

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM DELTA
SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes

Via Teleconference
March 1-3, 2022

Invocation

James Landlord gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Tuesday, March 1, at 9:12am. Council members Raymond Oney, Wassilly Alexie, Thomas Alstrom, John Andrew, Jackie Cleveland, Norma Evan, Robert Hoffman, James Landlord, Henry Parks, Phillip Peter, Sr., and Alissa Rogers were present by teleconference. Myron Naneng and Richard Slats were not present and were excused. A quorum was established with eleven of thirteen seated Council members present or participating by phone.

Attendees:

Via teleconference

Office of Subsistence Management, Anchorage: Eva Patton, Pippa Kenner, Cory Graham, Tom Plank, Lisa Grediagin, Robbin La Vine, Orville Lind, and Dr. Jason Roberts

U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

- Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, Bethel: Boyd Blihovde, Spencer Rearden, Aaron Webber, Chris Tulik, Aaron Moses, and Emmitt Nicori
- Togiak National Wildlife Refuge, Dillingham: Andy Aderman
- Anchorage: Jill Klein, Holly Carroll, Keith Ivy, and Robert Kaler
- Fairbanks: Gerald Maschmann
- Kenai Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office: Frank Harris

Bureau of Land Management, Anchorage: Bruce Seppi, and Chris McKee

Bureau of Indian Affairs, Anchorage: Pat Petrivelli

National Park Service, Anchorage: Dr. Kim Jochum, Victoria Florey, and Dillon Patterson

U.S. Forest Service, Anchorage: Greg Risdahl

Alaska Department of Fish and Game:

- Division of Wildlife Conservation - Bethel: Patrick Jones; Palmer: Mark Burch; Dillingham: Todd Rinaldi and John Lancefield
- Commercial Fisheries Division - Anchorage: Nick Smith and Shane Ransbury; Fairbanks: Deena Jallen, Christy Gleason, and Sam Decker
- Subsistence Division, Chris McDevitt, Fairbanks

National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) Fisheries, Juneau: Elizabeth Siddon, and Jim Murphy

North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC): Dr. Diana Stram, and Kate Haapala

Tribal Organizations:

- Association of Village Council Presidents, Bethel: Jennifer Hooper and Paige Jones
- Native Village of Alakanuk: Gabriel Buster
- Native Village of Napaimute: Dan Gillikin
- Orutsararmiut Native Council, Bethel: Gisela Chapa, Danielle Lowry
- Kwethluk Incorporated, Kwethluk: Anthony Olick
- Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission: Mary Peltola and Terese Schomogyi, Bethel; Kevin Whitworth, McGrath
- Mountain Village Tribe, Natural Resources: Stan Sheppard
- Native Village of Chevak, Tribal Administrator

Other Organizations:

- Yupik Interpretation Services, Bethel: Pat Samson and Sophie Evan
- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association: Serena Fitka and Catherine Moncrieff

Public:

- Evon Waska, Bethel
- John Lamont, Emmonak
- Bill Alstrom, St. Mary's
- Nick from Kwethluk

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Ms. Rogers, seconded by Mr. Andrews, to adopt the agenda as read with the following changes:

- Under old business add: Mulchatna Caribou Herd status update, review and finalization of Council's draft letters, and nominations for alternate YKDRAC seat on the Kuskokwim Salmon Management Working Group
- Under new business add: Fisheries Special Action request FSA22-01/02/03, and move up the fisheries management pre-season agency reports
- Under agency reports add: two NOAA and two NPFMC reports

The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Officers

Due to delay in Secretarial Appointments, Officers were nominated during the fall 2021 meeting and will remain as elected for the full year of 2022:

- Mr. Raymond Oney was elected the Council's Chair.
- Mr. Myron Naneng, Sr. was elected the Council's Vice Chair.

