

WESTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Larson Charlie Community Center
Galena, AK
October 2–3, 2024

Invocation:

Jenny Pelkola provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order Wednesday, October 2, 2024, at 9:24 am. Council Chair Jack Reakoff, and Council members Tommy Kriska, Jenny Pelkola, and Robert Walker were present in person. Council members Timothy Gervais, Darrell Vent, and Donald Honea, Jr. attended telephonically, and Member Pollock Simon, Sr. was absent and excused. The Council has two vacant seats. With seven out of eight seated Council members present, quorum was established.

Attendees:

*Asterisk * identifies if present via teleconference.*

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Regional Office – Rebecca Shaftel*; Central Yukon Field Office – Erin Julianus*, Geoff Beyersdorf*
- National Park Service (NPS): Regional Office – Eva Patton*; Gates of the Arctic (GAAR) National Park and Preserve (NPP) – Marcy Okada*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): Regional Office – Jill Klein*, Karlin Itchoak; Kuskokwim/Nowitna/Innoko National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex – Douglas Calvin, Jeremy Havener, Maria Cleaver; Kanuti NWR – Clayton Merrill, Joanna Fox*, Tina Moran*, Chris Harwood*, Alex Michaels*; Yukon Delta NWR – Laurie Boeck*, Aaron Moses*; Arctic NWR – Tim Knudsen*; Fisheries Division – Holly Carroll*, Shane Ransbury*; Refuge Law Enforcement – Cody Smith*, Jared Long*
- Department of the Interior, Office of Policy, Management and Budget (DOI PMB): Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy and Environmental Management, Office of the Secretary Eric Werwa*,
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Brent Vickers, Cory Graham, Liz Williams, Nissa Pilcher, Crystal Ciisquq Leonetti*, Katerina Wessels*, Brian Ubelaker*, Lisa Grediagin*, Kristen Morrow*, Brooke McDavid*, Gisela Chapa*, Orville Lind*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Sport Fisheries Division – Lisa Stuby*; Commercial Fisheries Division – Deena Jallen*, Christy Gleason*, Sam Decker*, David

Runfolla*, Matt Olson*; Subsistence Division; Brooke Fisher*; Wildlife Conservation Division – Jordan Pruszenski*, Glenn Stout*, Justin Jensen*, Brooklyn Davis

- Other Organizations: Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) Tribal Resource Stewardship Division (TRSD), Diloolaa Erickson; Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC), Kevin Whitworth*; Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA), Serena Fitka*
- Public: Chief Charlie Green, Colleen Stickman, Fred Huntington, Bob Rebarchik, Ross Martin

Election of Officers:

Officers elected at this meeting are to serve as officers at this meeting. Officer elections for the next year will be conducted during the winter 2025 meeting.

Jack Reakoff was re-elected the Council's Chair

Jenny Pelkola was re-elected the Council's Vice Chair

Darrell Vent, Sr. was re-elected the Council's Secretary

Review and Adopt Agenda:

- Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Kriska, to adopt the agenda with the following changes. The motion passed unanimously.
 - Shift *Public and Tribal Comments* before **Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes**
 - Shift *Council Training and Briefing on proposed changes to Wildlife Delegation of Authority Letters* after **Action Items**
 - Add *FWS Yukon Delta NWR Report* and *ADF&G Central Arctic Caribou Herd Update* under **Reports**

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda items

Colleen Stickman, Nulato, expressed concern over trespass issues on private property around Nulato. Ms. Stickman noted that proper signage had been in place to notify of private property that was ignored, and she felt there was a lack of concern by local public safety officers when the community made their concerns known.

Fred Huntington, Galena, expressed concern over what will happen when hunting is opened on the Wood Bison herd in the Grayling, Anvik, Shageluk, Holy Cross Subregion (GASH), as the herd resides mostly on Doyon land, and he is concerned with who will be tasked with enforcement when that time comes.

