

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

Dena'ina Civic and Convention Center  
600 W 7th Avenue, Anchorage, Alaska 99501  
March 7, 2024

**Invocation:**

Linda Evans provided an invocation.

**Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:**

The meeting was called to order Thursday, March 7, 2024, at 1:45pm. Council members Andrew Bassich, Eva Burk, Linda Evans, Dorothy Shockley, Charlie Wright, and Donald Woodruff were present in person. Council member Amanda Pope attended a portion of the meeting via teleconference. Sue Entsminger and Charlie Jagow were not present and were excused. With seven out of nine seated Council members present the quorum was established.

**Attendees:**

*Asterisk \* identifies if present via teleconference.*

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Dr. Brent Vickers, Cory Graham, Brian Ubelaker, Liz Williams, Brooke McDavid, Tom Plank
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Fisheries and Ecological Services – Shane Ransbury, Keith Herron\*; Regional Office – Jill Klein; Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge – Emily Magnussen\*
- National Park Service: Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve – Amber Cohen, Benjamin Pister, Dr. Barbara Cellarius\*; Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve – Mark Dowdle, Mathew Sorum; Denali National Park and Preserve – Amy Craver
- Bureau of Indian Affairs: Dr. Glenn Chen
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Jim Herriges\*
- Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission: Deanna Kosbruk
- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association: Gabe Canfield
- Salmon State: Melanie Brown
- Public: Stanley Pete

**Review and Adopt Agenda:**

Motion by Member Woodruff, seconded by Member Bassich, to adopt the agenda with the following modification:

- Move item 12a. *Follow up on Joint Council Actions* from Other Business to Action Items

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

### **Election of Officers:**

Charlie Wright was elected the Council's Chair.

Eva Burk was elected the Council's Vice Chair.

Donald Woodruff was re-elected the Council's Secretary.

### **Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:**

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Evans, to approve the fall 2023 meeting minutes as presented.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

### **Council Member and Chair Reports:**

Donald Woodruff of Eagle shared that after a recent meeting with staff from Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve in Eagle he decided to submit a special action request to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) to once again close sheep hunting in the Preserve for the 2024 season. Sheep numbers have not been shown to increase so the closure is warranted for another year. Member Woodruff stated that an Eastern Interior Sheep Management Plan needs to be developed and that the Western Interior Council's draft could serve as a template.

Amanda Pope of Circle reported that she has heard interest from different Tribes about building capacity to collect and manage their own data. They want more involvement with hunting and fishing resource management. She has observed a dramatic decline in moose and caribou in her area. There are overall declines for most resources, and this a big concern for people in area.

Andy Bassich of Eagle conveyed that moose populations in his area are extremely low and he saw very few tracks when mushing this winter. There were no fall Chum or Chinook salmon for a fourth year in a row. He has tried to mitigate salmon loss with nonsalmon and had minimal success. One can feed themselves over the summer with nonsalmon fish but there are not adequate amounts to put up for the winter. As Co-Chair of the Yukon River Panel Communications Committee, he said they have had success their U.S.-Canada Educational Exchange and are working to get more youth and culture camps on the Alaska side. He was recently at an Arctic Beaver Network meeting in Fairbanks and learned a lot about the impacts of beavers on salmon habitat and also about their expansion north due to climate change. He said that people in the Interior may have to depend on beavers more as a food resource. He noted that the Eastern Interior region is really hungry country compared to other areas, which have more alternative resources. Lastly, he has seen just one caribou this year and stated that there needs to be revival of Fortymile Caribou Herd Harvest Management Coalition. Salmon and caribou are the main food sources in the Eagle area, and neither are doing well.

Dorothy Shockley of Manley Hot Springs/Fairbanks shared that because of regulations, particularly those for moose and salmon, she can't feed herself or her family. She is very concerned about how the wood bison reintroduction project in the Eastern Interior has gone. The original plan to work collaboratively with villages has been foregone and the Governor directed Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G) to get wood bison on the ground by summer. Member Shockley noted the issues of food security and culture and expressed frustration about the lack of progress on subsistence issues since the last All-Council Meeting in 2016.

