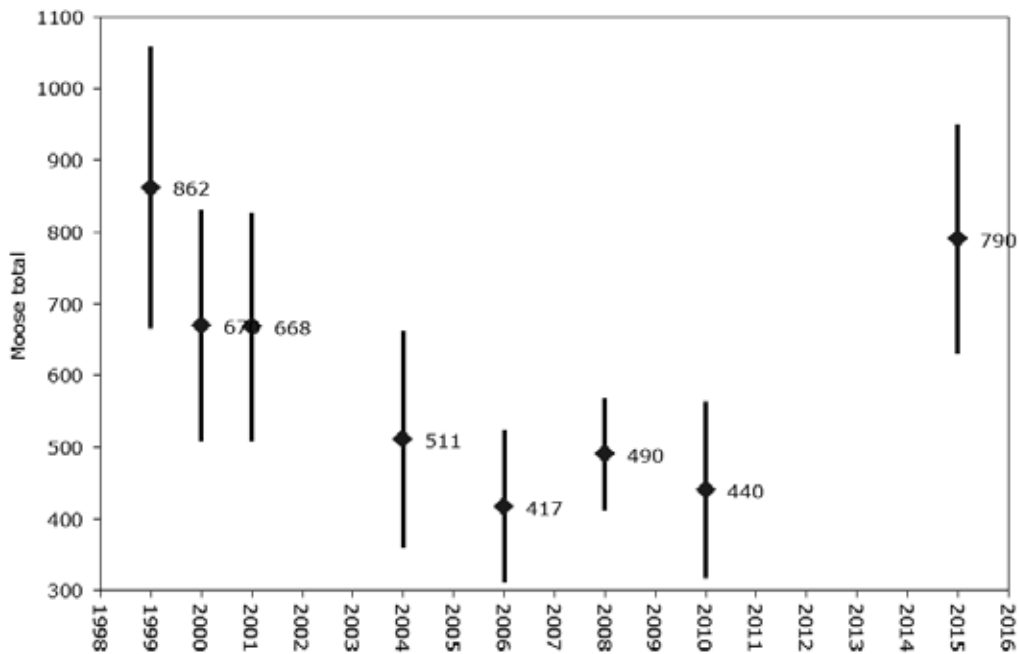
The Yukon Flats Basin is world renowned as one of the most important breeding grounds for waterfowl in North America. It also provides critical resources to over 1,200 residents that live in the Yukon Flats. Thus, the Yukon Flats Refuge focuses on monitoring the population status of animal's and their habitats important from both a local and national perspective. Special emphasis is also placed on species that may have declining populations. Following is a summary of completed and ongoing refuge projects for 2015.

Moose Survey – November 2015



A moose population survey was conducted on the Yukon Flats in November 2015. This was the first fall survey since 2010 due to a lack of snow in early winter that caused surveys in 2012-2014 to be cancelled. The estimate for the 2,269 mi² survey area in the western Yukon Flats (Alaska Game Management Unit [GMU]

25D) was 790 total observable moose (95% CI; 600-980). Density of moose was 0.35/mi² or 0.13/km². The population was comprised of an estimated 609 adults (95% CI; 460-759) and 191 calves (126-256). The estimate of total observable moose increased from 2010 to 2015. Improved calf survival may have contributed to the population increase in some recent years. It was unlikely that public harvest of wolves and bears contributed, as harvest intensity was light. Thus, moose density increased in the presence of lightly harvested wolf and bear populations, suggesting that the dynamics of this low density population may sometimes be more complex than previously thought.



Estimated observable fall moose total (with 90% confidence interval) for the western Yukon Flats. Note: confidence intervals for 2010 and 2015 totals do not overlap.