Ross Martin, Fairbanks, introduced himself as being a PhD student at the Yale School of the Environment. He informed the Council he was looking into trying to find a way to bridge the gap between what is being researched and what local priorities are in terms of subsistence issues in his studies. Mr. Martin stated that he is looking forward to reviewing past Council transcripts to shed some light on local priorities and learn about how subsistence issues have evolved over time, which are being solved, which remain problems, and how ecological circumstances are changing.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

- Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Kriska, to approve the winter 2024 meeting minutes with the following correction. The motion passed unanimously.

Update Member Gervais' report to say that he “*disagrees with the Solicitor’s interpretation on jurisdictional issues, on whether subsistence users under ANILCA or Alaska Natives under ANCSA can make claims against harvesting of salmon in commercial fisheries, while subsistence resources and escapement goals are not being met*”.

- Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Walker, to approve the All-Council winter 2024 meeting minutes. The motion passed unanimously.
- Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Pelkola, to approve the minutes from the Quadilateral Council Meeting regarding the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Tim Gervais of Ruby informed the Council that the past week the Gulf of Alaska trawl fleet was closed due to exceeding the quota for both Chinook and Chum salmon, but not catching even 50% of the pollock allocated to the fishery, which is a good representation of how much biomass these trawling boats can quickly catch. He expressed concern over potential regulatory changes the North Pacific Fishery Management Council may enact to circumvent this closure moving forward, and is interested to see what will happen with the genetic data that was required to be collected from each of the salmon caught. Member Gervais also expressed concern over the downward trend of salmon weighs in many commercial fisheries across the state, and the lack of genetic knowledge when it comes to intercept and high seas fisheries. He stated he was leery of the disruption that OSM and Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils will face in the move out of the FWS. Member Gervais finalized his report by noting that the applications were just recently due for the 2020–2021 Statewide Salmon Disaster Relief funds, and that while the money that will be distributed will provide relief, all of the agencies involved in this process need to understand that the payouts do not replace the value of having a functioning multi specie salmon runs, and that the subsistence process is more than just the number of fish caught.

Jenny Pelkola of Galena reported that she had a busy summer, although it busy with family activities and she was not busy catching salmon as that was closed on the Yukon this summer. She noted that the community was thankful that they were getting salmon from Bristol Bay, but it was a different kind of salmon that couldn't be prepared in the same ways, and she is hopeful that she will be able to just have a taste of Chinook Salmon just one more time during her lifetime. Member Pelkola noted that there was a lot of moose tracks around town, but that her and her husband were not able to get one this year. Member Pelkola finalized her report by expressing concern that Council members were still not getting honorarium in the face of the issues that the Council is having with getting and retaining members.

Tommy Kriska of Nulato reported that he is concerned with the lack of subsistence fishing opportunity for the communities on the Yukon again this summer, and that he is worried that the monetary gain of commercial fishermen is considered more important than subsistence users in Alaska. He also expressed concern that people will become complacent with receiving salmon as handouts instead of fishing themselves and drew parallels to the results of the decimation of the bison on the Great Plains and the ongoing salmon population crash in the Yukon and Kuskokwim rivers. Member Kriska reported that nonlocal hunters have been using traditional hunting grounds near Nulato, and they are leaving items and trash behind – he noted that the hunters may believe they are stashing items for next season or leaving behind useful items they believe will be picked up by someone else, but this is still considered littering. He reported that there was a lack of enforcement and instances of nonlocal hunters not taking requests to vacate private property seriously, and that an actual human presence from Doyon and Gan’A Yoo on Corporation lands would work far better than ‘private property’ signs. Member Kriska finalized his report saying that more young people from tribes were going to college, the tribes weren’t going anywhere so he believes one day things will change.

Donald Honea, Jr. of Ruby reported that he was concerned over the discrepancies between the preseason salmon numbers for the Yukon summer Chum run and what the season looked like. He recalled that for the years preceding the current salmon population crash, that everyone assumed that there would always be summer and fall Chum [Salmon] even if there were no kings [Chinook Salmon]. Member Honea expressed concern over the lack of input on the Council from the mid and upper Kuskokwim with the resignation of Member Whitworth. He noted that the moose population around Ruby seemed to be good, especially around the Novi [Nowitna River], and many community members were able to harvest a moose especially in the later part of the season. He finalized his report by saying that more education effort should be made to ensure people knew that native allotments and other tribal lands were considered private property.

