

**NORTHWEST ARCTIC SUBSISTENCE
REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes**

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

Invocation:

Verne Cleveland provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order Thursday, March 7, 2024, at 1:53 PM, by Chair Thomas Baker. Council members Michael Kramer, Bobbie Schaeffer, Enoch Shiedt, Verne Cleveland, and Chair Thomas Baker were in attendance when meeting was called to order. Members Elmer Armstrong, Wilbur Howarth, Clyde Ramoth, and Raymond Woods joined the meeting during Council member reports. Tristen Pattee was not present and excused. With nine out of ten seated Council members present the quorum was established.

Attendees: from sign-in sheet (attendance call was not taken for in-person or on-line attendees due to limited time)

Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): (Anchorage)

- Amee Howard, Acting Assistant Regional Director
- Katya Wessels, Supervisor, Council Coordination
- Tom Plank, Wildlife Biologist
- Dr. Hannah Voorhees, Anthropologist
- Karen Hyer, Fisheries Biologist
- Lisa Hutchinson-Scarborough, Council Coordinator

National Park Service (NPS):

- Sarah Creachbaum, Federal Subsistence Board member and Regional Director, NPS, (Anchorage)
- Eva Patton, Subsistence Program Manager (Anchorage)
- Emily Creek, Cultural Anthropologist and Subsistence Coordinator Western Arctic National Parklands (WEAR) (Kotzebue)
- Dr. Raime Fronstin, Wildlife Biologist, WEAR (Kotzebue)

Others:

- Morgan Urquia, Wild Salmon Center (Anchorage)

Welcome of new and reappointed Council members:

Council Coordinator Hutchinson-Scarborough welcomed newly appointed Council members Clyde Ramoth and Enoch Shiedt (who had been off for a year) and reappointed members Robert Schaeffer and Wilbur Howarth.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

These reports were presented before action items until quorum was established.

Elmer Armstrong of Noorvik provided a seasonal update and shared experiences from his family's hunting and gathering activities. He mentioned successful geese hunting in Schultz Bay, the challenges of plucking geese, and the abundance of nets for whitefish, despite not putting his own net out due to thickening ice. Member Armstrong discussed the late arrival of caribou and the joy of seeing younger generations participate in hunting. He recounted a humorous incident of sending his son out on a snowmachine with low fuel and then assisting him with gas. Member Armstrong reflected on teaching his sons hunting and meat preparation skills, highlighting the importance of passing down traditional knowledge. Overall, he described a rich subsistence lifestyle focused on harvesting game and gathering berries.

Verne Cleveland of Noorvik mentioned he is also the Chairman of Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) working group, and he enjoys being outdoors and hunting. He reported that recently he was out hunting and saw two caribou, one female and one male; they were going north, but he let them go, because he is concerned about the declining numbers and hopes that there will be more returning next year. He came home with nothing, 100 gallons of gas used. Member Cleveland shared details of his experiences hunting in a changing environment marked by fewer caribou sightings and significant natural disturbances like landslides and erosion due to heavy rains. He reflected on the impact of global warming on caribou migration patterns, noting the challenge of adapting to late arrivals and rutting behavior among older bulls. Member Cleveland also mentioned the hardships faced by hunters, including accidents and theft of harvested meat, highlighting the complexities of subsistence living amidst environmental shifts. Despite these challenges, he remains optimistic about the eventual return of caribou populations and emphasizes the need for responsible management to sustain their traditional way of life.

Wilbur Howarth of Noorvik report shared insights into his family's subsistence activities and environmental observations. He humorously mentioned an incident involving Member Cleveland's auger and emphasizes the traditional method of using "*tuuk*" to set nets under the ice. Member Howarth discussed his background as a reindeer herder and highlights the relationship between caribou and reindeer, noting their feeding habits and migration patterns. He said they both feed on grasses and lichens, but it takes lichen eight years or so to grow, so if the lichen is eaten up, the caribou will go elsewhere. He also touched on the challenges posed by climate change, such as high-water levels affecting moose habitat and caribou migrations. He reported that there are a lot of moose in the lower delta of the Lower Kobuk, but the past two years there was so much high water during the fall due to lots of rain, and the moose were hard to find because they were way up in the timber area lines. Wilbur's former involvement with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), experience in building

infrastructure like bridges, and his role as a subsistence advisor for NANA demonstrate his commitment to balancing development with environmental conservation, particularly in relation to caribou migration routes and fish habitats.