- Mr. Richard Slats was elected the Council's Secretary.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Phillip, seconded by Mr. Andrews, to approve the fall 2021 meeting minutes as presented.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Henry Parks of Nunapitchuk reported that since the previous meeting they had a wet fall season and the water levels were very high in his area. They did not catch much whitefish due to the wet and windy weather. Their fish racks were empty since they were not able to catch any whitefish in the fall. But, later in the winter after freeze-up, they were able to set under ice nets and catch lots of pikes and lush fish and a little bit of whitefish. When the winter trail got safe enough to travel, Mr. Parks went out to set blackfish traps, beaver traps, and otter traps. He caught a lot of blackfish and a few beavers. Mr. Parks reported that some hunters from his community were able to get some moose. This is good because it has been a very difficult year for the community due to COVID.

Mr. Parks explained that it has also been a very difficult year because of the complete closure to subsistence fishing on the Yukon River. Even though they were able to fish a little bit on the Kuskokwim River, the Chum Salmon were low in abundance, and community members caught only a few. Subsistence communities are suffering for the lack of salmon, which is their primary food. Mr. Parks is very concerned about the low salmon returns and stressed that everyone needs to conserve the salmon, including the commercial fisheries in the Bering Sea and Area M. Action needs to be taken now so the salmon do not continue to decline in the future.

Norma Evan of Marshall reported that this fall under the ice setnet fishing was very slow at first. Ms. Evan said they usually catch whitefish through the winter until the ice breaks up in the spring. She said the pike have been plentiful. Sheefish are starting to show up now, and people with setnets on the river in front of Marshall have been catching a few each day. A wolf chased a moose right through town the other day. Ms. Evan has seen more predators around and knows that trapping has reduced by about 40% locally. She sees few rabbit tracks in her area. Ms. Evan reported that their stores have been empty for over a month, but families were well prepared with moose harvested this fall. The community had no salmon. They have to sacrifice fishing to reach escapement goals and ensure the future of the salmon.

John Andrew of Kwethluk reported that last summer the fishing was both good and bad: there were a lot of Sockeye Salmon, but the Chinook Salmon were low, and Chum Salmon were practically non-existent. John reported that he caught only about seven Chum Salmon in the summer and then incidentally caught a few more later in the season in his whitefish nets. The Chinook Salmon run came in as a lot of small jacks. He said that last summer was rainy and people had a hard time drying fish. Many people are already running out of dried fish, and Mr. Andrew is sharing some of his fish with his relatives and

sending others to Chevak and Scammon Bay. His friends are doing the same: sharing with others that need fish. He said he has at least heard that the pike fishing is good now and ptarmigan are starting to show up. The first part of the fall, moose hunt was slow. People hardly saw any because the weather was too warm. Mr. Andrew noted that they are hardly seeing any rabbits around their area anymore and he has not heard of arctic hares being around anywhere.

Thomas Alstrom of Alakanuk reported that the fall came late and then the winter was cold with below-zero temperatures. They did not have good snow until January. Mr. Alstrom reported that he goes out and packs snow to melt for drinking water because it tastes better than the water they get from the faucet. The cold winter was brief without much snow. A warm spell came in February, and spring came early this year. The snow melted and the roads and river were just glare ice. He has a small 3.5-inch mesh net under the ice on the Alakanuk Slough and is catching some cisco, whitefish, small sheefish, and pike. However, he is not catching as many cisco and small whitefish as he used to; he used to catch 20 at a time and now hardly catches any. He has at least heard reports that people are starting to catch some sheefish now, and people can travel upriver to harvest pike around Mountain Village where they are plentiful. Mr. Alstrom stressed that they were not able to fish for salmon on the Yukon at all this year and there needs to be restrictions on the Bering Sea pollock fishery to reduce the salmon bycatch.

He also reported that there are a lot of moose around Alakanuk and they are even bedding down near people's houses. They have to be careful when they go out to watch for moose. He got charged by a young bull, but was able to run back into the house.