Robert Walker of Anvik reported that he has been working with other tribes with assistance from TCC in the GASH to draft a resolution seeking the creation of a controlled use area (CUA) in Unit 21A to exclude hunting for moose with aircraft in a portion of Unit 21A for submission to the Alaska Board of Game (BOG), and he is hopeful that he can bring that forward at the next Council meeting. He relayed to the Council that there were some subsistence fishing openers this summer, for which he was grateful as people were able to put up a few jars of salmon for the winter and that TCC had helped by sending [Sockeye] Salmon to the villages, but that it is a really dry fish and it was hard to figure out how to preserve and prepare it. Member Walker noted that he attended and testified at the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) on his support of a proposal that sought to modify the Area M commercial fishery to hopefully allow more western salmon stocks back to their natal rivers, but that it ultimately failed. He expressed concern over the status of the experimental herd of wood bison in the GASH, as there is no set plan to give any subsistence priority to the tribes in the region, and that he does not believe that what the tribes and ADF&G agreed to prior to the wood bison release is being adhered to.

Darrell Vent, Sr. of Huslia reported that he was frustrated that subsistence does not seem to be an actual priority, and that rural people are struggling with meeting their subsistence needs. He noted that the definition of what is and who practices subsistence is all jumbled up between the State and Federal governments, and that it is concerning to see the expensive boats coming down the river from Fairbanks and other large cities practicing ‘subsistence’ while the people that live in that area are struggling. He noted that first the caribou went, then the salmon, and now it looks like the moose are not far behind, that it is impossible to harvest or preserve what isn’t there anymore. Member Vent stated that one can see the changes when attending potlatches as most of the food that is brought is store bought and no longer Native food. Member Vent finalized his report by expressed concern that the CUA around Huslia is doing more harm than good by bringing in more people on boats, hunters that never seem to have the amount of meat in the boat to match the antlers they are displaying once they go through the check station.

Jack Reakoff of Wiseman reported that he was concerned that actions taken by the BOG showed no consideration to any of the Fish and Game Advisory Committee’s comments during their March 2024 Interior Region meeting, which he stated is an ongoing issue with both the BOG and the BOF. He expressed concern over actions taken by the BOG concerning non-resident harvest limits and resident season dates of caribou in the Central Arctic Caribou Herd range. Chair Reakoff also gave a brief explanation of the regional Subsistence Resource Commissions (SRC), as he sits as the vice chair of the GAAR SRC, and activities that the GARR SRC has recently been engaged with. He relayed that he had taken part in a spring conference call on the transference of the OSM out of the FWS into the DOI PMB, and that he still had concerns over what will happen when administrations change. Chair Reakoff informed the Council he had also taken part in the Priority Information Needs for fisheries teleconference for the Yukon this summer, as well as in communication with the BLM over concern in lifting the PL51-50, which he noted this Council has registered its opposition of. Chairman Reakoff finalized his report by informing the Council on animal populations and movement in the subregion where he resides.

Action Items

Fisheries Proposals and Closure Reviews

Regional

FP25-16: Kanuti River and Bonanza Creek Gear Types and Harvest Limits

The Council supports FP25-16. Poor salmon returns on the Yukon River have shifted effort to local, non-salmon species. This proposal will benefit subsistence users without negatively impacting grayling populations.

- Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Pelkola, to support fisheries proposal FP25-16 as written. The motion passed unanimously.

Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Region

FP25-15: Kuskokwim River Set Gillnet Restrictions to Align with State

The Council opposes FP25-15. The Council felt that the proposed distance between set nets is very close, and that while this distance would work in some limited instances and topographies, it is not a regulation

that the Council feels should be drainage wide. The Council noted that as this fishery is typically conducted under federal management and that having this regulation in place in areas that have a higher population would be detrimental to subsistence and noted that the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Regional Advisory Council was also in opposition to this proposal.

- Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Pelkola, to support fisheries proposal FP25-15 as written. The motion failed unanimously.