Linda Evans of Rampart/North Pole reported that she went to one of the wood bison planning meetings last fall. She was reminded of the words of the late Paul Williams who said everyone needs to work together to preserve the subsistence way of life and culture for the younger generations. Member Evans recalled growing up in fish camp and learning from her elders how to respect and care for resources and the environment. She is concerned about pollution of the Yukon River and the lack of migratory birds near Rampart in recent years. She also expressed frustration about the lack of progress on dealing with issues like the salmon declines.

Eva Burk of Nenana/Fairbanks was happy to have space at the All-Council Meeting to openly discuss issues and brainstorm actions. She agreed that the wood bison planning process did not go as hoped because communities did not have a say in it as was originally promised. Member Burk reported that salmon remain a huge priority for her and hopes that the Board and OSM support the requests of the Councils on this topic. She encouraged everyone to continue to learn about the North Pacific Fishery Management Council regulatory process and keep showing up at Alaska Board of Fisheries as well. She said that some folks in her area fished for Chum Salmon and whitefish last year. They noticed a lot of the salmon had ichthyophonous and were not good. There was a culture camp in Nenana that had great turnout. They had to fly in Sockeye Salmon but the kids were still excited and got to handle fish, which was the most important thing given current circumstance on the Yukon and Tanana rivers.

Charlie Wright of Tanana/Rampart feels the Eastern Interior region is at tipping point because the declines in salmon, caribou, and moose are having cascading effects on other species. In his lifetime he has seen the region go from being resource rich to having barely anything. Chair Wright pointed out that the road system brings a lot of issues with overcrowding and competition. He believes better monitoring of the moose population is critical and does not think that moose should be assessed by harvest reporting alone in any area. It takes a lot more time and effort to harvest a moose than it previously did. For the first time in his life, he has not gotten a moose the past couple seasons. People in the region are struggling bad with the high cost of living and food insecurity. He feels the uncertainties of climate change need to start being better incorporated into management. Chair Wright is also troubled by the way that wood bison planning has played out and is doubtful subsistence users will be able to harvest them in his lifetime. Salmon sustains people mentally, spiritually, and physically. He is worried about future generations being able to practice their traditions. The fight for salmon continues to be a big and important job.

**Action Items:**

***Deferred wildlife proposal***

*WP24-34: Recognize the customary and traditional use of moose in Unit 25D by residents of Circle and Fort Yukon*

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Evans, to **withdraw wildlife proposal WP24-34 from consideration by the Federal Subsistence Board.**

The Council moved to withdraw the proposal due to the prior withdraw of WP24-35 by the proponent following OSM Tribal consultation with the affected Tribes. The two proposals were co-aligned. The Council noted that these proposals resulted in conflicts between Tribes and communities and that is the last thing that the Council wants to see happen.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

***Wildlife proposal to reconsider***

*WP24-32 – Extend the marten trapping season to March 15 in Units 12, 19,20, 21, and 24*

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Shockley, to **support wildlife proposal WP24-32 with a Council modification to only extend the marten trapping season in Units 20E and 25B.**

The Council chose to reconsider this proposal after hearing the concerns posed by the Western Interior Council about extending the season in Units within the Western Interior Region. The Council recognized that the original proposal applied to a large area and that portions of that area may have different climactic conditions and trapping pressure. The Council decided to narrow their request to Units that the proponent had initially intended for the proposal: Units 20E and 25B. These two Units are some of the coldest and most sparsely populated regions of the state. There is very little trapping pressure, and marten fur quality remains good through mid-March. A season extension of two weeks in these two Units would have very limited impacts to marten and not result in conservation concerns.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

***Wildlife Special Action Request WSA24-01 Close sheep hunting to all users in Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve***

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Woodruff, to **support WSA24-01 with Council modifications to also include BLM lands within the Glacier Mountain Controlled Use Area (CUA) and to extend the timeline of the closure through the 2025 regulatory year.**