Jacqueline Cleveland of Quinhagak shared that she grew up in Quinhagak and has subsistence hunted and fished there her whole life. She is interested in documentary film making, has worked for her Tribe, and is now working as a Refuge Information Technician for the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge. Ms. Cleveland reported that Quinhagak had an okay fishing season in 2021 and met most of its subsistence fishing goals. Escapement goals were also met on the Kanektok River. However, the King Salmon seemed low and there were almost no Chum Salmon. Sockeye Salmon were very plentiful. There was commercial fishing in District 4: 74 permit holders had a total catch of approximately 2,500 Chinook, 78,000 Sockeye, 13,000 Coho, and 5,000 Chum salmon. The Tribal Council is concerned about so many nets out in the Kuskokwim Bay and about how inaccurate subsistence harvest counts might affect escapement. The Tribal Council is also concerned about sport fishing activity on the Kanektok River and the excessive motorboat traffic that is further eroding the riverbanks. These people also pollute the river, leaving things like batteries and refrigerators to wash into it. Pollution not only affects the fish and their habitat, but also the source of drinking water for the community. The pike population continues to grow, and Ms. Cleveland is concerned that pike might take over other species such as trout and char. People report seeing a lot more pike and less trout and char in the rivers around Quinhagak.

This winter Quinhagak had a winter moose hunt opportunity from December 1 to 15th, but during more than half of that time there were bad storms and people had difficulty accessing trails to get into the mountains to hunt. The fall hunt was similar in that bad weather prevented successful harvests. Only about ten moose were harvested between the fall and winter hunts combined.

James Landlord of Mountain Village reported that as soon as the Yukon River froze and the ice was thick enough, people were setting nets right in front of Mountain Village. When the ice gets thick enough to cross the river, people go over and set blackfish traps. Mr. Landlord travelled five miles upriver to set his nets where no one else was fishing and caught three Humpback Whitefish. He noted he had not caught Humpback Whitefish in some time. He ate one and gave the others to his Aunties. Mr. Landlord highlighted that he set three nets under the ice and caught a lot of sheefish – about 20 or 25 combined from his nets. Some of them were quite large like the size of King Salmon. He also caught some large pike and a few lush (Burbot). Additionally, he was surprised to catch ten Coho Salmon. But the Coho Salmon were all black with big teeth and mushy like they were spawned out. He took his nets out after a few weeks because the weather was cold and the ice was getting quite thick. The winter was cold this year with a constant wind from the North. They had a lot of snow in the area initially, but then the weather warmed up and it rained for nearly three days straight. This melted the snow, and it was just sheer ice everywhere. Erosion has been a problem on the river banks around Mountain Village, especially this past fall when they had strong south-southwest winds blowing into the shore. It even caused the gravel beach to erode. Mr. Landlord noted the river has changed since the time he was growing up. There used to be a big eddy right below the village where everyone would fish during both summer and winter, but now there is hardly even a little eddy because of all the erosion.

Alissa Nadine Rogers of Bethel shared that she started attending RAC meetings with her grandfather, the late John Hanson, when she was nine years old and is dedicated to advocating for subsistence way of life. Ms. Rogers reported that this past fall the Kuskokwim whitefish were really nice and fat which makes for good baking fish. She prefers to eat whitefish frozen raw, but her kids like them baked. There were lots of nice size pike on the Kuskokwim River too, and they were easy to catch. Ms. Rogers did hear some reports from others of deformed pike that did not look healthy. For example, some people said that they had gotten fish that were mushy, looked like their intestines were dissolving, and had livers that looked like they were full of rice. There was a lot of lush (Burbot) fish this winter and they were nice and big too.

Ms. Rogers reported that they did not go out to hunt much for ptarmigans this year, although she did catch the end of the migration and saw two big flocks. She and her family got enough to make dinner and some dry meat, which her kids really love to eat. She had a moose in her back yard this year, but most people are having to travel towards the Yukon River to catch their moose. She has heard reports that there are a lot more big, healthy wolves around this year. She has also heard there are more signs of wolverine, mink, and fox around, but fewer rabbits. She has not caught any rabbits this year but saw sign of jackrabbits out by the bluffs below Bethel.

Ms. Rogers expressed concern about the Mulchatna Caribou Herd decline. It is a subsistence resource that many communities rely upon. In recent years with Chinook and Chum salmon conservation measures, many families don't even have fish for the winter. The caribou closure has been especially difficult for those who are not able to make the long trip all the way to the Yukon River to get a moose. She is hopeful there might be a way for Tribes to organize around designated hunter permits to harvest the

abundant moose on the lower Yukon River and ship meat to the communities in need on the Kuskokwim. These have been very difficult years for subsistence families. The lack of salmon and caribou closures have made it difficult to harvest enough food. And then, because of COVID it has been difficult for communities to get food freight to villages. Ms. Rogers is also very concerned about impacts the Donlin Mine may have on fish and other subsistence resources, especially with the proposed chemicals that will be used in the gold processing.

