

BRISTOL BAY SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via Teleconference due to COVID-19

February 9, 2021

These minutes are an abbreviated record of the business conducted at this meeting.

For full details, transcripts of this three day meeting are available at:

<https://www.doi.gov/subsistence/library/transcripts/4-bristol-bay>

Invocation

Lary Hill gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Tuesday, February 9, 2021, at 8:41 AM. Council members Dan Dunaway (Acting Chair), Samantha Herrick, Lary Hill, Robert Larson, William Trefon, and Richard Wilson were present via teleconference. The Council has 3 vacant seats. A quorum was established with six of seven seated Council members participating by phone.

Attendees:

Via teleconference

- Chignik InterTribal Coalition: George Anderson
- Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA): Cody Larson
- Bureau of Indian Affairs: Dr. Glenn Chen
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Jon Gerken (Anchorage); Susan Alexander and Danny Moss (Alaska Peninsula and Becharof National Wildlife Refuges (NWR), King Salmon); Frank Harris (Kenai); Vince Mathews (Fairbanks); Kenton Moos, Pat Walsh, and Andy Aderman (Togiak NWR, Dillingham)
- U.S. Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Walter Gusse, Bruce Seppi, and Bonnie Million (Anchorage)
- National Park Service (NPS): Linda Chisholm (Aniakchak National Monument (NM)); Mark Sturm and Leslie Skora (Aniakchak National Monument and Katmai National Park and Preserve (NP&P)); Kim Jochum (Anchorage); Lisa Rupp and Susanne Fleek-Green (Lake Clark NP&P); Troy Hammond (King Salmon); Dylan Patterson and Krista Barts
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Bronwyn Jones (Anchorage); Lee Borden (Dillingham); Mark Burch; Brian Riley (Dillingham); Todd Rinaldi (Palmer); and Rick Merizon.

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM, USFWS): Donald Mike, George Pappas, Orville Lind, Robbin La Vine, Katya Wessels, Steve McFadden, and Jarred Stone
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA, Juneau): Ellen Yasumishi.
- Reporter: Salena Hile

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Wilson, seconded by Mr. Larson, to adopt the agenda as read with the following change:

- Add discussion of brucellosis infection in the Mulchatna Caribou Herd.

The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Officers

The Council held its election of officers for a term of one year.

Nancy Lyon - Chair

Dan Dunaway - Vice Chair

Richard Wilson - Secretary

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Wilson, seconded by Mr. Hill, to approve the Fall 2020 meeting minutes. *The motion passed* unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Robert Larson of Koliganek noted that he didn't have very much to report. He has been gone most of the winter for health reasons, and just got back last week. A few people are getting wolves.

Billy Trefon of Nondalton reported that he is representing the Tribe and wants to discuss extension of the moose and caribou subsistence hunts.

Lary Hill of Iliamna said that he didn't have much to report. They had a few winter season moose that were harvested. Some people are concerned about the brucellosis infection of the Mulchatna caribou, and how you tell if an animal is infected, if they don't show any of the outward signs. There were three to four lake Silvers that were 18-20 inches long and they didn't have anything in their stomach. Their flesh was kind of pink.

Richard Wilson of Naknek noted that they finally go a little snow on the ground and a little ice on the rivers. People are starting to cross to hunt the caribou herd south of the Naknek River. He hasn't heard of any infection of the herd. The Mulchatna caribou were spread out all the way from the west side of Kvichak Bay toward Sugerloaf. He guessed that a couple thousand had crossed the Kvichak a few weeks ago and that they were spread out. Mr. Wilson reported on the ptarmigan population and that ptarmigan

seem to be coming along fairly well. People are seeing flocks of 50 to 100 birds here, and there. He noted that he had a flock of 20 birds come thru his yard every once and a while. Hunters got a few moose in December. Nobody is traveling to Big Creek and Smelt Creek, and few moose have been spotted there.

Samantha Herrick of Pedro Bay noted that she hasn't heard or seen anything that she needs to report. Mr. Trefon asked about wolves. Ms. Herrick noted that she hasn't heard of too much trouble with wolves.