Aerial scoter and scaup surveys – 2014 and 2015



The 14th annual aerial survey to monitor scoter and scaup populations on the Yukon Flats was conducted 5-12 June, 2015. These data are currently being analyzed; below we present the data from

the 2014 survey which was conducted 5-8 June, 2014. White-winged scoters accounted for 99%, and surf scoters accounted for the other scoter species observed in 2014. The number of white-winged scoters estimated in the study area (10,559) during the breeding season was lower than the previous twelve-year mean (2001-2005 and 2007-2012) of 16,188. No black scoters were observed in 2014. The scaup monitoring index for 2014 was 23,017, which was 22% lower than the average index value for 2002 – 2013 (28,105). Pacific loons and trumpeter swans were counted opportunistically. In 2014, a monitoring index for Pacific loons was estimated at 2,125, which was not significantly different than the 7 year average from 2007 – 2013 (1,677). The trumpeter swan population index was 652 birds in 2014, which was similar to the previous 6 year average from 2007-2012 (782).



Aerial loon surveys – 2015

Aerial surveys have indicated the Yukon Flats is an important breeding area for Pacific loons (*Gavia pacifica*) and common loons (*G. immer*). Loons have been surveyed during waterfowl breeding pair surveys conducted by the Division of Migratory Birds since 1953, and more intensive loon surveys have been conducted by the Yukon Flats Refuge since 1984 (1988, 1999 – 2003, 2006). The 9th annual aerial survey to monitor loon populations on the Yukon Flats was conducted in 2015. These data are currently being analyzed.



Eagle surveys on the Black River and Birch and Beaver creeks

Bald eagles steeply declined by the mid-20th century due to egg shell thinning from DDT, widespread habitat loss, and harvest (legal and illegal). Bald and golden eagles are both birds of management concern by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The refuge initiated a bald eagle “sticknest” survey in 2014 on the Chandalar, Porcupine and Black rivers to begin collecting locations of raptor nests (eagles and hawks) and measuring production of young along major river corridors in the Yukon Flats.

In 2015 surveys were initiated on Birch and Beaver creeks and repeated on the Black River. Data analysis is pending. Inventorying and monitoring bald eagle nests and foraging sites will not only provide information on their local densities, trends, and habitat use, but will also provide a database needed for responsible management.

Coarse woody debris work on Chandalar and Black Rivers



Have you ever considered the fate of all the wood that is grown on the Yukon Flats? Wood is harvested, burned, swept away in floods, buried in silt, consumed by insects and animals, the list goes on. Another important function of wood is its ability to be stored as carbon beneath the soil surface. The refuge initiated a project in 2014 with Colorado State University to inventory the amounts of woody debris found in our Yukon Flats stream systems. Goals of the project are to record wood blockages in our stream systems, better understand how wood obstructions influence river

channel connectivity and flooding and learn how wood is stored as carbon in stream systems. The Dall River and Preacher Creek were inventoried in 2014 and the Black and Chandalar rivers were surveyed this past summer. Additionally the Yukon River was sampled between Circle and the Dalton Highway Bridge. In total, the project sampled up to 700 river miles in the Yukon Flats.

Scaup brood production survey



A lesser scaup brood production survey was conducted for the second consecutive year at Canvasback Lake, Plot F (25 miles northeast of Beaver), and Track Lake (23 miles north of Fort Yukon) during 21 July to 31 July. The wetlands in these lake complexes each contain at least one lake large enough to safely operate a float plane on. Broods of Scaup and other waterbirds were counted by 3 teams of 2 observers. Counts used a double observer approach and the method differed based on wetland size. 2015 data is being analyzed and we anticipate a progress report completed by late winter 2015.

Moose – Mapping potential foraging habitat



The Yukon Flats Refuge and Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko Refuge have partnered with the U.S. Geological Survey to develop a willow map that when complete will show where willow habitats (and thus potential moose foraging areas) occur on and off the river and in some upland areas. Over the last two summers staff have mapped willow and non-willow stands (like birch and cottonwood) from the air (fixed-wing and helicopter) and collected vegetation data on the ground to help improve the map as well as get a relative

idea of browse availability among stands. With this information we are especially interested in how Yukon Flats willow stand species composition, structure and relative abundance, and

relative forage abundance, compare to those stands at the Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko Refuge were moose numbers are higher overall. A final map will be released later this winter.