Phillip Peter Sr. of Akiachak reported that he is an elder now and does not go out very far hunting like he used to when he was a young man. He recalled travelling all summer, fall, and winter to hunt and trap. Now he is very involved in subsistence meetings. Just the other day he met with Kuskokwim River villages in support of special actions for Federal Management of salmon on the Kuskokwim River. Phillip is very concerned about nets being confiscated when there are setnet openings. People are getting cited for nets not being the right length and depth, and if Chinook Salmon happen to be caught, they are released by the troopers. He feels this is not right because they are subsistence fishing and providing for their families. They have been following the law not fishing when it is closed. The fishing nets are essential to subsistence and no one can afford to replace them. There is too much confusion about what nets size and length can be used and where. Mr. Peter stressed that it really caused a lot of confusion, stress, and hardship on local people when ADF&G opened the fishery when it was closed by the Federal manager. He stressed that this should never happen again. He said that management decisions should be clear and straightforward so that everyone knows when and how fishing can occur along the whole Kuskokwim River, from the Johnson River up to Aniak. It is important to avoid confusion; this just caused even more duress for subsistence fishers in already difficult times.

Mr. Peter reported that the local communities of Akiachak, Akiak, Tuluksak, and Kwethluk are very concerned about the Mulchatna Caribou Herd decline and there is a need for more education about the conservation of the caribou. The communities are interested in seeing a working group formed to address caribou management and pursue a hunting moratorium in order to help the caribou herd recover. He also stressed that for all these subsistence issues it is important to work together with one mind, to not be divided, and to follow the subsistence laws of the elders. He stated that together we are a powerful people.

Robert Hoffman of Bethel expressed his appreciation for the comments just made by Phillip Peter, Sr. and he fully agrees with speaking this truth. Mr. Hoffman introduced himself as a new Council Member and a lifelong subsistence hunter and fisherman dedicated to subsistence in the region. He serves on the Orutsararmiut Native Council, Bethel Native Cooperation, and the Association of Village Council Presidents. He reported that they have abundant moose in the region now thanks to the moose moratorium, and he thanked all the people that worked together to accomplish that mission. He recalled as a young boy there were no moose and they had to travel all the way upriver to Stoney River to find them. Now, they can just go to fish camp and harvest a moose. He is very pleased about what a hunting moratorium can accomplish. Now, the most important issue is fish. They used to have abundant salmon, so much that they even had a commercial fishery in which he used to be involved. But now with the low returns of Chinook and Chum salmon, they barely have enough frozen or dry fish to subsist on through

the winter. Salmon is their primary food and many people don't have jobs to buy food; they fully depend on subsistence. Everyone has to work together to help support the subsistence communities in these times; people need to eat.

Mr. Hoffman has heard that climate change may be causing the Chinook and Chum salmon decline, and he wonders why the Sockeye Salmon are abundant. He reported that this is the first time he recalls such an abundance of Sockeye Salmon on the Kuskokwim River. They used to only catch one or two when he was young. He is thankful Sockeye Salmon were so plentiful so they could harvest them in place of the King and Chum salmon and be happy. Mr. Hoffman is very concerned about high seas fishing and sees the Bering Sea trawl fisheries as responsible for the decline. He feels they should be restricted, too, if subsistence fishers cannot harvest Chinook and Chum salmon. He is also concerned about Donlin Mine impacts to fish and how the chemicals they plan to use could contaminate the river. Mr. Hoffman reported that the rabbits and caribou are in decline too. He thinks fewer people are trapping for furs these days and there are more predators harvesting the rabbits and the caribou.

Wassily Alexie of Russian Mission reported that COVID is still going on in his community. They have a lot of concerns about subsistence fishing, and no one along the entire Yukon River was able to fish for salmon this past summer. He worries about what they will do if they can't fish again this year. Mr. Alexie noted a few families went over to the Kuskokwim River and were fortunate to get a few Chum Salmon, but there were hardly any Chum Salmon on the Yukon River. He recalled over the years how their fishing nets were restricted from 8.5 to 7.5 to 6-inch mesh, and then this past year they could only use 4-inch mesh nets. Mr. Alexie was surprised how many little jack King Salmon they caught and is concerned that so many little, young King Salmon are coming back up the river.

