

**YUKON-KUSKOKWIM DELTA SUBSISTENCE
REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes**

Via Teleconference, Anchorage
March 16-17, 2020

Invocation:

Council member Phillip Peter, Sr. gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order on Monday, March 16 at 9:09 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 (Council has four vacant seats) quorum was established.

Attendees:

Via Teleconference:

Office of Subsistence Management, Anchorage:

Eva Patton, Greg Risdahl, Pippa Kenner, Frank Harris, Tom Doolittle, Chris McKee, Robbin La Vine

Orutsararmiut Native Council, Bethel: Moses

Jordan, Janessa Esquible, Robert Lekander

Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission:

Mary Peltola (Bethel), Robert Lekander (Bethel), James Nicori (Kwethluk)

Association of Village Council Presidents, Bethel: Jennifer Hooper

Native Village of Napaimute: Dan Gillikin

Native Community of Akiak: Mike Williams,

Native Village of Kwethluk: Evan Nicolai, Frank Nicori, Mark Nicori, Evan Olick

Kwethluk Incorporated: George Guy

Native Village of Alakanuk: Paul Cassole, Gabriel Buster, George Paster

Bill Alstrom (*St. Mary's*)

Calista Corporation: Steven Alexi

Lamont Albertson (Anchorage)

University of Wisconsin: William Baron

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, Bethel: Ray Born, Chris Tulik, Aaron Moses, Gary DeCossas, Aaron Webber

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Togiak National Wildlife Refuge, Dillingham: Andy Aderman

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service: Carol Damberg (Anchorage), Gerald Maschmann (Fairbanks)

Bureau of Land Management, Anchorage: Bonnie Million, Walter Gusse

Bureau of Indian Affairs, Anchorage: Glenn Chen

Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Palmer:

Mark Burch, *Anchorage:* Nicholas Smith; Keith Oster; *Fairbanks:* Jeff Estensen, Deena Jalen,

David Runfola; *Dillingham:* Lauren Watine; *Bethel:* Patrick Jones

Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association, Homer: Wayne Jenkins

Western Alaska Conservation Cooperative, Anchorage: Danielle Stickman

Donlin Gold: Kristina Woolston

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion #1 by Mr. Peter, Sr., seconded by Mr. Landlord, to adopt the agenda as read with the following changes:

- Add the Mulchatna Caribou Special Action Request to New Business.
- Provide all Yukon River fisheries updates first followed by the Kuskokwim River fisheries updates.
- Add the Kuskokwim River Chinook Salmon Fisheries Special Action Requests after the Kuskokwim Fisheries presentation and discussion.
- Recognize the late Harry Wilde, Sr. for his service to the Council.

Motion #1 passed by unanimous vote in support.

Election of Officers

Ms. Alissa Nadine Rogers was elected the Council's Chair.

Mr. Phillip Peter, Sr. was elected the Council's Vice Chair.

Mr. Raymond Oney was elected the Council's Secretary.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion #2 by Mr. Andrew, seconded by Mr. Peter, Sr., to approve the November 6-8, 2019 meeting minutes as written with no corrections. Motion #2 passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Richard Slats of Chevak reported that he is very concerned about the severe decline of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd and thinks the warm winters with freeze thaw events has had an impact on the health and population of the herd. He emphasized that during the previous Council meeting held at Bethel last November there was some of the worst freezing rain anyone has experienced in the region with inches of thick ice covering everything, which had to have taken a toll on animals. At least there was a good snow cover this year, and people were able to travel safely by snow machine for subsistence activities. Mr. Slats shared that they saw ptarmigan around the community for the first time in a while and this makes him hopeful to see ptarmigan return. Mr. Slats was nominated to serve on the North Pacific Fisheries Management Committee Local and Traditional Knowledge Task Force. He was interested in the Council members sharing their traditional knowledge and talked about his engagement with this newly formed group. Mr. Slats was also recently appointed to serve on the Arctic Research Consortium Arctic Indigenous Scholars Program and wants to ensure subsistence communities are central to climate change research and discussion.