The Council noted that multi-agency sheep population surveys have showed over a 75% decline in recent years and therefore sheep hunting needs to be closed to all users until the population can recover. The Council also noted that the sheep declines do not only apply to lands within Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve. Only 12 sheep were counted in the Glacier Mountain CUA when historically the average has been 70 to 100 sheep. The Glacier Mountain CUA is a popular location for walk-in sheep hunting because it is accessible from the Taylor Highway. Glacier Mountain CUA contains a mix of BLM and State of Alaska lands. The Council recognizes that their modification of this WSA would only close the BLM portion of the Glacier Mountain CUA but hopes that the State of Alaska would take action to close the remainder of the area due to the extreme conservation concerns. The Council would like this closure to extend through the 2025 regulatory year because the sheep population needs more than one year to begin to recover. Results of the planned sheep population surveys over the next several years will be critical to determining if this closure will need to extend beyond the modified timeline.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

### ***Review and approve FY2023 Annual Report***

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Woodruff, to approve FY2023 Annual Report with the following modifications:

- Add information about Wildlife Special Action WSA24-01 to Topic 1
- Add that the Council will be sending a letter to the Board on the same subject to Topic 2
- Emphasize in Topic 3 that the Board needs to keep elevating the salmon crisis and bycatch issues to the Secretary of the Interior and that the Councils need stronger advocacy from the Board on these topics
- Edit Topic 5 to be more specific about numbers of Pink Salmon released annually and to state the Councils opposition to all hatcheries or incubation projects on the Yukon River
- Add that moose surveys are also needed near Manley Hot Springs in Topic 6
- Emphasize in Topic 7 that Interior communities do not have access to as many alternatives to salmon as in coastal areas
- Make it clear in Topic 8 that co-stewardship needs to actually mean equal partnerships and decision making responsibilities
- Add to Topic 13 that data on wildlife collisions needs to be tracked and the Council would like information on trends over time. Replace the word disruption with the word barrier.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Woodruff, to write a letter to the Board requesting they urge ADF&G to initiate a Fortymile Caribou Harvest Management Coalition meeting and ask the Federal management agencies to play a more active role in the Coalition process.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

***Fisheries Special Action Request FSA24-01 Close Yukon River Chinook, Chum, and Coho Salmon fishing to non-federally qualified users***

Cory Graham, OSM Fisheries Biologist, presented an overview of FSA24-01 to the Council. The Council heard public testimony from Stanley Pete of Numan Iqua about the effects of the request, particularly to Alaska Natives who have had to move from their home communities to urban areas. Mr. Pete noted that these special actions do nothing to address issues of bycatch and interception and instead penalize subsistence users and put them against each other.

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Evans, to **support FSA24-01 as written.**

The Council supported FSA24-01 due to concerns about salmon populations in the Yukon River. Chinook Salmon are nearing extirpation, and we need to do everything we can to protect them. While there are unlikely to be openings this year, the Council nevertheless sees value in limiting the pool of eligible users to only federally qualified subsistence users.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

***Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Regulatory Proposals***

*Introduction of Draft Federal Fisheries Closure Review analyses*

Cory Graham presented an overview of FCR23-05 Closure to subsistence harvest of all fish in the Delta River and FCR25-02 Closure to subsistence harvest of grayling in the Nome Creek drainage of Beaver Creek to the Council.

*Development of Regulatory Fish and Shellfish Proposals*

Cory Graham notified the Council of the call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Proposals for the 2025-2027 regulatory years.

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Woodruff, to submit a proposal to set harvest limits and gear types for non-salmon fishes in Delta River so that they align with State of Alaska regulations.

The Council noted that sport fishing is currently open in the Delta River under State of Alaska regulations but that there is currently a closure in place under Federal regulations and no Federal subsistence opportunity. They felt this is unfair and should be changed. The Council intends to recommend that the closure in the Delta River be rescinded during their Fall 2024 meeting. Submitting this proposal will ensure that if the closure is lifted, harvest limits and gear type restrictions can be put in place to address any potential conservation concerns from increased opportunity.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

### ***Selection of Working Groups Participants for Development of FRMP Priority Information Needs***

Chair Wright, Vice Chair Burk, and Council members Bassich and Shockley volunteered to serve on the working group to develop Priority Information Needs for the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program for the Yukon Area.

