

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM DELTA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via Teleconference

October 6-7, 2020

Invocation

Richard Slats gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Tuesday, October 6 at 9:15 AM. Council members John Andrew, Carl Maxie Sr., Phillip Peter Sr., Richard Slats, Raymond Oney, James Landlord, Thomas Alstrom, and Alissa Nadine Rogers were present participating by teleconference. Robert Aloysius was not present and was excused. With eight out of nine seated Council members present, Quorum was established. The Council has four vacant seats.

Attendees:

Via teleconference

- *Office of Subsistence Management, Anchorage:* Eva Patton, Greg Risdahl, Pippa Kenner, Cory Graham, Tom Kron
- *Federal Subsistence Board member:* Rhonda Pitka, Beaver
- *Orutsararmiut Native Council, Bethel:* Janessa Esquible, Caroline Black, Avery Hoffman, Mathew Van Kapsner
- *Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission:* Mary Peltola, Terese Schomogyi, *Bethel;* Kevin Whitworth, *McGrath*
- *Association of Village Council Presidents, Bethel:* Jennifer Hooper, Paige Jones
- Lamont Albertson, Aniak
- Native Village of Napaimute: Dan Gillikin
- *Native Community of Akiak:* Mike Williams, Moses Jones, Robert Williams, James Nicholai
- *Organized Village of Kwethluk:* Evan Olick
- *Kwethluk Incorporated:* Chariton Epchook, Anthony Olick
- *Native Village of Alakanuk:* Gabriel Buster
- *Calista Corporation:* Mary Martinez
- *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, Bethel:* Boyd Blihovde, Ray Born, Chris Tulik, Aaron Moses, Gary DeCossas, Matt Donald
- *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Togiak National Wildlife Refuge, Dillingham:* Andy Aderman

- *U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Carol Damburg, Anchorage, Gerald Maschmann, Jan Conitz, Fairbanks*
- *Bureau of Land Management, Anchorage: Bonnie Million, Bruce Seppi*
- *Bureau of Indian Affairs, Anchorage: Glenn Chen*
- *National Park Service, Fairbanks: Marcy Okada*
- *Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation Palmer: Mark Burch, Anchorage: Todd Rinaldi, Commercial Fisheries Division: Ben Gray, Nicholas Smith, Keegan Birchfield Anchorage: Jeff Estensen, Deena Jalen, Sabrina Garcia, Fairbanks; Sportfish Division: John Chythlook, Subsistence Division: David Runfola, Chris McDevitt, Fairbanks*
- *Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association: Serena Fitka, Catherine Moncrieff*
- *National Oceanic and Atmospheric Association Alaska Fisheries Science Center, Juneau Jim Murphy, Ellen Yasumiishi,*

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Peter, Sr., seconded by Mr. Andrew, to adopt the agenda as read with the following changes:

- Add student interns Avery Hoffman and Mathew Van Kapsner to agenda to co-present on ONC fisheries and ADF&G sonar project.
- Move ADF&G Mulchatna caribou herd update to earlier on the agenda
- Update on presenters for agenda items as needed
- Allow for public comment opportunity after lunch and end of day to better accommodate when public is able to call in.

The motion passed by unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion #2 by Mr. Andrew, seconded by Mr. Oney, to approve the March 16 -17, 2020 meeting minutes as with the following modifications: Last name spelling corrections for meeting participants from Alakanuk should be spelled Paul *Kassock* and George *Peter*, and Native Village of Kwethluk participants should be listed as *Evan Nicolai*, *Martin Nicolai*, and *Frank Ashepak*.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

The Council also discussed interest in having longer more detailed minutes, including public discussion rather than the new abbreviated format recently implemented by the Office of Subsistence Management (OSM). OSM staff noted that complete verbatim transcripts are available for each meeting and posted to the website for public access. Copies of meeting transcripts can also be mailed by request.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Richard Slats of Chevak reported that traditionally ptarmigan have always been the first red meat of the year followed by geese. Then when the fish come in, they either fish off of Hooper Bay or go to the two rivers south of Chevak where they traditionally set up fish camps. King Salmon are shrinking in size,

according to elders. Richard report had gear challenges himself this year and an injury that made it hard to get into a boat so he plans to fish for whitefish and pike by jigging under the ice this winter.

Richard reported that he tries to keep abreast of all the issues in the region. Climate change is making it hard for subsistence users and now with the pandemic food security has become even more of a priority. He asked everyone to keep this in mind that the pandemic has made it even more difficult for rural communities to get access to fresh healthy food.

