

**NORTHWEST ARCTIC, NORTH SLOPE, WESTERN INTERIOR
ALASKA, AND SEWARD PENINSULA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL
ADVISORY COUNCILS
Meeting Minutes**

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

Invocation:

Raymond Woods provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

*Asterisk * identifies if present via teleconference.*

The meeting was called to order on Friday, March 7, 2024, at 8:27 a.m. In attendance were the following members from their respective Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils:

- From the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, Members Baker, Woods, Schaeffer, Kramer, Shiedt, Armstrong, Cleveland, Howarth, and Ramoth. With nine of the ten seated members in attendance, quorum was established by this Council.
- From the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory (NSRAC) Council, Members Kippi, Frantz, Williams, and Adams*. With four of the seven seated members in attendance, quorum was established by this Council.
- From the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (WIRAC), Members Reakoff, Walker, Pelkola, Vent Sr., and Gervais. With five of the nine seated members in attendance, quorum was established by this Council.
- From the Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Members Reynolds, Moses, Seetot Jr., and Green Jr. With four of the nine seated members in attendance the council did not establish quorum and could not participate in any votes during this joint session.

Upon the agreement of participating Council members, Thomas Baker, Chair of the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council chaired the meeting.

Attendees:

*Asterisk * identifies if present via teleconference.*

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Ameer Howard, Lisa Grediagin, Thomas Plank, Dr. Hannah Voorhees, Katerina Wessels, Nissa Pilcher, Lisa Hutchinson, Gisela Chapa
- National Park Service (NPS): Kyle Joly*, Emily Creek
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Geoff Byersdorf

- Public: Roll call for the public was not done at the meeting.

Review and Adopt Agenda:

- Motion by Member Reakoff, seconded by Member Shiedt, to adopt the agenda as written.

The motion **passed** unanimously.

Action Items:

Deferred wildlife proposal

WP24-28/29: Reduce caribou harvest limit to 4 per year, only one of which may be a cow in Units 21D, 22, 23, 24, and 26A (WP24-28) and in Unit 23 only (WP24-29).

Tom Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist, and Dr. Hannah Voorhees, OSM Anthropologist, presented the analysis for Wildlife Proposals WP24-28/29.

During the Councils' discussion, Council members commented on the importance of having the four Regional Advisory Councils together to discuss the proposal and the potential impacts on the communities they represent. Given the large range of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) and impacts of any regulatory changes, this joint session supported collaborative decision-making across Council regions. They further recommended OSM to have these meetings more frequently because caribou are an important resource, and they emphasized the need to continue to work together. Council members also expressed dissatisfaction over the State not being present to address questions or be part of the discussion in this meeting.

The Councils expressed their concern over competition between federally qualified subsistence users, non-federally qualified users, and nonresident sport hunters while the WACH population is in decline. As a result, they proposed the creation of a working group comprised of members from each of the four Councils in attendance to draft a letter to the Federal Subsistence Board and Alaska Board of Game with recommendations to address their concerns. The nomination of a member from each Council to form this working group was decided at each of the Councils' individual 2024 winter meetings.

- Motion from Member Frantz, seconded by Member Reakoff, to support WP24-28 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. Specifically, the harvest limit reductions would apply to Unit 26A, west of the Coleville River drainage upstream from the Nuka River and drainages of the Chucki Sea, south and west of and including the Kuk and Kugrua river drainages.

For the Northwest Arctic RAC, the motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

For the North Slope RAC, the motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

For the Western Interior Alaska RAC, the motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

The Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council did not have a quorum at the time of the joint four-council meeting and had to have an additional discussion of WP24-28/29 and make their recommendation during their individual 2024 winter Council meeting, held March 8, 2024, in Anchorage, Alaska (see Seward Peninsula Council meeting minutes for March 8, 2024).

Justification: The Councils developed a joint recommendation and justification supporting the modifications the Alaska Board of Game made on similar State regulatory proposals. A limit of 15 caribou per year represents a significant reduction from five per day. A harvest limit of 15 caribou per year would not represent a Federal subsistence priority, but it would prevent State regulations from being more restrictive than Federal regulations. A Federal subsistence priority is important and there should be cuts elsewhere before federally qualified subsistence users are further restricted. For example, the nonresident hunt should be eliminated, commercial services should be suspended, and predator control should increase.

Hunters do not always try to get fifteen caribou per year, but it is important to have the option so that “super hunters” can continue to provide for those in need. The exclusion of the eastern portion of Unit 26A is due to the reliance of North Slope residents on the Teshekpuk and Central Arctic herds, and this harvest limit would unnecessarily restrict harvest on these herds. The higher harvest limit could potentially contribute to greater reduction of cow harvest because fewer hunters filling their individual harvest limit would be needed to provide caribou for communities. The allowance of one cow is meant for accidental harvest, to avoid criminalizing hunters. Although some Council members would like to see greater reductions, they support this harvest limit currently. The Councils felt there may be additional causes of the herd decline that are not yet understood, and which should receive greater attention by researchers.

Public and Tribal Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

No public or Tribal comments were received.

The meeting was adjourned at 12:32pm on March 7, 2024.

Katerina Wessels, DFO
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

Thomas Baker, Chair
Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

A certification request for these DRAFT minutes was sent to the Chair on 05/29/2024.

These minutes will be formally considered by the four Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils at their next meetings.

- Northwest Arctic RAC: October 28 – 29, 2024 in Kotzebue.
- North Slope RAC: August 19 – 20, 2024 in Utqiagvik.
- Western Interior Alaska RAC: October 2 – 3, 2024 in Galena.
- Seward Peninsula RAC: October 24 – 25, 2024 in Nome.

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 Katerina Wessels at 1-800-478-1456 or (907) 786-3885, email katerina_wessels@fws.gov.