The Council requested OSM approval to send a representative to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) meeting in April and in the fall to testify about salmon bycatch reduction, the need for ecosystem-based management of salmon, and the need for voting subsistence representatives on the NPFMC.

### ***Proposed Rule – Federal Subsistence Board membership***

During the joint session of the All-Council Meeting, Senior Advisor for Alaskan Affairs and Strategic Priorities Raina Thiele and Department of the Interior Solicitor Robert Anderson presented about the proposed rule to add three public members to the Federal Subsistence Board. The Council discussed the proposed rule and chose to submit comments from the Council.

Motion by Member Shockley, seconded by Member Woodruff, to submit Council comments for Federal Subsistence Board membership proposed rule. The Council supported the addition of three public members to the Board. Additionally, they provided the following comments:

- The Council supports the addition of three public members to the Federal Subsistence Board.
- All regions of Alaska should be adequately and equitably represented by public members on the Board.
- Public members should have the following qualifications:
  - be a federally qualified subsistence user
  - have firsthand experience in subsistence practices
  - hold traditional ecological knowledge tied to the region they represent
  - possess familiarity with current fish and wildlife issues in the region they represent
  - have current or previous experience serving on a Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
  - demonstrate understanding of the Federal Subsistence Board, Alaska Boards of Fisheries and Game, and North Pacific Fishery Management Council regulatory processes
- Public member nominees should be evaluated using a weighted criteria that takes into account the above qualifications and the number of letters of support they receive. Additionally, an understanding of Western science should be considered. An understanding of Western science would be beneficial but should not be weighted as strongly or necessarily be a hard requirement like the other qualifications.

- Public members should have a term limit of five years after which incumbent members will need to be re-nominated and evaluated against new nominees in a process similar to Council member nominations and appointments.
- The Board Chair should also have a five-year term limit after which they should be evaluated before possibly being reappointed.
- All public members should have alternates just like agency members.
- All Tribes should have an equal opportunity to nominate public members, it should not only be limited to certain Tribes.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

### ***Follow-up on proposed Joint Council actions***

During the joint session at the All-Council Meeting, the ten Regional Advisory Councils discussed regional and statewide concerns related to subsistence. The Councils proposed that a variety of these topics be developed into Joint Council letters that each Council could then decide to sign onto during their individual meetings. This Council voted to sign onto six letters.

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Woodruff, to sign onto two Joint Council letters about bycatch and caribou.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Shockley, to sign onto four additional Joint Council letters about Council member time compensation, correspondence issues, revisions to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act, and ANCSA D-1 land withdrawals.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

### ***Future Meeting Dates***

The Council confirmed their Fall 2024 meeting dates and location: October 8-10 in Tanana with Fairbanks as a backup location.

The Council selected their Winter 2025 meeting date and location: February 19-20 in Fairbanks

The Council selected their Fall 2025 meeting date and location: October 7-9 in Manley Hot Springs.

### **Public and Tribal Comments on Non-Agenda Items:**

There were no public comments on non-agenda items.

### **Other Business:**

Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, provided a brief update to the Council on the following topics:



- WIRAC Dall Sheep Board of Game Statewide Proposal
- 2023 Council Charter changes
- Hunter Ethics Outreach and Education Initiative
- Status of OSM comment policy review for Alaska Board of Fisheries proposals
- Council Correspondence and Policy update

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Brooke McDavid, Designated Federal Officer  
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

*Chair certified for accuracy on May 30, 2024*

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Robert “Charlie” Wright Sr., 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 October 8-10, 2024, meeting in Tanana, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcripts, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9181, or email [brooke\\_mcdavid@fws.gov](mailto:brooke_mcdavid@fws.gov).