Moose monitoring



A long term moose monitoring effort was initiated in 2013 by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Alaska Department of Fish and Game in Game Management Unit 25D West, Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge. The purpose of this effort is to measure health indices such as calf production and recruitment, partition and twinning rates, age at first reproduction, short yearling (10-month-old) weights, and survival of females and their offspring, indicators of the nutritional health of this low density moose population. From November 4-12,

2013, 38 female moose were captured and radio collared along the Yukon River near Beaver, Alaska and southward to the White Mountains. Radio tracking flights were conducted monthly and weekly during calving. Calf production and fall recruitment during 2014 was 78.4 and 50.0 per 100 females, respectively. Twinning rate was 19.9%. None of the 3 2-year old females were observed with calves. Over-winter survival for calves was 66.7%. During 2015, calf production was much higher with 128.1 calves per hundred cows and a twinning rate of 53.8. A total of 6 radio collared females have died since capture, November 2013, with 32 remaining on the air as of June 5, 2015. Cause of mortality include: 1 capture mortality, 3 wolf predation and 2 unknown. Adult survival for the 1st year was 97.3%, and 86.5% for the 2nd year. Annual home range estimate using MCP averaged 369 km², which exceeded other moose populations throughout their range. Of 502 locations, 45.6% were in the Yukon River floodplain, 31.7% river terrace, 13.3 % uplands and 9.4% mountains. Of all the locations, 29.5% were located within burns. Radio collared females appeared to be mostly non-migratory. However, more relocations over multiple years are necessary to make inferences related to home range and distribution.

Sheep survey



Dall's sheep occur on the southern Refuge boundary near Mount Schwatka. In mid to late July the Refuge collaborated with BLM and ADFG to estimate the presence of Dall's sheep in the White Mountains. A total of 357 sheep were observed in the Schwatka, Victoria, Fossil Ridge, Lime Peak, and Cache mountain regions. The ratio of lambs to ewes was 31:100, the same as reported for 2014.

2015 fire season



2015 was a very active fire season across Alaska with over 5 million total acres burning across the state. Below average precipitation and above average temperatures in May and June set the stage and when a period of unusually high lightning activity occurred between June 19 and June 22, the second busiest Alaska fire season ever recorded was off and running.

The Yukon Flats NWR saw 11 fires start within the refuge border this season, burning a total of 190,125 acres, of which 140,076 acres were FWS owned land. Of these 11 fires, 9 were located within the Limited fire management option and were monitored throughout the summer. 2 fires fell within Modified fire management option, with the Chahalie Lake the only fire to receive any suppression actions. As of 9/16, there were no human caused fires this year on the Yukon Flats NWR.

Invasive plant control work



The Yukon River is a major conduit for the spread of invasive species such as white sweet clover that may negatively impact moose and salmon habitats. The refuge partnered with the Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District and Fort Yukon, Beaver, Birch Creek, and Stevens Village to survey, map and control white-sweet clover during July-August 2015.

Elodea, a highly invasive aquatic plant, has not been found on the Yukon Flats Refuge but it is present in Chena Slough in Fairbanks and was recently discovered in Tolchaket Slough near Nenana on the Tanana River. The refuge is assisting the Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Field Office, National Park Service, U.S. Forest Service and the Fairbanks Soil and Water Conservation District with a September 2015 inventory of the Tanana River in the Fairbanks/Nenana vicinity for presence of Elodea. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and partners are making preparation for Elodea treatment in summer 2016 in affected areas.

Salmon spawning assessment



The salmon stocks in the Chandalar River support vital subsistence and commercial fisheries, and provide the largest stock of fall chum salmon in the Yukon River drainage. This valuable stock is monitored annually using sonar by the Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Field Office (FFWFO). Fish passage past the sonar site in 2013 was approximately 198,000

chum salmon which is just above the long term average. 2014 data have not yet been analyzed.

Refuge staff and FFWFO have been collaborating with the Village of Venetie and University of Alaska Fairbanks to assess chum salmon habitats on the Chandalar River since 2013. The purposes of the project are to determine if groundwater discharge zones are associated with spawning presence and to develop a long term monitoring program of spawning habitats in the Chandalar River. In 2015 graduate student Chelsea Clawson came on board to manage the project. Plans are underway to collect a second round of aerial photography of spawning areas in September 2015. A special thanks to Lance Whitwell, Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government, for offering support to this project.