Raymond Oney of Alakanuk reported that subsistence fisheries have been on the top of their mind since breakup because it provides their food security for winter. The Yukon had a good spring breakup but the water was high and the Chinook came in late - people wondered where the fish were. There were few fish all summer all the way from the headwaters all the way down the river. People reported that the salmon did not show up on the spawning grounds. Creeks that normally were full of fish had none. Even the bears were not catching fish for the winter. He is concerned that in addition to Chinook, the Coho and summer Chum Salmon have been way down too. Ray expressed that it was probably the worst fishing season in his lifetime. He stressed the need to address climate change, which is accelerating out of control. Everyone needs to work together to find solutions and rebuild fish stocks on the Yukon River. Everyone needs to be at the table, but understand it will take reducing harvest to save the Chinook. He stressed that they are fortunate to have supported a moratorium on moose decades ago, which let the moose population rebuild and now they are abundant.

Thomas Alstrom of Alakanuk reported that the Yukon Delta is made up of three main rivers: the north channel near Kotlik has colder water, the middle mouth, and the south river mouth which has three villages on them. He said that the fish may have been late because they were waiting for the strong currents and water deep water to subside and waiting out in the ocean in the colder water in Norton Sound. Then, when the fish came, they went into the north mouth in the colder water. He suggested that ADF&G focused the test fishing on the north mouth, which is the smallest. He observed more Chums and Cohos coming in more through the north mouth this year.

Thomas reported that people in Alakanuk have been catching a lot of Imarpinraq (Bering Cisco) along the coastline. And now they are just beginning to see snow geese fly and Canadian geese are starting to group up to fly south. Lamprey Eels are also grouping up and getting ready to migrate upstream, and they are catching some. They are also seeing some belugas swimming upriver in the last few days.

James Landlord of Mountain Village reported that summer Chum Salmon were slow coming in. Last month some people in his community said they didn't catch enough fish to put away for winter and several families didn't catch any salmon at all even when they tried dip netting in several locations. James reported that the fall Chum Salmon were late, too. There was hardly any wind this summer – it was mostly calm conditions. He notes the fish come when there are high winds to mix up the water at the mouth, but this summer it was real calm with hardly any winds from the south or southwest. At least there were plenty of moose to go around, and he thinks everyone caught their moose this year.

Phillip Peter Sr. of Akiachak reported that moose harvest was good for his community this year but is very concerned about subsistence fishing for Chinook Salmon. The Chinook were late and not coming in heavily in June. Then at the end of July they had the third opening with Federal management but few people got King salmon. Phillip reported that for the fourth opening, he did pretty good with his fish catch. Chums and Reds are doing okay and he caught quite a few of them. Phillip is concerned they are losing the older, larger Chinooks and is worried the smaller 6 inch mesh is just choking them. He feels that the subsistence way of life for fishing is changing with too many restrictions but something needs to be done to work together to protect the Chinook Salmon. His Grandmother used to tell him to not catch too many Chinook – he would catch 20 fish and his Grandma was satisfied with that. But now the population of each family member in the village is growing and when there are fish openings, they have to wait in line to find a spot to drift.

John Andrew of Kwethluk reported that everything was late after spring breakup; by the time they were whitefish fishing in the lakes they were late. The whitefish were really small this year, and they were sporadic on the river – he didn't catch many whitefish. John reported that the Chinook, Chum, Reds, and Coho Salmon were all late this year. And the Chinook were small, but he didn't bother to go out with 4 inch mesh gear allowed because the fish tear up the nets and get hurt and don't make it to the spawning grounds. John highlighted that moose season was excellent this year, but there were wolves everywhere even coming up right onto the Kwethluk airstrip road.

Carl Maxie of Napaskiak reported that he has to look for a good fishing spot every year because the fish move around in shifting channels. There were less salmon this year, but he thought they were larger in size overall with some opportunity for Reds and Chums in June. He's sees lots of seals coming into the Kuskokwim River and it seems like the whitefish are moving up the river. Carl suggested more monitoring fish movement to plan around opening subsistence fishing opportunity since fish were pretty spotty when they did get a chance to fish. His grandfather always used to tell him that when the winds would blow up the Yukon and Kuskokwim River, that the fish would start to come upriver in big numbers, and that was the good time to fish. He noted there are lots of moose in the area and would like to see expanded hunting opportunity. He hopes everyone gets through this pandemic thing soon.