Dan Dunaway (Acting Chair) of Dillingham noted that he was disappointed with the restrictions on the caribou for both the Mulchatna and Nushagak Peninsula Herds. The brucellosis infection is a huge concern, and he is looking forward to discussing it. He thinks that we'll get a report from Togiak NWR on the harvest. He has heard about a few ptarmigan. He noted that Mr. Hill's comments about winter Silver Salmon were interesting and said that people over on the Kenai River were seeing Silver Salmon up into January, but didn't discuss size. We'll get an update on the small herd sizes and more restrictive proposals with the Alaska Board of Game (BOG). He believes that BOG actions are going to be postponed for now.

Acting Chair Dunaway invited public comments

George Anderson from the Chignik InterTribal Coalition noted that they are working to ensure the well-being of their communities and noted that their social and cultural well-being is tied to the health of the lands and waters, which surround them. The abundance of one main subsistence resource has languished the past three years. He asked that the State and Federal agencies share the mutual goal of sustainable resource management. In response to closures and restrictions in 2018, 2019, and 2020 for subsistence harvest of Chinook and Sockeye Salmon, they have been requesting formal stock assessment research and recovery plans to support subsistence harvest opportunity. He requested that these comments be included in the Bristol Bay Council's Annual Report to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) requesting help from the Federal in-season managers and staff in the Chignik Area. Acting Chair Dunaway noted that they are very concerned about the status of salmon in the Chigniks, and that the Council will work with them and the agencies to address the issue.

Old Business

Individual C&T Determinations

Dylan Patterson with the NPS reported on decisions made by the Board in January 2021 on the process used to make C&T determinations for individuals. There were lengthy presentations on this at the fall 2020 Council meetings. He noted that all most all C&T use determinations are for communities and areas, not for individuals. The NPS suggested some tweaks to the process to make it easier to understand and more timely for both the public and for staff. The NPS is suggesting improvements to something that already exists. Input from the ten Councils and seven Subsistence Resource Commissions (SRCs) last fall was incorporated for the January 2021 Board meeting. The Board will retain final decision-making authority. The process now includes formal recommendations from both the affected Councils and the affected SRCs. Perhaps the biggest change is that the process is no longer tied to the lengthy biennial Federal regulatory proposal cycle; instead, the application window is open continuously. The Board took

action to help improve the process, but still welcomes any feedback for further improvements concerning individual C&Ts.

There were follow up questions by Mr. Trefon, Mr. Hill, Acting Chair Dunaway, and Mr. Wilson, and a discussion about this issue. Mr. Patterson explained that this will not affect community or area-wide C&Ts. Individual C&Ts are very rare and they are made for individuals that have C&T use on those Park lands, but for whatever reason, do not still live in the resident zone communities for those Park lands. Ms. Jochum clarified that there is nothing new, and that there are no new permits. It is just a new process on how to handle individual C&T applications. People must be Federally qualified subsistence users to apply for individual C&Ts. This is not for people that move to an urban area and come back to follow traditional practices. Ms. Fleek-Green offered to come out and talk with residents of Bristol Bay communities if there are any questions. Mr. Sturm provided additional clarification concerning real residency. Dr. Ream clarified what is meant by “pattern of use” in making determinations for individual C&Ts and that we would be looking to the Councils and SRCs to help define that pattern of use.

Positioning of Animals

Council Coordinator Mike provided more information on positioning of animals and the working group’s efforts on this. Robbin La Vine provided background on the positioning of animals issue and WP16-48, WP18-24, WP20-26, and WP20-27. The issue revolved around Federally qualified subsistence users being able to use a snow machine to position animals for hunting as long as the animals are not shot from a moving snow machine.

Mr. Wilson made a motion to recommend WP20-26 to expand this issue to include other Federal lands in Units 9B, 9C, 17B, and 17C, beyond BLM. Mr. Hill seconded the motion. *The motion passed* unanimously.

Council Charter

The Council discussed their Charter. Mr. Wilson made a motion that Council members continue to serve on the Council when their term ends, until there is a replacement appointed by the Secretary’s office. Mr. Trefon seconded the motion. *The motion passed* on unanimous vote.