Trail camera monitoring

Staff at Yukon Flats NWR recently discovered a compelling picture of a red fox carrying a prey

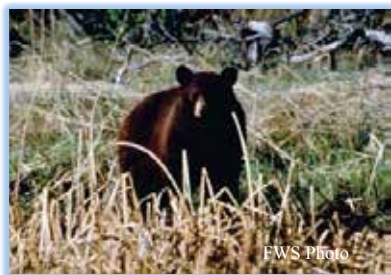


item in its mouth while examining results from an experimental trail camera study. While not sure what the fox was eating, what was clear was that experimental trail cameras functioned well throughout winter 2014-2015. In September 2014, Refuge staff placed 4 trail cameras on the Refuge and left them until April 2015. The idea was to test whether the cameras could function down to the low temperatures in the area and whether the batteries could last the winter. If so, staff could proceed with the purchase of additional cameras to develop a network that could be used to monitor furbearers.

Cameras captured numerous pictures of foxes, lynx, wolverine, marten, snowshoe hare, and moose, both during the day and at night. And the temperature stamp on the pictures verified they functioned even during extreme cold, with photos taken down to -43 degree Celsius (-45 degrees Fahrenheit). In addition, cameras were timed to record two photos per day that documented temperature, onset of snow, snow depth (with the aid of a snow stake), large wind events that drifted snow, and in the future will be used to document snow melt in an effort to monitor phenology of winter break-up.

Trail camera technology has increased to where these cameras can be deployed all winter and very likely year-round. The cameras work day and night and can allow biologists to learn about previously unseen aspects of life on the Refuge. Refuge staff also expects presentation of trail camera pictures will be a hot topic at public meetings.

Black bear survey



Black bears are generally difficult to observe from an aircraft due to the thick forest cover. However, in the spring, prior to leaf out, bears are commonly observed on open wetlands feeding on aquatic vegetation. Perhaps they are purging out their digestive tract after coming out of the

den. Staff flew over a large group of wetlands between Beaver and Birch Creek on May 11, 18, and 22 and observed 4, 14, and 4 bears, respectively. Many bears that were observed were standing in open water as they feed on aquatic plants and were highly visible. We plan to repeat this effort in 2016 to identify the dates that bears are in highest concentrations on wetlands. The objective of the project is to develop a long term monitoring survey to detect the trend in black bear observations.

Hyperspectral Imaging



The Refuge is collaborating with the University of Alaska Fairbanks (UAF) in testing out the use of a new tool to collect high resolution aerial photography. The instrument is called HySpex, and when mounted in the port hole of an aircraft, is capable of collecting high resolution spectral images. Most cameras can detect the primary colors, red, green and blue but this instrument can differentiate over 150 different spectral bands. In early September

photography was collected over Yukon Flats wetlands between Beaver and Birch Creek in an effort to better describe lakes and plant communities. UAF will analyze the data over the winter and, working with Refuge staff, we will determine means for this new technology to support land management.

Moose management meeting



The refuge participated in a moose management meeting in Fort Yukon on April 7 and 8. The Council of Athabascan Tribal Governments (CATG) organized the meeting which was funded through the Annual Funding Agreement between USFWS and CATG. The meeting was well attended by representatives from all the Yukon Flats Villages, the Refuge and Alaska Department of Fish and Game. One objective of the meeting was to discuss strategies to achieve goals and objectives of the 2002 Yukon Flats Cooperative Moose Management Plan. CATG is currently summarizing the meeting notes.

Hospital Lake monitoring



Ten students from the village of Fort Yukon worked with the Yukon Flats Refuge staff this summer to participate in a science camp at Hospital Lake in Fort Yukon. Student participants included Lydia Acker, Kaila Druck, James Fields, Trevor Hardy, Caleb Knudson, Marissa Peter, Troy Solomon, Catherine Solomon, Theodore Solomon, and Lisa Strom. Hospital Lake, adjacent to the Fort Yukon airport landing strip, offers the Refuge an opportunity to collect waterfowl information and provide a learning opportunity for local youth while strengthening the relationship between the Refuge and Fort Yukon residents. Students inventoried ducks, collected invertebrates, captured small mammals, deployed fish traps, collected dragonflies and other insects, and learned to use Global Positioning Systems (GPS).