Alissa Rogers of Bethel reported that when she was growing up she spent almost every weekend in a different village hunting or fishing with her relatives. She reported that this year the Sheefish just trickled in and her Sheefish catch was small. They are seeing a lot more Blackfish and they were big. Alissa reported that her family hasn't fished for Chinook since 2005. They did catch some Chums and Reds, but the meat was soft and needed to be put on ice right away. She went fishing for Silver Salmon twice this fall, and they were really nice - the meat was pristine with no abnormalities. They caught more pike than whitefish this year and heard reports of people catching small, tiny Kings while fishing for whitefish. She noted the fishing opportunity openers did not coincide with the fish migrations and weather. Lamprey reports were unusual, they normally don't catch them till summer or fall, but this year there were bunches of Lamprey swimming on the surface of the water near the Bethel sea wall in the spring. She noted they looked like balls of snakes. Geese and swans are grouping up now and getting ready to fly south. She is not seeing as many small birds as usual, but did notice the swallows left really early this year. Blueberries

were really big, but sour. There were lots of salmon berries and there are more highbush cranberries around this year. There's a lot of mouse food (seeds gathered by mice) everywhere – their caches are bigger than usual and plentiful this year. Her own garden didn't do as well because of the weather, but they still got potatoes and all the root vegetables did well. Alissa reported they did get out moose hunting, but otherwise didn't get out much this year because of COVID-19 and they are being really careful.

Old Business

805(c) Report – Update

The Council received a written report on the Federal Subsistence Board Action on 2020-22 wildlife proposals affecting the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region as directed under 805(c) of ANILCA. Eva Patton, Council Coordinator provided a brief overview of this report.

Regional Advisory Council Nominations – Update

Fifteen applications were received for the Y-K Delta RAC region - plenty of applications to fill all currently vacant and expiring Council seats. Nominations are now in the Secretary of Interior's Office for final appointment due the first week of December 2020. New applications for the 2021 RAC appointment cycle are being sent out widely now and all are encouraged to apply from across the Y-K Delta region. Every year there are three to four seats that expire on each Council.

New Business

Fisheries Proposals and Closure Reviews

Office of Subsistence Management staff Pippa Kenner and Cory Graham provided the Council with overview and analysis of fisheries proposals and closure reviews for the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region.

Regional:

FP21-01: Repeal closure to subsistence fishing prior to, during and after State commercial fishing periods in Kuskokwim Districts 1 and 2 – salmon. Motion by Mr. Peter, Sr., seconded by Mr. Maxie to support FP21-01. Council Justification: This proposal will minimize confusion; aligns State and Federal regulations (currently the State regulations are less restrictive than the Federal Subsistence regulations); makes regulations less restrictive; gives subsistence users more opportunity to fish without being closed for so long around commercial fishing periods which currently have very few participants anyway since there is no commercial buyer on the Kuskokwim. There are only a few catcher sellers taking part in commercial openings. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

FP21-02: Modify spacing requirements for set gillnets in Kuskokwim River tributaries from 150 feet to 75 feet – all fish. Motion by Mr. Peter Sr. and seconded by Mr. Oney to support FP21-02. The motion failed with 3 votes in favor and 5 against and 1 absent.

Council justification: Reducing set net distance in Kuskokwim tributary rivers from 150 feet to 75 feet will not increase actual opportunity – it will only increase crowding and less efficient fishing for all. When set nets are only 75 feet apart, the nets set upstream are blocked or corked, and everyone will have a difficult time catching fish. Set net sights are managed traditionally by families and they use the same

eddies year after year. Set net sites so close together will reduce the number of fish caught by everyone upstream. Good set net sights are limited, and people often try to set nets as close to the mouth of the rivers as they can. Reducing the distance between nets will cause crowding and reduces safety. Reduced distance will increase density of nets at the mouth of tributary rivers and there will be a greater likelihood that nets will be run over by boats especially at night with regular boat traffic to and from villages and subsistence activities. This poses a safety issue and also increases likelihood of nets and boat motors getting damaged.