Chair Raymond Oney of Alakanuk thanked all the Council members for their reports and their good work talking with people in their communities, observing of their surroundings, and working to ensure people are meeting their subsistence needs. He encouraged the Council Members to continue to advocate for their people and subsistence way of life. There is always a lot of work to do; it is never done.

Mr. Oney reported that they had a cold freeze-up, but then had a lot of rain later in the winter and very high winds – so much that one time he thought his house would blow away. They are experiencing more frequent and more severe storms with very high winds and often big temperature swings from 10 below to 30 above. These are unusual weather patterns, different than he has ever experienced. It is affecting their subsistence way of life and affecting the animals and their migration, reproduction, and survival. Mr. Oney is certain it will have an effect on everyone in the long run and encouraged people to be vigilant in their observations about these changes and report them in order to advocate on behalf of subsistence. He encouraged the Council Members to talk to their elders and youth about the subsistence way of life and to also talk to the agencies to make sure that the subsistence way of life can continue.

Old Business

Mulchatna Caribou Herd Update and Discussion

Mr. Todd Rinaldi and John Lancefield with ADF&G introduced themselves as managers of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd based in Dillingham. Mr. Rinaldi reported that there was no hunting opportunity this past year and there continues to be none due to the decline in the herd's population. ADF&G plans to continue to monitor the herd to better understand what's causing the decline and will provide the Council with further updates.

Boyd Blihovde and Andy Aderman with USFWS also provided the Council with Mulchatna Caribou Herd monitoring updates and discussed their outreach efforts with local communities about the recent caribou hunting closures.

The Council discussed concerns about the Mulchatna Caribou Herd's dramatic decline and their desire to enact conservation measures that would help the herd rebound. They were particularly interested in a hunting moratorium similar to what had been implemented in the past for moose in this region. The Council discussed the pending Federal subsistence wildlife proposal WP22-41 that will delegate in-season management authority to the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge Manager (in coordination with others). The Council discussed conservation strategies and having a Special Action Request ready if there are any open hunting opportunities on the Mulchatna Caribou Herd prior to the Council's next meeting in the fall.

- Motion by Mr. Alexie, seconded by Mr. Andrew, **to submit a special action request to the Federal Subsistence Board requesting a 5-year hunting moratorium on the Mulchatna Caribou Herd.** The Council feels that a temporary hunting moratorium could help the population of this important subsistence resource rebound.

The motion passed by unanimous vote.

The Council agreed to revisit the special action request later in the meeting after Ms. Rogers and OSM staff were able to prepare more detailed language for consideration. When the topic was revisited, the Council decided to make additions to its recommendation on WP22-41 at the upcoming Federal Subsistence Board meeting instead of submitting a special action request.

- Motion by Ms. Rogers, seconded by Mr. Alexie, **to continue to support WP22-41 and to amend the Council recommendation to include the following management strategies:**
 1. Implement a moratorium on the harvest of Mulchatna Caribou Herd throughout the range of the herd for 5 years or until the population has reached 30,000 to be jointly enforced by U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and Alaska Department of Fish and Game
 2. Close Federal public lands to harvest of Mulchatna Caribou Herd throughout their migratory range that includes units 9A, 9B, 9C, 17A, 17B, 17C, 18, 19A, and 19B
 3. Maintain the age and sex ratio of the herd to increase productivity. The Council suggests 30 bulls:100 cows but acknowledges a better ratio may be provided by biologists

4. Support liberal subsistence harvests on bears and wolves
5. Improve knowledge of and compliance with harvest reporting requirements
6. Conduct outreach to address user conflict and provide education about hunting regulations

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

- Motion by Ms. Rogers, seconded by Mr. Hoffman, **to support a draft special action request that includes the above points that were added to the WP22-41 recommendation.** This special action request would only be submitted if hunting for the Mulchatna Caribou Herd was proposed to be opened prior to the next Council meeting.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