Refuge Law Enforcement Officer Clay Hamilton (left) having a chat with Fort Yukon Youth attending the refuge sponsored Science Camp at Hospital Lake.

Circle Open House



Refuge staff in collaboration with the Fairbanks Fish and Wildlife Field Office and the Circle Tribal Council, sponsored a “Science Partners Open House” on July 1 in Circle. The gathering included a BBQ, the opportunity to ask scientists and managers about ongoing projects in the Yukon Flats, and activities for the youth. The gathering was well received by Circle residents.

Youth Camp at Julie Mahler's



Julie Mahler, Yukon Flats Refuge Information Technician (RIT), hosted a 3-week cultural camp this summer at her cabin on the Porcupine River. Youth from Beaver, Fort Yukon, Venetie and Arctic Village attended this event, which was designed in partnership between CATG and Yukon Flats Refuge. Youth learned outdoor survival skills, built survival shelters, made boat paddles, and had daily Gwich'in story/language hour with a local Native elder. Refuge staff provided an archery class, career opportunities, and team building games. Thanks for all your hard work, Julie!

Wilburforce Foundation & National Wildlife Refuge Association Visit



The Refuge was visited by representatives of the Wilburforce Foundation and the president of the National Wildlife Refuge Association. They experienced RIT Julie Mahler's subsistence camp at 8-mile Porcupine River. Julie provided a home cooked meal including fresh vegetables from her garden and local wild resources. Refuge Law Enforcement Officer Mimi Thomas provided boat transportation for the visit and Vince Mathews Refuge Subsistence Coordinator gave a refuge overview and a tour of Fort Yukon. The high point for the visitors was the warm welcome by Flats youth at 8-mile camp.

Arctic Village Science Camp



RIT Julie Mahler shared with the Arctic Village students her traditional knowledge on how to build a caribou skin boat, preparing harvested wild resources, and her artistic talents. Vince Mathews helped the students how to navigate with a compass and assisted with the arts & craft sessions drawing wildfowl pictures, weaving baskets from willows, and bead work. Julie was a big help with preparing the daily meals and mentoring the students. Vince kept things lively with the kitchen staff and the students. All learned from each other. Retired Refuge Interpreter Paul Williams, Sr. shared his traditional wisdom through stories and life experiences.

To access up to date Yukon Flats Refuge events please join us on Facebook at:

<https://www.facebook.com/YukonFlatsNationalWildlifeRefuge>

**Department of the Interior
U. S. Fish and Wildlife Service**

Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

Charter

- 1. Committee's Official Designation.** The Council's official designation is the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council).
- 2. Authority.** The Council is renewed by virtue of the authority set out in the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (16 U.S.C. 3115 (1988)), and under the authority of the Secretary of the Interior, in furtherance of 16 U.S.C. 410hh-2. The Council is regulated by the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), as amended, 5 U.S.C. Appendix 2.
- 3. Objectives and Scope of Activities.** The objective of the Council is to provide a forum for the residents of the Region with personal knowledge of local conditions and resource requirements to have a meaningful role in the subsistence management of fish and wildlife on Federal lands and waters in the Region.
- 4. Description of Duties.** The Council has authority to perform the following duties:
 - a. Recommend the initiation of, review, and evaluate proposals for regulations, policies, management plans, and other matters relating to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on public lands within the Region.
 - b. Provide a forum for the expression of opinions and recommendations by persons interested in any matter related to the subsistence uses of fish and wildlife on public lands within the Region.
 - c. Encourage local and regional participation in the decisionmaking process affecting the taking of fish and wildlife on the public lands within the Region for subsistence uses.
 - d. Prepare an annual report to the Secretary containing the following:
 - (1) An identification of current and anticipated subsistence uses of fish and wildlife populations within the Region.
 - (2) An evaluation of current and anticipated subsistence needs for fish and wildlife populations within the Region.