Annual Report

Council Coordinator Mike presented the three FY-2020 Annual Report items that the Council had discussed last fall. The Council wanted to add brucellosis as a topic. Based on Mr. Anderson’s testimony earlier in the day, they also added wording reassurance to topic number 2 Concern about Poor Salmon Returns to Chignik Lake. The Council unanimously agreed that they have consensus on the FY-2020 Annual Report with these additions.

New Business

Wildlife Proposals

Ms. La Vine and Council Coordinator Mike explained that until we actually have the proposed rule published in the Federal Register, we won’t be accepting wildlife proposals. However, the Council should

feel free to vote to develop proposals at this meeting, so the proposal(s) can be formally submitted when the proposed rule is published.

2022 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program

Mr. Jarred Stone with OSM presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) summary. He noted that for the FY-2020 funding cycle, there will be about \$2.25 million available for the first year of new projects throughout the Alaska. He noted that anyone who wants to apply can find information about the program on the Federal Subsistence Management Program web page or by visiting www.grants.gov. He noted that applications will be reviewed by the Technical Review Committee, and that the results will be presented at this fall's Council meeting.

Agency Reports:

- Cody Larson (Bristol Bay Native Association, Dillingham) reported on their subsistence projects and endorsed the BBNA summer internship program. He offered to help people in Bristol Bay with regulatory proposals.
- Todd Rinaldi (ADF&G, Palmer) gave an update on Mulchatna caribou, wolf distribution, brucellosis, and Unit 17A moose. He reported that nothing has changed significantly since last fall for Mulchatna caribou. The count for the herd is approximately 13,500 caribou. The density of wolves is estimated at about 4.7 wolves per thousand square miles in Unit 17. Predation accounts for about 85% of mortality in the first 15 days for caribou calves. Of these, 44% were preyed on by brown bears, 26% by wolves, 7% by black bear, 8% by golden eagle, 1% by wolverine, 6% from general bear predation, and 8% unknown predation. Brucellosis is present in caribou, moose, and bison across Alaska. In caribou, it typically can result in swollen front knees or an enlarged scrotum. People can become infected with the *Brucella* bacteria if they come in contact with bodily fluids of an infected animal. We haven't been seeing prolific signs of the disease in the past few years; however, the *Brucella* bacteria has been detected in ungulates at a relatively high rate. Hunters should be aware that there is a constant low level presence of the brucellosis disease in Mulchatna caribou and should wear gloves when cleaning animals and avoid contact with caribou body fluids. All meat needs to be cooked thoroughly. Mr. Rinaldi wasn't aware of any cases of humans being infected with brucellosis recently. Right now, we aren't seeing a harvestable surplus for the Mulchatna Caribou Herd, and don't expect things to change dramatically in the next couple years. We weren't able to hold the Unit 17C and 17B late season moose hunt this year.
- Rick Merizon (ADF&G, Palmer) gave an update on ptarmigan and hares. Beginning in 2018, they radio collared Alaska hares and have been learning a great deal about Alaska hare movements and life history. They have looked at Alaska hare regulations from Kotzebue to the Alaska Peninsula.
- Pat Walsh (Togiak NWR, Dillingham) gave an update on wolf and bear predation. The brown bear population is stable. He estimated that the population is more than 855 brown bears for the Togiak NWR. The Togiak NWR has a moderate abundance of brown bears that is strongly influenced by the availability of salmon. Wolf packs averaged about 867 square miles/pack.

There are a total of 12 packs of wolves on Togiak NWR now and he doesn't expect that the wolf population will continue to grow very much, even if the food supply increases. Overall, the average pack size is 6.1 wolves/pack in the spring and 7.2/pack in the fall, with an estimate of about 90 wolves in spring and about 100 in the fall. Most moose mortality occurs in May and June around the time of calving. Stable isotopes were looked at to evaluate what bears and wolves were eating. Caribou compose the majority, about 65%, of the diet of wolves that use the Nushagak Peninsula, while moose provided about 30% of their diet. For wolves using the rest of the Togiak NWR, moose composed about 75% of their diet, while salmon composed about 25%. It was estimated that salmon provide about 77% of the brown bear diet while moose and vegetation constitute about 23%. With moose population growth, the bear population hasn't increased. The wolf population has grown but is at a near maximum potential.