John Andrew of Kwethluk reported that half the hunters in his community were unable to hunt moose this past fall because the water levels were so low that they could not access their usual hunting grounds by boat. When the water did finally rise, a late run of Sockeye Salmon and Coho Salmon also came in. They were able to catch both species up until freeze-up. However, the water levels were so high after

freeze up that they were not able to set nets for under ice fishing like they usually do. It was because the river current was too fast and no eddies were in places where they usually set their nets for whitefish. After a mild November the winter turned cold at the end of December and they had lots of snow, good mounds of snow like they had not seen in many years. He noted that it felt like a “normal” winter finally, and they were able to get out by dog team and go hunting by snow machine. Some went out to hunt caribou before the closure but many are concerned about the Mulchatna Caribou Herd decline and want to conserve the caribou so they go hunting for moose in the fall. Mr. Andrew reported that many of the elders in the community were pleased with the cold winter because the thick ice and abundant snow would help flush the rivers, bringing down drift wood, and raise the spring water level so that freshwater fish could get back into lakes and reproduce.

James Landlord of Mountain Village reported that they had a similar winter to what Mr. Andrew reported with cold weather in December and thick ice and plenty of snow. People were able to start ice fishing around Mountain Village right after freeze up and were getting good whitefish and Pike. He heard reports of big Pike being caught – some the size of King Salmon. People were also catching some ptarmigan northwest of his community in an area called Volcano Hill. Mr. Landlord thought there might be high water on the Yukon this spring with the thick ice and deep snow but a warm weather crash in April could turn the ice to crystals and slowly flow out.

Phillip Peter Sr. of Akiachak reported that they also experienced a late salmon run due to low water on the Kuskokwim. He stressed that some people in his community did not get their King Salmon quota and did not go fishing in July because the bugs were too bad to safely dry fish. He stressed that the Elders know when to fish and how much to fish and the regulations make it difficult. Mr. Peter reported that Akiachak will again support the special action request to close the fishery to all but Federally qualified subsistence users. He also relayed that changing mesh size requirements was difficult for the community and having to use only whitefish nets to catch salmon meant they catch little jack Kings. They have to catch a lot of little fish to make up for the big Kings they used to catch. The low water made it difficult to reach their usual moose hunting meadows in the fall but some people were still able to be successful and get a moose. They did encounter a lot of Sockeye Salmon late in the fall when they were out moose hunting and saw lots of Sockeye jumping behind a beaver dam on a creek they were boating on.

Carl Maxie Sr. of Napaskiak reported that they also had a lot of snow and were expecting a good spring break up. They are catching what fish they can with 6-inch mesh but would like to talk further about fisheries management proposals. (Phone connectivity was poor so Carl only provided a very brief report.)

Raymond Oney of Alakanuk reported that it was good to finally have a normal cold winter with thick ice and lots of snow. There were reports of a bear and wolves in the area and it pushed moose into their community so they had lots of moose around this winter. People are out ice fishing at the time of the Council meeting and some are catching Sheefish that are slowly starting to show up in the area.

Thomas Alstrom of Alakanuk was just recently appointed to the Council and introduced himself. He concurred with Mr. Oney’s report that there were a lot of wolves and even a brown bear near Alakanuk,

which pushed moose into their community. Mr. Alstrom reported that people are out ice fishing jigging for Pike and Sheefish.

Alissa Nadine Rogers of Bethel reported that she had just recently returned from the Yukon and saw big flocks of ptarmigan like she had not seen in years, so she is hopeful the ptarmigan numbers are coming back up. Ms. Rogers reported some unusual catches of tomcods and whitefish in blackfish traps that were set in coastal lakes that had flooded and that the blackfish were so abundant they could be caught by dip net in some streams and lakes near beaver dammed areas. Ms. Rogers expressed concern for the lack of sea ice and thin ice that makes it unsafe for subsistence hunters to get seals. She reported the unusual event of having snow geese literally in her back yard but that she was not seeing the little snow buntings around Bethel like usual. She also reported a decrease in rabbit sighting and thought maybe this was at the end of a seven year cycle. Ms. Rogers reported low fishing success this year for under-ice fishing for whitefish and Sheefish and the eddies had shifted where they would normally fish. They did catch salmon very late in the season and even under the ice and there was good catch of Lush fish (Burbot) this fall. Ms. Rogers is very concerned about low emperor goose numbers, especially since the subsistence hunting moratorium had just been lifted. She is also very concerned about the declining Mulchatna Caribou Herd and worries that harvest may be higher than reported. Ms. Rogers noted that fortunately the moose population is doing really well on the Yukon and continuing to grow on the Kuskokwim so that should help subsistence hunters provide for their family while caribou hunting is closed for conservation.