- Motion by Ms. Evan, seconded by Mr. Hoffman, **to nominate Ms. Rogers to present the above management strategies at the upcoming Statewide Board of Game meeting.**

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Draft Letters and Proposals

The Council discussed and finalized several draft letters and fisheries proposals that had been previously voted on at the fall meeting. These included:

1. Proposal to the Alaska Board of Fisheries due April 11, 2022, requesting restrictions or closures to the Area M intercept commercial fishery when the Yukon and Kuskokwim River subsistence fisheries were closed
 2. Proposal to the Alaska State Board of Fisheries due April 11, 2022, requesting a genetic testing program be implemented in the Area M commercial fishery to better determine salmon stock of origin caught in this fishery
 3. Council letter to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council addressing Bering Sea commercial trawl fishery salmon bycatch and Halibut bycatch concerns and highlighting impacts specific to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta communities
 4. Joint RAC (Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Western Interior, Eastern Interior, and Seward Peninsula Councils) letter to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council addressing Bering Sea Commercial Trawl fishery salmon bycatch reductions and requesting two Tribal or subsistence seats be added to the Council. Additionally, request the Federal Subsistence Board to elevate these concerns to the Secretary of Interior and Secretary of Commerce.
- Motion by Ms. Rogers, seconded by Mr. Alexie, **to support the Councils joint letter to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council including the edits/additions recommended by the Western Interior RAC** as follows: set the hard cap for Chum Salmon to no more than

250,000 and request the hard caps requested for Chinook and Chum salmon be instituted immediately.

Motion passed with 10 votes in favor to one against with two absent.

Election of Alternates for the Kuskokwim Salmon Management Working Group

With the recent retirement of Council member Mr. Robert Aloysius, alternates are needed to serve as a voting member on the Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council in the event primary Y-K Delta RAC Working Group representative, John Andrew, is not able to attend a meeting.

- Motion by Ms. Cleveland to nominate Mr. Hoffman of Bethel to serve as an alternate on the Working Group.

The motion passed unanimously.

- Alissa Rogers volunteered to also serve as an alternate on the Working Group.

The motion passed with 10 votes in favor to one against with two absent.

New Business

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Update

Mr. Cory Graham, Fisheries Biologist for the Office of Subsistence Management, presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) update. The FRMP is currently in the final phase of the 2022 Monitoring Program funding cycle. The Federal Subsistence Board met in early February and endorsed the final Monitoring Program funding plan. With this cycle coming to an end, it's time for the Councils to begin developing priority information needs for the 2024 Monitoring Program call for proposals. Mr. Graham asked if any Council Members would like to volunteer to help develop priority information needs for the next call for proposals. Alissa Rogers and Thomas Alstrom agreed to assist in this effort.

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Proposals

Mr. Graham informed the Council that the Board will be accepting proposals to change Federal regulations for the subsistence harvest of fish and shellfish on Federal public lands and waters for the 2023-2025 regulatory years for a period of at least 30 days upon the publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register. 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 discussed some important subsistence fisheries issues and learned that either they were already in regulation such as use of dip nets as subsistence fishing gear on the Yukon and Kuskokwim Rivers, or that the topics were of importance to include in the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Priority Information Needs such as monitoring Kuskokwim Rainbow Smelt populations and identifying critical spawning habitat such as the gravel flats below Kalskag that may be in jeopardy due to increased barge traffic proposed for the Donlin Mine and dredging proposals to accommodate medium/deep draft barges.

Fisheries Closure Review Discussion

Mr. Graham presented to the Council the information the Fisheries Closure Reviews that will come for Council's review and action during the fall 2022 meeting. OSM will be reviewing three closures located in the Western Interior region. These closures are Jim River, Bonanza Creek, and Kanuti River. OSM will also be reviewing two closures in the Eastern Interior region, and these closures include Nome Creek and Delta River. These closures are relevant to your Council because they are located within the Yukon River drainage, and rural residents of the entire drainage could harvest fish in these areas if the closures are rescinded.