Michael Kramer of Kotzebue reported that he didn't get out much this year due to single-parenting responsibilities for his 3-year-old son. He did manage to engage in subsistence activities with his son, like berry picking, hunting for ducks, and also got a few salmon. He mentioned his son's enthusiasm for outdoor activities like trapping and duck calling. Despite not going caribou hunting himself, he provided fuel and ammunition for his older sons to hunt, resulting in him getting a caribou. He also mentioned concerns about caribou migration and shared experiences from the Upper Noatak region where others had successful hunts. He and his brother set out a beluga net and his brother got one. He briefly mentioned a personal incident with his son getting burns and being medevacked, emphasizing the challenges and importance of healthcare access in remote areas like Kotzebue.

Clyde Ramoth of Selawik, a new member of the Council, provided a brief report on subsistence activities in Selawik. He mentioned declining numbers of fish, caribou, and moose, attributing this decline to predation and climate change. Member Ramoth highlighted the importance of traditional ecological knowledge (TEK) and suggested considering changes to regulations, such as adjusting hunting seasons due to warmer temperatures. He concluded his report by expressing gratitude and thanks for being able to serve on the Council.

Robert Schaeffer of Kotzebue highlighted his deep concern about the impact of climate change on various aspects of the environment and subsistence activities. He noted increased rainfall affecting wood quality and concerns about salmon spawning due to high water levels. He also expressed concern about permafrost melting and its consequences such as the effects of methane and carbon emissions on the atmosphere. Additionally, he mentioned severe storms and their impact on sea mammals like seals. His observations underscore the significant challenges faced by communities in adapting to these changes and the need for proactive preparation.

Enoch Shiedt of Kotzebue reported on the intricate dynamics of subsistence living in the face of environmental changes. He noted a bounty of salmonberries but limited growth of blueberries due to adverse ice conditions, highlighting the delicate balance required for successful berry harvesting. In terms of subsistence harvest, there is an increase in catches of *oogruk*, seals, and beluga, showcasing the community's adaptability to shifting resource availability. Member Shiedt also discussed the delayed salmon runs attributed to global warming, impacting fishing schedules. Interestingly, Arctic char and trout are arriving earlier than usual, possibly indicating broader ecological shifts. The challenges of caribou hunting emerge, with altered migration patterns possibly influenced by external factors like hunting pressures and transportation activities. Moreover, he observed significant changes in river conditions due to high water levels and erosion, affecting navigation and fishing practices. Through it all, Member Shiedt's report underscores a deep-rooted cultural pride, urging the preservation of traditional knowledge and practices amidst evolving environmental realities.

Raymond Woods of Shungnak provided a regional report highlighting concerns about outside hunters and transporters affecting caribou migration and traditional hunting practices. He stressed the importance of cultural knowledge in subsistence activities and expressed frustration with corporate influences and regulatory decisions impacting hunting and land use.

Chair Report: Thomas Baker of Kotzebue kept his report concise to accommodate the limited time for addressing all agenda items. He noted that the Council members' reports comprehensively addressed the conditions related to caribou, salmon, and moose over the past year. He expressed gratitude to all Council members for their presence at the All-Council Meeting in Anchorage and commended their active participation.

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Shiedt, to adopt the agenda with the following changes:

- Add a member nomination to work on a joint four-Council letter regarding WACH caribou.
- Add discussion on other joint Council letters.
- Add service award presentation.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Service Award:

Member Verne Cleveland of Noorvik received his ten-year service award. Sarah Creachbaum, member of the Federal Subsistence Board and Alaska Regional Director for the National Park Service presented his award.

Election of Officers:

- Member Ramoth nominated Thomas Baker; member Kramer nominated Enoch Shiedt, and member Howarth nominated Michael Kramer as chair. Baker and Kramer accepted their nomination; member Shiedt declined the nomination.

The election was conducted through anonymous voting pole led by Hutchinson and Wessels.

Thomas Baker was elected Chair on a 5 to 3 vote.

