

NORTH SLOPE SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via Teleconference

Anchorage, Alaska

April 1, 2020

Invocation

Gordon Brower gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Wednesday, April 1 at 9:35 am. The meeting was held by teleconference only due to COVID-19 health and safety protocols. Council members Gordon Brower, Steve Oomittuk, Martha Itta, Wanda Kippi, Edward Rexford, Sr., and newly appointed member Peter Earl Williams were present participating by teleconference. William Hopson was not present and was excused. The Council has three vacant seats. A quorum was established with six of seven seated Council members present or participating by phone.

Attendees:

Via teleconference:

- *Office of Subsistence Management, Anchorage:* Eva Patton, Karen Hyer, Hannah Voorhees, Tom Kron, Orville Lind
- *National Park Service, Anchorage:* Joshua Ream
- *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve:* Marcy Okada, Kyle Jolly
- *US Fish and Wildlife Service, Fairbanks:* Vince Mathews; *Anchorage:* Carol Damberg
- *Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Fairbanks:* Steve Berendzen, *Kaktovik:* Will Wiese,
- *Bureau of Land Management, Fairbanks:* Shelly Jones, Debbie Nigro, Matthew Whitman
- *Bureau of Indian Affairs, Anchorage:* Glenn Chen
- *Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Palmer:* Mark Burch; *Utqiagvik:* Carmen Daggett; *Fairbanks:* Brendan Scanlon
- *North Slope Borough Wildlife Department, Utqiagvik:* Brian Person
- *Tikialq Native Village of Point Hope:* Jack Schaeffer

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion #1 by Ms. Itta, seconded by Ms. Kippi, to adopt the agenda as read with the flexibility to shift action items for when quorum was present if Council members got dropped from the call or had to step out to attend to family or emergency community meetings due to COVID-19. The motion #1 passed by unanimous vote.

Election of Officers

Mr. Gordon Brower was elected Council's Chair.

Mr. Steve Oomittuk was elected Council's Vice Chair.

Ms. Wanda Kippi was elected Council's Secretary.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion #2 by Ms. Kippi, seconded by Mr. Rexford, Sr. to approve the October 23-24, 2019 meeting minutes with the following modifications: A correction by Ms. Kippi to her comment on page 5 regarding her netting two whitefish: word "netted" needs to be changed to *niksik* or *niksiksuqing* (the Inupiaq word for jigging). The same correction in the paragraph describing netting Grayling: change "netting" to *niksiksuqing*.

Ms. Itta made a correction to her comment on page 6. Residents of Anaktuvuk Pass did not ask her to represent them but rather asked her to relay to the Council the urgency of having Anaktuvuk Pass representation on the Council. The Secretary of the Interior did not appoint any Anaktuvuk Pass representatives to the Council in 2018. Motion #2 passed by unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Gordon Brower of Utqiagvik reported that it was another slow freeze-up year with warm temperatures in the fall. He usually tries to make it up to his cabin on the river to fish. Others also reported difficulty fishing this year. The warm temperatures and slow freeze up of the lakes and rivers delayed safe setting of under ice nets. Gordon stressed that last year he made around 35 – 40 sacks of fish but it was too warm for them to freeze properly and much of it became fermented. This can make a form of aged or stink fish called *aqaaq* (*auruk* = aged) in Inupiaq that the elders do like, but not everybody eats fish like this, and it is not normally deliberately made this way in such large quantities—he estimated approximately 80% of his catch fermented. Gordon relayed that normally he can safely freeze his fish catch and store it at his cabin until late November when he brings it back to Utqiagvik to distribute in the community for Thanksgiving and to the Church for Christmas. However, this year they had to bring the fish back home to freeze it and thus could only catch so much. Gordon reported that the caribou were abundant around Utqiagvik this year, and people were out hunting this winter. His son caught a caribou and it was fat and healthy.

Concerns still remain about the lack of whale sightings this past fall, and the community of Utqiagvik hopes the whales will return again as normal this spring. People are also concerned about the coronavirus but are out mostly continuing their subsistence activities as they are socially distanced on the land and still need to get food.

Steve Oomittuk of Point Hope reported that the winds have been blowing strong all fall and winter mostly from the South/Southeast, although they recently got some good North winds. Steve highlighted that the winds are an essential part of subsistence hunting for Point Hope. The wind brings in the migration of the

animals, and hunters watch the weather coming in from the mountains and the ocean to know if it will be safe to go out and hunt. A north wind is good for a successful whale hunt. Native Village of Point Hope celebrates the “born of the ice,” and freeze-up was late again this year with ice not solidifying until around Thanksgiving time. Then the cold temperatures set in and it remained 10 to 30 below zero F. all winter. Steve reported that the ice was good and thick this year and there were big pressure ridges close to shore. He highlighted that it had been many years since they had good thick ice like this and it is important breeding grounds for the seals. Hunters have had to hunt in open leads in the ocean in recent years. But this winter, Steve saw seals hauled out on the ice by the hundreds. He noted few polar bears were seen around the village, likely because they were out hunting seals, too. The community usually fishes for *igalugaq/uugak* (tomcods) in January – February, catching up to a couple hundred a day by jigging with hooks, but this year the ice was very thick and a little difficult to get through to the fish. The caribou were plentiful near the community through the fall and winter, but then moved east in the spring. Steve reported that in recent years the weather, seasons, and animal migrations, which are part of the cycle of life they live by, have been all mixed up but overall this had been a good year for subsistence.