Call for Non-rural Determination Proposals

Ms. Pippa Kenner, Anthropologist at the Office of Subsistence Management in Anchorage, informed the Council that the Board will be accepting proposals to change non-rural determinations in Federal regulations. A non-rural determination is the process for formally changing in Federal regulations a community's status from non-rural to rural or from rural to non-rural. This is the second call for proposals for non-rural determinations since 2018. Any valid non-rural determination proposals submitted this year will be acted on by the Board in 2025. The call for non-rural determination proposals occurs every four years at the same time as every other fisheries regulatory cycle.

Review and approve FY-2021 annual report

Motion by Ms. Rogers, seconded by Mr. Alstrom, to approve the Council's FY-2021 Annual Report with the following additions:

- 1) Request for support for Kuskokwim communities to be able to harvest additional moose from the very abundant lower Yukon River moose population to provide for families in need
- 2) Update the North Pacific Fisheries Management bycatch topic to be consistent with the joint RAC letter on this topic that was just approved by the Council
- 3) Add additional detail on the hardship caused by low Chum Salmon returns and highlight the lack of subsistence fishing opportunity
- 4) Update the Mulchatna Caribou herd topic to include the request for a five-year moratorium discussed earlier in the meeting.

Federal Subsistence Board Annual Report Reply Process Review and Revision Discussion and Council comments and feedback

Ms. Robbin La Vine, Policy Coordinator for the Office of Subsistence Management, provided an overview and facilitated discussion on Annual Report Reply process. The Council discussed the review of the process and glad to see the process is being considered. The Council is aware that responses to the Annual Report can take time and letters to the Federal Subsistence Board may allow for more targeted discussion of urgent issues and may get a quicker response.

Receiving Public Testimony Protocol – Guided Discussion

Ms. La Vine led the Council in a guided discussion about their preferences for receiving written and oral public testimony at Council meetings. In the Council's opinion, the best ways to encourage public feedback to the Councils is through outreach to local organizations, Tribes, and local Village Corporations. These groups often have representatives attending the RAC meetings and can help build awareness in each their own communities and across the region. It is always more effective and powerful to have opportunity for in person participation – it would be best to go back to in-person meetings as there are so many more opportunities for the Council and public and agencies to connect. The reality is that most in the region have limited internet and spotty phone reception, but all avenues for participation should be open. It is helpful to send draft agendas to the Tribes and organizations three months in advance so they can prepare or add topics to the Tribal Council meeting agendas so they have time to make an official recommendation. Local radio stations such as KYUK and KNOM and local newspapers such as Delta Discovery are great ways to get information out the public.

The Councils discussed public comments and prefers that they be read into the record in full verbatim if possible to keep the full language and intent. In-person testimony makes a bigger difference than written comments or letters. It allows a person to speak their heart, speak in their own language, and convey issues at depth that is hard to do in a written statement. The Council stressed the need to think of the Elders who do not use internet or may not speak or write in English.

Briefing and Council comments on proposed actions to automate Federal subsistence permits

Ms. La Vine briefed the Council on proposed actions to automate Federal subsistence permits. The Council recommended utilizing Refuge Information Technicians to issue permits and gather information. It may sound great to automate everything, but it needs to be accessible and it needs to actually work for rural Alaska.

Briefing on the Secretarial regulations proposing the inclusion of identified submerged lands in the Tongass National Forest.

Ms. La Vine provided the Council with an update on this issue. It directly applies only to the Southeast Alaska region.

Fisheries Special Action Request FSA22-01/02/03

Ms. Pippa Kenner, Anthropologist for OSM, provided the Council with an overview of Fisheries Special Action Request FSA22-01/2/3 which requests that the Federal Subsistence Board close the Yukon River drainage to the harvest of Chinook and summer and fall Chum Salmon except by Federally qualified subsistence users and to further reduce the pool of eligible Federally qualified subsistence users based on an ANILCA Section 804 analysis.

- Motion by Ms. Rogers, seconded by Mr. Phillips, Sr. **to Support FSA22-01, 02, and 03 with modification** to allow the area of the Black River drainage (situated south of the mouth of the Yukon River) to remain open to the harvest of Chinook and summer and fall Chum salmon by non-Federally qualified users. The Council discussed that the Yukon River has been experiencing low Chinook Salmon runs for the last twenty years and now the Chum Salmon runs have declined at an alarming rate. The Council supports continuing conservation efforts to help the Chinook and Chum salmon stocks rebound. Everyone needs to be at the table to help conserve these fish.