Eastern Interior Region

FP25-17: Delta River Add Rod and Reel with Limits Matching State

The Council took **no action** on FP25-17 and requested that the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) **defer to the recommendation of the Eastern Interior Council.**

FCR23-05: Delta River All Fish *deferred*

The Council took **no action** on FCR23-05 and requested that the Board **defer to the recommendation of the Eastern Interior Council.**

FCR25-02: Nome Creek Arctic Grayling

The Council took **no action** on FCR25-02 and requested that the Board **defer to the recommendation of the Eastern Interior Council.**

2026 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and Priority Information Needs (PINs) development

Cory Graham, OSM Fisheries Biologist, and Liz Williams, OSM Cultural Anthropologist, presented the draft lists of PINs for the Kuskokwim Area and Yukon Area to the Council. The Council was informed that the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (YKDRAC) made a slight amendment to the Kuskokwim Area list to add Sockeye Salmon and other nonsalmon fish species to some of the PINs.

- Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Kriska, to approve the Yukon PINs. The motion passed unanimously.
- Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Walker, to approve the Kuskokwim PINs as amended by the YKDRAC. The motion passed unanimously.

Annual Report

Review FY2023 Draft Annual Report Reply Summary from the Board

Nissa Pilcher, OSM Council Coordinator, briefly reviewed the Council's FY23 Annual Report, provided an overview of the Board's replies to the Council's FY-2023 Annual Report topics. She informed the Council a final version will be sent to the Council after the meeting as soon as it is ready.

Identify Issues for FY2024 Annual Report to the Board

The Council identified the following issues to include in their FY2024 annual report:

1. Request to have OSM review how they could create a fish commission.

2. Request the Board form a Memorandum of Understanding between the Department of Commerce, the Department of the Interior, and the Department of Agriculture concerning commercial fishing.
3. Request more information be provided to the Council on salmon genetic work in the Gulf of Alaska, the Bering Sea, and state managed intercept fisheries such as Area M.
4. Request that the Board assist in whatever means available to address the Council's concerns over the escalating numbers of hunters going into Unit 21A and observed poor salvage, such as allocating funds to increase federal enforcement into this Unit during the fall moose season.
5. Continued concern that subsistence users are bearing the brunt of salmon conservation.
6. Continued concern over the lack of data available on Yukon and Kuskokwim drainage non salmon populations due to the continued subsistence reliance on them.
7. Continued efforts to finalize the Council's Sheep Harvest Management Guidelines.
8. Concern over how recent BOG regulatory actions on caribou in Unit 26A will negatively impact subsistence users.

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed its winter 2025 meeting dates as February 25–26 in McGrath, with alternate location being Fairbanks.

The Council confirmed its fall 2025 meeting dates as October 7–8 in Fairbanks, with alternate location being Huslia.

Correspondence

During the meeting the Council voted to send the following correspondence:

- A letter to OSM concerning the inclusion of Regional Advisory Councils in the revision process when communicating with the BOG and BOF.
- A letter to the Alaska Department of Public Safety concerning the topic of trespass on private property.
- A letter to SeaShare to encourage ways to return salmon bycatch to Yukon and Kuskokwim villages for distribution.

Council Training; Delegation of Authority Letters

Mr. Graham presented information on delegated authority, specifically an overview of what it is, where and how to find information on delegated authority, and outline Council and user's involvement in delegated authority.

Briefing on Proposed Changes to Wildlife Delegation of Authority Letters

Brian Ubelaker, OSM Wildlife Biologist, presented the Council with information about upcoming proposed changes to wildlife delegation of authority letters.