- Member Armstrong nominated Michael Kramer as Vice Chair; Michael accepted the nomination.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

- Member Armstrong nominated Clyde Ramoth as Secretary; Clyde accepted the nomination.

The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

- *Motion* by Member Cleveland, seconded by Member Armstrong, to approve the fall 2023 meeting minutes as presented.

Minutes were approved with no changes on an 8 to 0 vote (1 member abstained because he was not on the Council at the time when the fall 2023 meeting took place)

FY 2023 Annual Report:

Ms. Hutchinson provided the Council with an overview of their draft FY 2023 annual report and requested feedback on any changes that they may have.

- *Motion* by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Cleveland, to approve the FY 2023 annual report with no modifications.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Action Items:

Deferred wildlife proposal(s)

WP24-28: Reduction in the caribou harvest limit in Units 21D, 22, 23,24, and 26A; to four caribou per year person one of which may be a cow.

WP24-29: Reduction in the caribou harvest limit in Unit 23 to four caribou per year person one of which may be a cow.

These proposals were discussed and voted on during an earlier meeting with four Councils: Northwest Arctic, North Slope, Seward Peninsula, and Western Interior, during a joint session at the All-Council Meeting in Anchorage on March 7, and the Council took the following action:

- The Council voted to support WP24-28/29 with modification to exclude the eastern portion of Unit 26A from the harvest limit reductions and to change the harvest limit to 15 caribou/year, only one of which may be a cow, in Units 21D remainder, 24B remainder, 24C, 24D, 22, 23, and 26A.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Regulatory Proposals

Development of Regulatory Fish and Shellfish Proposals

Karen Hyer, OSM Fisheries Biologist, and Dr. Hannah Voorhees, OSM Anthropologist, informed the Council about the upcoming Federal subsistence fish and shellfish regulatory call for proposals for the 2025 – 2027 regulatory years. The Council did not develop any subsistence fisheries proposals at the time of the meeting.

Selection of Volunteer Participants for Development of FRMP Priority Information Needs

Members Howarth, Kramer, Ramoth, Shiedt, and Woods volunteered to serve on the working group to develop Priority Information Needs for the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program for the Northern Region. Some potential project needs mentioned by Council members at the meeting included: population studies of Chum Salmon, Char, and Sheefish; temperature monitoring of local streams; and causes and effects on fish of the copper coloring of rivers.

Reappointments for Kobuk Valley and Cape Krusenstern Subsistence Resource Commissions.

Emily Creek, Subsistence Coordinator and Anthropologist for the Western Arctic National Parklands informed the Council that terms of two members (Merle Custer and Rosa Horner) of the Kobuk Valley National Park Subsistence Resource Commission (KOVA) and three members (Enoch Adams, Enoch Shiedt, and Alex Whiting) of the Cape Krusenstern National Monument Subsistence Resource Commission (CAKR) had expired and that all five were qualified and all desired to be reappointed.

- *Motion* by Member Cleveland, seconded by Member Ramoth, to re-appoint Merle Custer and Rosa Horner to the KOVA SRC.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

- *Motion* by Member Armstrong, seconded by Member Ramoth, to re-appoint Enoch Adams, Enoch Shiedt, and Alex Whiting to the CAKR SRC.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed their Fall 2024 meeting dates and location: October 28-29 in Kotzebue. The Council selected their Winter 2025 meeting date and location: March 27-28 in Kotzebue. The Council selected their Fall 2025 meeting date and location: October 27-28 in Kotzebue.

Public and Tribal Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

No public or Tribal comments were received.

Other Business:

Charter Review:

Ms. Hutchinson, OSM Council Coordinator, provided an update on the 2023 Council charter changes. The Council asked what is next with young leader member non-voting seat appointment and do they need a letter of interest or an application. Some suggestions and questions were made regarding how the youth members can be appointed.

Mr. Ramoth inquired whether there was a requirement for a letter of interest from the young individuals before their appointment to the Council or Federal Subsistence Board. Mr. Kramer suggested that the process of selecting youth representatives should involve the tribes, allowing them to choose individuals who will represent them well. He emphasized that this method would ensure that the chosen youth are appropriately selected and would streamline the selection process for both the Councils and the Board. Ms. Wessels explained that due to the recent Charter changes, there hasn't been enough time to finalize the exact steps for the appointment process with the Department of the Interior. She mentioned that typically, becoming a Council member involves filling out an application or being nominated by an organization. However, for the new process, they might use the same obligations as current members, or the individuals could simply submit a letter of interest. The details are still being worked out, and it is possible that the Councils will be involved in the selection, potentially using existing nominations committees.