The Council stressed that people can't just keep fishing until the salmon are fished out. However, subsistence communities have been suffering for the lack of salmon so if there were enough salmon to allow some harvest, then the Federally qualified subsistence users would have priority under Federal management. This special action request is just for the 2022 fishing season, which would allow opportunity to evaluate the effects.

The Council is concerned that the coastal communities of Chevak, Scammon Bay, and Hooper Bay do not currently have a customary and traditional use determination for Yukon River Chinook and Summer Chum salmon. The Council understands that the Office of Subsistence Management will assist these communities in submitting a proposal to address this. In the meantime, for 2022 under this Special Action request, the Council requests that the Black River area be omitted from Federal management so that these communities would not be excluded from this traditional salmon harvest area if there were to be a salmon fishing opportunity under Federal management.

Motion passed on a vote of 11 yes, 0 no, 2 absent.

The Council took action on these special action requests before FSA22-04 was received.

Agency Reports:

- *Orutsararmiut Native Council and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program* report presented by ONC Natural Resources Director, Gisela Chapa and Partners Program Biologist, Danielle Lowrey

- *Native Village of Napaimute and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program* report presented by NVN fisheries biologist Dan Gillikin
- *Yukon Fall Chum* report presented by Deena Jallen and Christy Gleason, ADF&G Yukon Fisheries Biologists and Inseason managers
- *2022 Yukon River Preseason Salmon Management* report presented by Holly Carroll, USFWS Yukon Federal Inseason Manager
- *Association of Village Council Presidents* update, presented by Jennifer Hooper
- *Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission* update presented by Mary Peltola
- *Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association* update presented by Serena Fitka
- *2022 Kuskokwim River Preseason Salmon Management* presentation presented by Boyd Blihovde, Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Manager
- *Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge* report presented by Refuge Manager Boyd Blihovde, Subsistence Biologist Aaron Moses, and Refuge Information Technician Chris Tulik
- *Togiak National Wildlife Refuge* report presented by Togiak NWR Wildlife Biologist, Andy Aderman
- *Bureau of Land Management* report provided by BLM Anchorage Field Office Biologist, Bruce Seppi
- *Mulchatna Caribou Herd* report provided by ADF&G
- *Eastern Bering Sea Ecosystem* report presented by Dr. Elizabeth Siddon, NOAA Fisheries
- *Northern Bering Sea Juvenile Salmon* report presented by Dr. Jim Murphy, NOAA Fisheries
- *North Pacific Fisheries Management Council Bering Sea Bycatch* report presented by Dr. Diana Stram, Sr. Scientist
- *North Pacific Fisheries Management Council Local and Traditional Knowledge and Subsistence Taskforce* report by Dr. Kate Haapala
- *Alaska Seabird Update* presented by Robb Kaler, Biologist, USFWS Migratory Bird Management program
- *Office of Subsistence Management* report presented by Robbin LaVine, OSM Policy Coordinator

Council Requests:

The Council discussed the hardship and costs incurred participating in RAC meetings by teleconference and requested a letter be submitted to the Federal Subsistence Board requesting reimbursement for cell phone minutes and digital data expenses incurred while participating in two- to three-day meetings by teleconference and downloading of large files for those that have computer internet access. The Council members take time away from the family, subsistence activities and paid work to participate in meetings and recently have been paying for cell phone minutes to participate in meetings by teleconference.

- Motion by Ms. Rogers, seconded by Mr. Andrew, to submit this request in a letter to the Federal Subsistence Board.

Motion passed unanimously.

Future Meeting Dates:

The Council selected October 27-28, in Bethel for the fall 2022 meeting dates.

The Council selected April 3-4, in Alakanuk for the winter 2023 in meeting dates.

signature on file with original

Brooke McDavid, Subsistence Council Coordinator, for Eva Patton, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

signature on file with original

Raymond Oney, 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 2022 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 Brooke McDavid, Subsistence Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-388-9205, or email her at brooke_mcdavid@fws.gov.