Reports

The Council received updates on the following topics:

- Louden Village Update presented by Louden First Chief Charlie Green
- TCC TRSD Update and TCC Fisheries Program Report presented by Diloolo Erickson, TRSD Director
- Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission Report presented by Kevin Whitworth, KRITFC Director
- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association Report by Serena Fitka, YRDFFA Executive Director
- Yukon River Subsistence Fishing Update Presented by Holly Carroll, FWS Yukon River Subsistence Fishery Manager, Deena Jallen and Christy Gleason, both ADF&G Yukon Fisheries Biologists
- ADF&G Central Arctic Caribou Herd Report presented by Jordan Pruszenski, Wildlife Biologist
- FWS Kanuti NWR Update presented by Clayton Merrill, Subsistence Specialist
- FWS Kanuti NWR Complexing Update presented by Karlin Itchoak, Assistant Regional Director
- FWS Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko NWR update presented by Jeremy Havener, Subsistence Specialist
- FWS Arctic NWR Sheep Survey Effort presented by Tim Knudson, Logistics Coordinator, and Clayton Merrill
- FWS Yukon Delta NWR Update presented by Aaron Moses, Subsistence Specialist
- FWS & BLM Gravel-to-Gravel Initiative Update presented by Rebecca Shaftell, BLM Gravel to Gravel Project Coordinator
- NPS Proposed Rule; Amended Alaska Sport Hunting and Trapping Regulation Update presented by Eva Patton, Subsistence Program Manager
- NPS GAAR NPP and GAAR SRC Update presented by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator, and Matt Cameron, Wildlife Biologist
- BLM Central Yukon Field Office Update presented by Erin Julianus, Wildlife Biologist
- OSM Update presented by Brent Vickers, Anthropology Division Supervisor

Other Business

The Council received briefings on the following topics:

- Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program Update
- 805(c) Report and summary of Board wildlife regulatory actions
- 2025 Council Application and Nomination Open Season
- Correspondence update on status of the Councils previous correspondence as well as other correspondence of interest to the Council from other Councils or entities
- BOF Agenda Change Request/Proposal Status Update
 - Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Kriska, to authorize Member Gervais to speak for the Council at the BOF Work Session on the Council's submitted Agenda Change Request. Motion passed unanimously.
- Proposed move to the use of Declining Balance Cards for Council Member travel

Closing Comments

Member Pelkola expressed her thanks for the meeting and noted that it is very important for members to attend the meeting in person as it makes the meeting run a lot smoother, and that she would like to foster having more interaction between the Councils. She noted her concern over the reports of wanton waste that members and the public commented on.

Member Kriska agreed that there was great benefit to meet with other Councils, and that he does see many individual members outside of formal Council meetings, and that the issue of wanton waste was concerning. He also echoed the sentiment that Council members should make effort to attend meetings in person, that he is a busy person but the topics the Council discusses are very important and connects with all of the Council members other efforts such as Fish and Game Advisory Committees and fish commissions, and noted again his frustration that things didn't seem to be getting better for subsistence users.

Member Walker expressed his thanks towards TCC attending in person, and that he was pleased to see that government-to-government consultations are happening. He expressed concern over the lack of an honorarium for Council members, noting that costs in the village are high, and members are not intending to get rich off the Federal government for receiving compensation for their time, and that this was an ongoing concern that was never fixed the last time he was on the Council. He finalized his comments by noting that the consequences are not stiff enough for those individuals that get trespassing during hunting season, and that is even if they get caught.

Member Gervais expressed his thanks for the community of Galena for hosting the meeting and thanked the Council members and Chair for contributing their knowledge and time, and the Chair for managing and running a good meeting. He noted that the time spent here is important.

Chair Reakoff expressed his appreciation for the Council members that attended the meeting and noted that there were a lot of technological issues with those participating on the phone that resulted in lost time during the meeting. He noted that it is imperative that the Councils get the correct technology to be able to conduct these meetings, and there are different capabilities out there that need to be utilized. He stated he was very pleased by the public attendance and comments received at this meeting. Chair Reakoff conveyed his appreciation for all the efforts of the KRITFC and YRDFA, and that he is seeing good forward movement with the Federal subsistence programs, refuges, and parks on getting the requested information and data that the Councils are asking for. Chairman Reakoff closed out the meeting thanking those in attendance for attending the entire meeting as there are many important issues on the horizon.

Minutes were Chair certified for accuracy on 12/10/2024

Jack Reakoff, Chair

Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its February 2025 meeting in Fairbanks, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

For a more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Nissa Pilcher at 1-800-478-1456 or (907)891-9054 or email nissa_pilcher@ios.doi.gov.