Public Comment on non-agenda items:

- Evan Nicolai gave a short report from the Organized Village of Kwethluk.
- Martin Nicholai spoke about the Kwethluk Tribe's management of the Kwethluk Weir.
- Mike Williams, Chief of the Native Village of Akiak, spoke about changes observed in his Tribe's region.
- Will Baron, Anthropologist with the University of Wisconsin, reported on his work investigating fisheries management with the Native Community of Akiak.
- Moses Jordan and Robert Lekander discussed feedback on fisheries special actions and observations from Orutsarmiut Native Council subsistence representatives.
- Bill Alstrom of St. Mary's shared his observations on the Yukon River fisheries and subsistence.

Old Business

No old business.

New Business

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Update

Ms. Pippa Kenner presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) update. The Council discussed subsistence fisheries research priority information needs (PINs). Chair Rogers asked for volunteers from the Council to develop PINs. Richard Slats, Raymond Oney, James

Landlord, and Thomas Alstrom volunteered to discuss PINs for the Yukon River. John Andrew, Carl Maxie, Phillip Peter, and Alissa Rogers volunteered to discuss PINs for the Kuskokwim River.

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Proposals

Mr. Greg Risdahl informed the Council that the 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 did not have any subsistence fisheries regulatory proposals at this time.

Wildlife Special Action Request

Temporary Wildlife Special Action Request WSA20-04 submitted by Togiak and Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuges, requested that the Federal in-season manager be given delegated authority to open and close seasons, announce harvest limits and set sex restrictions for caribou in all or portions of Units 9A, 9B, 9C, 17A, 17B, 17C, 18, 19A, and 19B for the 2020-2022 regulatory cycle.

Motion #3 by Mr. Andrew, seconded by Mr. Peter, Sr., to support WSA20-04. Motion #3 passed by unanimous support.

The Council expressed concern about the steep decline in Mulchatna Caribou Herd and supported management efforts to conserve the herd including the Federal in-season manager being able to make management decisions to open or close hunting and other management tools as needed. The Council is interested in having dialog with the in-season manager on recommendations for providing for some subsistence opportunity especially in the fall. The Council suggested organizing a working group to help facilitate discussion between managers and all three Regional Advisory Councils (Y-K Delta, Western Interior and Bristol Bay) within the range of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd.

Review and approve FY2019 annual report

The Council discussed issues for inclusion in its FY2019 Annual Report.

Motion # 4 by Mr. Peter, Sr., seconded by Mr. Oney to approve the FY2019 Annual Report as written with the following additions:

1. Add request for the status of Arctic Terns.
2. Have the Board recognize Harry Wilde Sr. for his service.
3. All areas in the Y-K Delta Region, including the coastal villages, need to be represented on the Council for balanced regional membership.
4. Concerns about sunken barges in the Kuskokwim and the Kwethluk rivers.

Council discussion with in-season fisheries managers on salmon health and population forecast

The Council requested updates on Bering Sea by-catch. Motion #5 by Mr. Landlord, seconded by Mr. Oney, to submit a letter to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council requesting the Bering Sea Trawl Fisheries Chinook Salmon by-catch be reduced from 31,000 to no more than 17,000 per year. Motion #5 passed by a vote of 7 in favor, 1 opposed, and 1 absent. Mr. Alstrom suggested the request to reduce by-catch should be less drastic in order to be able have a better chance of support from the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council and success of meeting the conservation goals.

Fisheries Special Action Request

Temporary Fisheries Special Action Request FSA20-01, submitted by the Akiak Native Community, a Federally-recognized Tribe, requested that the Federal Subsistence Board: 1) Close Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River drainage to the harvest of Chinook Salmon except by Federally qualified subsistence users possessing a community harvest permit between June 1, 2020 and July 1, 2020; 2) Further reduce the pool of eligible harvesters based on the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA) Section 804 Subsistence User Prioritization analysis that was implemented in 2017; 3) Consult with 33 Federally recognized Kuskokwim River Tribes named in the 2014 Office of Subsistence Management Section 804 analysis to establish an appropriate harvest allocation of Chinook Salmon to be distributed among communities within the Kuskokwim River drainage.