- Andy Aderman (Togiak NWR, Dillingham) noted that right now, the moose harvest for 17A is at 143 moose and may increase as more harvest reports come in. He reported on recovery of overgrazed lichen on Hagemeister Island and that full recovery of the lichens will probably take about 77 years. He noted that summer camps and school presentations did not occur last summer due to COVID-19. He talked about staffing changes at the Togiak NWR.
- Susan Alexander and Danny Moss (Becharof and Alaska Peninsula NWRs) gave an overview of refuge work. Mr. Moss introduced himself and Ms. Alexander reported on refuge staffing changes. Ms. Alexander noted that the Refuge flew seven moose composition surveys from mid-November to early December 2020, in Units 9C and 9E with excellent conditions. She also addressed caribou winter forage, habitat change, water temperature, and ptarmigan monitoring.
- Ellen Yasumishi (NOAA, Juneau) reported on sea ice and temperatures in the Bering Sea. In the last 20 years, we have had the top 10 warmest summers in the last 120 years. COVID-19 drastically affected their surveys. She reported on fish surveys, oceanographic information and plankton surveys from the Bering Sea.
- Susanne Fleek-Green (Lake Clark NP&P) highlighted key subsistence issues. She reported on beaver population impacts on water quality and salmon habitat. She reported on the increase in submerged vegetation with warmer water. She reported on their fisheries project at the River Mile 22 counting tower. She reported on education and outreach efforts and the impact of COVID-19 on these efforts.
- Krista Barts (NPS, Inventory and Monitoring Division) reported on mercury in Lake Trout in two Southwest Alaska Parks. Usually, older Lake Trout at the top of the food chain will have higher concentrations of mercury. They looked at 10 lakes in Lake Clark NP&P and 6 lakes in Katmai NP&P. The median value of Lake Trout total mercury is above the State's fish consumption threshold in seven of the 16 lakes, while Sockeye Salmon levels are consistently low. The mercury in Lake Trout is mainly an issue for women who are or can become pregnant, nursing mothers and children under the age of 18.
- Mark Sturm (Katmai NP&P and Aniakchak NM) reported that COVID-19 has impacted programs and that his staff are preparing for the field season this year. They are trying to understand how access can be increased to Brooks Camp in particular. He talked about a legislative proposal to convert parts of Katmai NP&P to allow subsistence use. After discussion, Council Coordinator Mike suggested that the Council send a letter to Mr. Sturm on developing

correspondence from the Council to the Park Service. Mr. Wilson made a motion to send correspondence to the Park Service about finding a legislative solution to the Katmai NP&P land use issues. Mr. Trefon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously. Linda Chisholm (subsistence coordinator for Aniakchak) noted that SRC members reported that caribou and ptarmigan numbers were up from what they saw a year or two ago. She also noted that several SRC members are working on applications for Bristol Bay Council membership.

- Bonnie Million (BLM, Anchorage) noted that they are stepping up involvement to participate in Mulchatna Caribou Herd monitoring.
- Lee Borden (ADF&G, Dillingham) reported that they had been able to run the Naknek Rainbow Trout catch survey last fall for the second year of that project. Sport fishing effort was down 75-80% due to COVID-19.
- George Pappas (USFWS, OSM) gave the OSM report.

Future Meeting Dates

Fall 2021 meeting to be held Oct. 27 and 28 in Dillingham.

Winter 2022 meeting to be held Feb. 8 and 9 in Naknek.

_____/signature on the original/_____

Tom Kron on behalf of the retired Council Coordinator, Donald Mike, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

_____/signature on the original/_____

Dan Dunaway, Acting Chair
Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were formally considered and approved by the Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2021 meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Katerina Wessels at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-786-3885 or email her at *Katerina_Wessels@fws.gov*.