Martha Itta of Nuiqsut reported that fishing has been good, not as much as they usually catch, but still enough to meet people’s needs and fewer reports of sick fish this year. At the time of this meeting, people are out fishing for *titaalliq* (Burbot). Martha reported hunters have been successful with caribou and the caribou have been plentiful near the village at this time so they are putting them in the city’s freezers to provide for the community. Hunters are also out now for wolverine and *amaguk’s* (wolves). Usually, with all the industrial traffic around the community, hunters have to travel far to other areas to be successful, and that is a concern because of time and the gas it requires. Martha reported that in the past few weeks with the COVID-19 pandemic, the traffic has been reduced and that has helped as people are still out subsistence hunting.

Wanda Kippi of Atqasuk reported that there have been some caribou around the community and hunters have been out and catching a few. Wanda has not heard reports of hunters catching wolverine, wolf, or fox at this time, and has seen few herself. She noted that usually there are many fox around Atqasuk and it is odd not to see them. Wanda reported things have been pretty quiet in Nuiqsut with people hunkering down due to COVID-19.

Edward (Eddie) Rexford, Sr. of Kaktovik reported that the weather is nice right now and people are out hunting caribou and have been successful. Eddie plans to go to Schrader Lake and do some ice fishing himself. He is also thinking of going moose hunting under the community permit while the weather is good. The US Fish and Wildlife Service permits came through from the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge to allow Rollagons to bring in building modules from Deadhorse across frozen ground to the community as a temporary replacement for the school that burned down this winter. It took a long time to get the permits approved but they are relieved to get the school modules and equipment in to the community now before ice melts and to begin rebuilding the school.

Steve Earl Williams of Anaktuvuk Pass (goes by his middle name Earl) reported that he is pleased to be appointed to the Council and looks forward to serve his community and the region on important

subsistence matters. He reported that there are many caribou around Anaktuvuk Pass this year and people are still out hunting. Many people were out fishing and there had been some cold weather for good ice and snow for winter fishing and hunting activities. He noted much of the community was hunkered down due to COVID-19, but subsistence activities were still ongoing out on the land.

New Business

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Update

Karen Hyer, Fisheries Biologist, and Hannah Voorhees, Anthropologist with the Office of Subsistence Management, presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) update. The Council discussed the FRMP program at length including development of subsistence fisheries research priorities in the region and recommendations for better engaging local communities and tribes in the research. The Council discussed the increasing prevalence of salmon in the region and concerns that Chum Salmon may be displacing their traditional subsistence foods such as whitefish and Char. The Council also made formal recommendations in their fiscal year 2019 annual report topic on FRMP research priorities to include a request that contaminants research and monitoring be eligible for funding under the program.

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Proposals

Karen Hyer informed the Council that the Federal Subsistence Board is accepting proposals through April 20, 2020 to change Federal regulations for the subsistence harvest of fish and shellfish on Federal public lands and waters for the 2021-2023 regulatory years. The Board will consider proposals to change Federal subsistence fish and shellfish seasons, harvest limits, methods, and means related to taking of fish for subsistence uses, as well as customary and traditional use determinations. The Council asked questions about existing regulations and received confirmation that there are very few if any restrictions for subsistence fishing and subsistence harvest of shellfish in the North Slope region. The Council did not have any fisheries proposals to submit at this time.

Review and approve FY2019 annual report

Motion #3 by Ms. Itta, seconded by Mr. Williams, to approve fiscal year 2019 annual report with the addition of a new topic: subsistence community area of influence and subsistence priority, and addition of specific request to the Federal Subsistence Board for FRMP funding to research contaminants in subsistence fisheries. The motion #3 passed by unanimous vote.

Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission appointment

Marcy Okada, Subsistence Program Manager for Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, discussed the Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) appointment process and presented the Council with a letter from the SRC Chair recommending Esther Hugo of Anaktuvuk Pass be re-appointed to continue to serve on the Commission. The Council discussed this with newly appointed Council member Peter Earl Williams from Anaktuvuk Pass, who also supported this recommendation. Motion #4 by Ms. Itta, seconded by Ms. Kippi, to appoint Esther Hugo of

Anaktuvuk Pass to serve on the Gates of the Arctic National Park SRC. Motion #4 passed by unanimous vote.

Agency Reports:

- Jack Schaefer presented the Native Village of Point Hope report
- Steve Berendzen presented the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge report
- Marcy Okada presented the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve report
- Shelly Jones presented the Bureau of Land Management Arctic Field office and NPR-A report
- Carmen Daggett presented the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife Department report
- Brendan Scanlon, Alaska Department of Fish and Game Fisheries, presented the North Slope Dolly Varden and Colville River Arctic Grayling FRMP Project reports
- Tom Kron presented the Office of Subsistence Management report

Future Meeting Dates:

The Council selected August 18-19 for the fall 2020 meeting and November 4-5 as an alternate if COVID-19 restrictions prevent meeting in person in August.

The Council selected February 24-25 for the winter 2021 meeting.

Both meetings will be held in Utqiagvik unless lifting of COVID-19 travel restrictions allow for meeting in a non-hub rural community.

Eva Patton, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

Gordon Brower, Chair
North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2020 meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Eva Patton at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-786-3358, email eva_patton@yahoo.com.