Temporary Special Action Request FSA20-02, submitted by the Organized Village of Kwethluk, a Federally-recognized Tribe, requested that the Federal Subsistence Board: 1) Close Federal public waters of the Kuskokwim River drainage to the harvest of Chinook Salmon except by Federally qualified subsistence users between June 1, 2020 and July 1, 2020; and 2) Further reduce the pool of eligible harvesters based on the ANILCA Section 804 Subsistence User Prioritization analysis that was implemented in 2017.

Temporary Special Action Request FSA20-03, submitted by LaMont Albertson of Anchorage, Alaska, requested that the Federal Subsistence Board: 1) Close Federal public waters. of the Kuskokwim River drainage to the harvest of Chinook Salmon except by Federally qualified subsistence users at the beginning of the 2020 Chinook Salmon run; 2) Further reduce the pool of eligible harvesters based on an ANILCA Section 804 Subsistence User Prioritization analysis; and 3) Authorize the Federal in-season manager to implement emergency special actions during the entire 2020 Chinook Salmon season.

Motion #6 by Mr. Andrew, seconded by Mr. Peter, Sr., to support Fisheries Special Action FSA20-01, -02, and -03. Motion #6 passed with a vote of 7 in favor, 1 neutral, and 1 absent.

The Council voted to support FSA20-01, -02, and -03, citing concurrence with the majority of public testimony they heard during the public hearing for these special actions and also during the public and Tribal comment period at the Council meeting. Overall, the Council expressed that protecting a subsistence priority during these uncertain times is critical for communities on the Kuskokwim. The

Council stated that closing to all but Federally qualified subsistence users will help ensure these rural communities meet their subsistence needs and also provide better tools for long-term conservation of Chinook. The Council agrees with justification presented in FSA20-03 that quality of escapement is a concern that should be considered for salmon management on the Kuskokwim as subsistence fishers are seeing smaller and smaller fish. They also concur with the proponents of these special action requests that climate change impacts are creating more and more uncertainty for the health of the salmon and whether they will successfully return to spawn. The die-off of salmon observed last year due to extreme warm water temperatures is of particular concern. The Council feels it is imperative to manage the salmon fishery for conservation and subsistence priority in these uncertain times to ensure the long term viability of Kuskokwim Chinook and ensure that communities meet their subsistence needs. The Council stressed that subsistence communities have been doing their part for conservation, restricting the harvest of Chinook in order to help the population rebound and that the subsistence priority should be maintained at this time so that these communities can benefit from those conservation efforts.

The Council further concurred with the justification provided in Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fisheries Commission resolution in support of FSA20-01, -02, and -03 presented during the meeting. Motion #7 by Mr. Peter, Sr., seconded by Mr. Oney, to support this resolution as read into the record. Motion #7 passed by a vote of 7 support, 1 neutral, and 1 absent.

The Council received wildlife updates and discussed the abundant moose population and management strategies on the Yukon River. Motion # 8 by Mr. Oney, seconded by Mr. Peter, Sr., to write a letter to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game and Alaska Board of Game to request extending the Unit 18 remainder moose season to April 30. Motion # 8 passed by unanimous vote in support.

Agency Reports:

- Office of Subsistence Management report provided by Pippa Kenner
- Office of Subsistence Management Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program updates presented by Pippa Kenner and Frank Harris
- Orutsarmiut Native Council updates and Partners Program updates presented by Moses Jordan and Janessa Esquible
- Native Village of Napaimute updates and Partners Program update presented by Dan Gillikin
- Association of Village Council Presidents report presented by Jennifer Hooper
- Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission updates presented by Mary Peltola
- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association updates and FRMP reports presented by Wayne Jenkins
- 2019 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
- 2019 Kuskokwim River Salmon Season Summary presented by 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 Ray Born
- Togiak National Wildlife Refuge updates presented by Andy Aderman
- Bureau of Land Management updates presented by Walter Gusse

- Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Subsistence Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program project reports presented by David Runfola
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Division of Wildlife updates presented by Patrick Jones and Lauren Wateen
- Donlin Mine update presented by Kristina Woolsten

Future Meeting Dates:

The Council selected October 6-7, for fall 2020 meeting dates to be held in Bethel.

The Council selected March 3-4 for winter 2021 meeting dates with a request to meet in a Yukon River community if budgets allow and COVID-19 travel restrictions lifted.

Eva Patton, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Subsistence Management

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

These minutes will be formally considered by the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2020 meeting in Bethel, 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@fws.gov.