- (3) A recommended strategy for the management of fish and wildlife populations within the Region to accommodate such subsistence uses and needs.
 - (4) Recommendations concerning policies, standards, guidelines, and regulations to implement the strategy.
 - e. Appoint one member to the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park Subsistence Resource Commission and one member to the Denali National Park Subsistence Resource Commission in accordance with Section 808 of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA).
 - f. Make recommendations on determinations of customary and traditional use of subsistence resources.
 - g. Make recommendations on determinations of rural status.
 - h. Provide recommendations on the establishment and membership of Federal local advisory committees.
5. **Agency or Official to Whom the Council Reports.** The Council reports to the Federal Subsistence Board Chair, who is appointed by the Secretary of the Interior with the concurrence of the Secretary of Agriculture.
 6. **Support.** The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service will provide administrative support for the activities of the Council through the Office of Subsistence Management.
 7. **Estimated Annual Operating Costs and Staff Years.** The annual operating costs associated with supporting the Council's functions are estimated to be \$160,000, including all direct and indirect expenses and 1.15 staff years.
 8. **Designated Federal Officer.** The DFO is the Subsistence Council Coordinator for the Region or such other Federal employee as may be designated by the Assistant Regional Director – Subsistence, Region 7, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. The DFO is a full-time Federal employee appointed in accordance with Agency procedures. The DFO will:
 - Approve or call all of the advisory committee's and subcommittees' meetings,
 - Prepare and approve all meeting agendas,
 - Attend all committee and subcommittee meetings,
 - Adjourn any meeting when the DFO determines adjournment to be in the public interest, and
 - Chair meetings when directed to do so by the official to whom the advisory committee reports.

9. **Estimated Number and Frequency of Meetings.** The Council will meet 1-2 times per year, and at such times as designated by the Federal Subsistence Board Chair or the DFO.

10. **Duration.** Continuing.

11. **Termination.** The Council will be inactive 2 years from the date the Charter is filed, unless prior to that date it is renewed in accordance with the provisions of Section 14 of the FACA. The Council will not meet or take any action without a valid current charter.

12. **Membership and Designation.** The Council's membership is composed of representative members as follows:

Ten members who are knowledgeable and experienced in matters relating to subsistence uses of fish and wildlife and who are residents of the Region represented by the Council. To ensure that each Council represents a diversity of interests, the Federal Subsistence Board in their nomination recommendations to the Secretary will strive to ensure that seven of the members (70 percent) represent subsistence interests within the Region and three of the members (30 percent) represent commercial and sport interests within the Region. The portion of membership representing commercial and sport interests must include, where possible, at least one representative from the sport community and one representative from the commercial community.

The Secretary of the Interior will appoint members based on the recommendations from the Federal Subsistence Board and with the concurrence of the Secretary of Agriculture.

Members will be appointed for 3-year terms. A vacancy on the Council will be filled in the same manner in which the original appointment was made. Members serve at the discretion of the Secretary.

Council members will elect a Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary for a 1-year term.

Members of the Council will serve without compensation. However, while away from their homes or regular places of business, Council and subcommittee members engaged in Council, or subcommittee business, approved by the DFO, may be allowed travel expenses, including per diem in lieu of subsistence, in the same manner as persons employed intermittently in Government service under Section 5703 of Title 5 of the United States Code.

13. **Ethics Responsibilities of Members.** No Council or subcommittee member will participate in any specific party matter in which the member has a direct financial interest in a lease, license, permit, contract, claim, agreement, or related litigation with the Department.

- 14. **Subcommittees.** Subject to the DFO's approval, subcommittees may be formed for the purpose of compiling information and conducting research. However, such subcommittees must act only under the direction of the DFO and must report their recommendations to the full Council for consideration. Subcommittees must not provide advice or work products directly to the Agency. The Council Chair, with the approval of the DFO, will appoint subcommittee members. Subcommittees will meet as necessary to accomplish their assignments, subject to the approval of the DFO and the availability of resources.

- 15. **Recordkeeping.** Records of the Council, and formally and informally established subcommittees or other subgroups of the Council, shall be handled in accordance with General Records Schedule 6.2, and other approved Agency records disposition schedule. These records shall be available for public inspection and copying, subject to the Freedom of Information Act, 5 U.S.C. 552.



Secretary of the Interior

NOV 20 2015

Date Signed

DEC 03 2015

Date Filed