FP21-03: Modify language to clarify set gillnet orientation in tributaries of the Kuskokwim River – all fish. Motion by Mr. Peter, Sr. and seconded by Mr. Oney Council to support FP21-03. Council justification: This proposal clarifies that it is legal in both State and Federal regulations to use a drift gill net in tributaries, which is a traditional practice. The Council also stressed that this is done with care to not overfish or disturb spawning areas and it is important to continue Chinook Salmon conservation measures at this time by closing fishing on tributary rivers when needed. The Council confirmed with the Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager that this proposal will clarify regulations and that it is legal to use drift gill nets in tributaries, but inseason management tools can still restrict fishing methods when needed for Chinook Salmon and other fish conservation measures. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Crossover:

FCR21-04: Closure to Federally qualified subsistence users in the Yukon drainage, Jim River – all fish. Motion by Mr. Oney and seconded by Mr. Peter, Sr. to defer FCR21-04 to the home RAC region. Council justification: Defer to the Western Interior RAC: this stream is in that region and they would be most familiar with subsistence fishing communities in this area. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

FCR21-07: Closure to Federally qualified subsistence users in the Yukon drainage, Nome Creek – Arctic Grayling. Motion by Mr. Landlord and seconded by Mr. Oney to defer FCR21-07 to the home RAC region. Council justification: Defer to the Eastern Interior RAC: this stream is in that region and they would be most familiar with subsistence fishing communities in this area. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

2022 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program

Pippa Kenner, Anthropologist with Office of Subsistence Management presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) Priority Information Needs (PINs) working group discussion results for the Yukon and Kuskokwim River regions. The Council discussed details of research priorities at length and heard from local fishers on their observations.

Motion by Mr. Andrew and seconded by Mr. Maxie to support the following Kuskokwim FRMP Priority Information Needs (PINs):

- Impacts of climate change in continued harvest and use of fish; and impacts of climate change on fish, for example fish migration, spawning, and life cycle.
- Knowledge of population, reproduction, and health of spawning habitat for declining Humpback Whitefish populations.
- Documentation of oral histories describing salmon harvest methods in the Kuskokwim River drainage, specifically the period before the development of the modern commercial fishery.
- Reliable quantitative and/or qualitative estimates of salmon run size, escapement, and harvest in the Kuskokwim River drainage including Kuskokwim Bay tributaries.
- Explore new and cost effective methods for conducting in-season salmon run and harvest assessments in the Kuskokwim River drainage, with an emphasis on community-based monitoring.
- Estimates of “quality of escapement” measures to help inform salmon stock assessments, for example potential egg deposition, age, sex, and size composition of spawners, and advancing genetic baselines.
- Improved Kuskokwim River drainage-wide and sub-stock specific salmon run size and timing forecasts.
- Distribution, abundance, condition, and survival of juvenile and out-migrating salmon in the Kuskokwim River drainage.
- Traditional ecological knowledge of fishes.
- Information sharing between stakeholders and agencies concerning salmon conservation in the Kuskokwim River drainage, for example, outreach to villages using the media and other methods.
- The meaning and significance of sharing, barter, and/or customary trade of subsistence foods in the context of the social, cultural, and economic life of people in the lower Kuskokwim drainage.
- Effects of environmental stressors, such as heat stress, on salmon mortality during adult upriver migration, and/or pre-spawn mortality within spawning tributaries.
- Effects of *Ichthyophonus* infection on Chinook and Chum Salmon mortality and spawning success.
- Assessment of incidental Chinook Salmon mortality with gillnets, with particular consideration for delayed mortality from entanglement or direct mortality from drop-outs (for example, loss of Chinook Salmon from 6-inch mesh nets).
- Collect baseline information on the resident fish community to better understand potential impacts and to assess impacts of proposed development projects.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Mr. Oney and seconded by Mr. Peter to approve the following Yukon region FRMP PINs:

- Impacts of climate change in continued harvest and use of fish and impacts of climate change on fish, for example, impacts to fish migration, spawning and life cycle.
- Effects of environmental stressors, such as heat stress on salmon mortality during adult upriver migration and/or pre-spawn mortality within 12 spawning tributaries.
- Effects of *Ichthyophonus* infection on Chinook salmon mortality and spawning success.
- Knowledge of population, reproduction and health of spawning habitat for Bering Cisco and Humpback Whitefish.