In reference to future Charter changes, Mr. Schaeffer suggested that the powers of the Chair, Vice-Chair, and Secretary need to be clearly defined within the Charter. He stressed the importance of this clarity to ensure that their roles are well understood, particularly when signing documents on behalf of the group. This measure would provide necessary protection and accountability for those holding these positions.

FSB membership Proposed Rule:

After a long discussion about the Department of the Interior proposed rule to add three public members to the Federal Subsistence Board, the Council decided to not submit a letter from the Council but instead to submit comments as individuals if desired. Ms. Hutchinson agreed to email information to the Council members on how to submit comments.

D-1 lands discussion:

The ANCSA 17(d)(1) withdrawals draft EIS focused on thoroughly assessing impacts to resources that could occur because of opening subject lands. An overview of the EIS was presented to the Council during the fall 2023 meeting. Although the public comment period ended February 14, 2024, the Council at this meeting (winter 2024) had a lengthy discussion about the potential of BLM opening of the ANCSA (d)(1) lands to industrial development. Council members overall had shared sentiment regarding the necessity of protecting these lands to maintain their ecological integrity and cultural significance.

Joint Council action items:

The Council discussed and made decisions on the following:

Quadrilateral Working Group:

The Council acted on deferred Wildlife Proposals WP24-28/29 in a joint session with the Seward Peninsula, Western Interior Alaska, and Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Councils held on Thursday, March 7, 2024, during the All-Council Meeting. The Council discussed and carried over an action item to nominate a member from each Council to serve on a quadrilateral working group to write a letter to the Board and Alaska Board of Game with united concerns about the WACH.

- *Motion* by member Ramoth seconded by Mr. Shiedt, to appoint Verne Cleveland to represent the Council to a working group comprised of members from the North Slope, Seward Peninsula, Western Interior Alaska, and Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Councils, to draft a letter to the Federal Subsistence Board and Alaska Board of Game with shared concerns and recommendations over the population decline of the Western Arctic Caribou. Member Cleveland declined due to conflict of interest as he is a member of the WACH working group. Member Shiedt then nominated Chair Baker; Member Kramer seconded. Chair Baker accepted.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Joint Council letters of concern to the Board:

- *The Council* supported a joint-Council letter to address caribou issues statewide. There was not a completed draft of the letter to review at the time of the meeting, only bullet points developed from the all-council meeting.

The Council unanimously agreed that Chair Baker will represent the Council when the work of writing the letter takes place and would represent the Council's interests.

- *Motion* by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Howarth, to support a joint-Council letter to the Board to address bycatch and interception of subsistence resources in commercial fisheries in the Gulf of Alaska and the Bering Sea.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

- *Motion* by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Howarth, to support a joint-Council transmittal letter to the Board with a request to elevate to the Secretary of the Interior for fair Council member time compensation.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Agency Reports:

A prior meeting notice informed the public that due to the shortened time allotted for the meeting, that any Agency or other reports submitted would be presented in written form only.

Closing Comments:

Council members expressed gratitude for the opportunity to attend the All-Council Meeting, appreciating the insightful discussions and contributions from various Councils. They also extended thanks to staff and fellow Council members for facilitating a short yet productive Council meeting, highlighting significant topics such as bycatch and encouraged residents of the region to provide caribou harvest reports, and acknowledging the valuable contributions and support of all attendees and staff.

Member Cleveland made *motion* to adjourn.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:49 p.m. on March 7, 2024.

Lisa Hutchinson-Scarborough, DFO
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

Thomas Baker, Chair
Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

This version of the meeting minutes was certified by the Chair, May 30, 2024. The final meeting minutes will be approved by the Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council at its October 28-29, 2024 meeting in Kotzebue, and signed by the Chair at that meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcripts, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Or call Lisa Hutchinson-Scarborough, Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-310-4097; email: lisa_hutchinson@fws.gov.