- Reliable estimates of Chinook, Summer Chum, fall Chum and Coho salmon escapements and/or harvest, particularly sub-stocks that are large contributors to the total run.
- Estimates of quality of escapement measures for Chinook Salmon, for example potential egg deposition, age, sex and size composition of spawners, percentage of females, percentage of jacks, and spawning habitat utilization with an emphasis on Canadian origin stocks.
- Reliable in-season harvest of salmon harvest in the lower, middle and upper Yukon River subsistence fishery.
- Reliable estimates of age, sex, length and genetic composition of salmon harvested in the subsistence fishery with emphasis on Chinook and fall Chum Salmon.
- In-season estimates of genetic stock composition of Chinook, summer Chum and fall Chum Salmon runs and harvest.
- Reliable methods of forecasting Chinook, summer Chum, fall Chum and Coho Salmon run abundance.
- Assessment of incidental mortality with gillnets, dipnets and seines with particular consideration for delayed mortality from entanglement from dropouts and live release of Chinook Salmon, for example loss of Chinook Salmon from six inch mesh net during Chum Salmon fisheries and the live release of Chinook Salmon from dipnets and seines.
- Traditional ecological knowledge of fish.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Identify Issues for FY2020 Annual Report

The Council identified the following topics for inclusion into the FY-2020 Annual Report:

- Climate change mitigation
- Include TEK along with science studies
- Effects of the pandemic on food security
- Declare when food security or other emergencies that are going on and put them on the forefront
- Continue monitoring Mulchatna caribou herd and other inventory and monitoring studies
- Need to protect the resources for people that live in the villages who depend on them for their survival.
- Hardship of meeting by teleconference and request for technical support for Councils for video conferencing.

Proposed Review Processes for National Park Service Individual Customary and Traditional Use Determinations

Marcy Okada with the National Park Service (NPS) presented the Council with the proposed changes to the NPS individual customary and traditional use determinations review process and requested the Council's opinion on the changes.

Motion by Mr. Andrew and seconded by Mr. Alstrom to take no action on this request from the Park Service. The motion passed by unanimous vote. The Council expressed frustration at the lack of advance detailed information on this Individual C&T request before it being presented to the Council for action and that a full analysis of the request and effects should have been provided to the Council and public for review. While there are no National Park Service lands within the boundaries of the Y-K Delta RAC region, the Council is not comfortable making recommendations without adequate information and understanding of how this may impact subsistence communities and other regions who would be directly affected by the National Park Service independently making individual C&T determinations without it going through the Federal Subsistence Management Program public process.

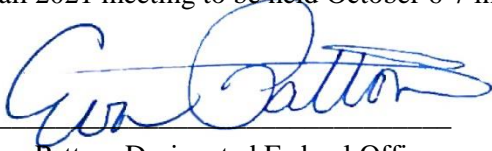
Agency Reports:

- Office of Subsistence Management Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program presented by Pippa Kenner
- Orutsararmiut Native Council report and Partners Program updates presented by Janessa Esquible and Avery Hoffman
- Native Village of Napaimute report and Partners Program update presented by Dan Gillikin
- Association of Village Council Presidents report presented by Paige Jones
- Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission report presented by Mary Peltola
- Kuskokwim Community Based Fish Harvest Monitoring report by Lamont Albertson
- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association report presented by Serena Fitka and Catherine Moncrieff
- 2020 Yukon River Salmon Season Summary presented by Gerald Maschmann, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Deena Jalen and Jeff Estensen, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- 2020 Kuskokwim River Salmon Season Summary presented by Gary DeCossas and Ray Born, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and Nicholas Smith, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
- Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge updates presented by Boyd Blihovde and Aaron Moses
- Togiak National Wildlife Refuge updates presented by Andy Aderman
- Bureau of Land Management written report summary read into record (Bonnie Million offline)
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence, report presented by David Runfola
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife Conservation, caribou report by Todd Rinaldi
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Commercial Fisheries Division, Bethel Sonar report by Keegan Birchfield with ONC student intern Matthew Van Kapsner.
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration report on Marine Ecology of Western Alaska Juvenile Salmon by Jim Murphy and co-presented with ADF&G Sabrina Garcia
- National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, report on Bering Sea ecosystem and environmental change presented by Ellen Yasumiishi
- Office of Subsistence Management report provided by Greg Risdahl

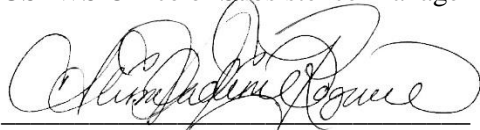
Future Meeting Dates:

Winter 2021 meeting to be held March 3-4, 2021 in Bethel

Fall 2021 meeting to be held October 6-7 in Bethel



Eva Patton, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management



Alissa Nadine Rogers, Chair
Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were formally considered by the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its winter 2021 meeting, and any corrections or notations were 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@fws.gov.