

**WESTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY
COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes**

McGrath Traditional Council Community Service Center
McGrath, Alaska
October 8-9, 2019

Invocation:

Member Raymond Collins delivered the invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order on Tuesday, October 8, 2019 at 9:00 a.m. Council members Jack Reakoff, Jenny Pelkola, Timothy Gervais, Pollock Simon Sr., Donald Honea Jr. and Raymond Collins were present in person. Tommy Kriska and Goodwin Semaken were not present and were excused. Shirley Clark was not present and was unexcused. A quorum was established with 6 out of 9 seated Council members present (Council has one vacant seat).

Attendees:

In person:

Karen Deatherage, Fairbanks, Office of Subsistence Management (OSM)
Frank Harris, Anchorage, OSM
Lisa Maas, Anchorage, OSM
Pippa Kenner, Anchorage, OSM
Steve Fadden, Anchorage, OSM
Glenn Chen, Anchorage, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Vince Mathews, Fairbanks, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Fred Bue, Fairbanks, USFWS
Bruce Seppi, Anchorage, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Walker Gusse, Fairbanks, BLM
Matt Cameron, Fairbanks, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR)
Lisa Stuby, Fairbanks, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)

Kevin Woodworth, McGrath, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRIFC)
Johnathan Samuelson, McGrath, KRIFC
Suzanne Little, Anchorage, Pew Charitable Trusts
Gina McKindy, McGrath Native Village Council
Betty Magness, McGrath Native Village Council
Sally Collins, McGrath
Damian Dennis, McGrath
Connor Dennis, McGrath
Geraldine Semone, McGrath

Via teleconference:

Orville Lind, Anchorage, OSM
George Pappas, Anchorage, OSM
Chris McKee, Anchorage OSM
Carol Damburg, Anchorage, USFWS
Gerald Marschman, Fairbanks, USFWS
Tina Moran, Fairbanks, Kanuti National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)

Chris Harwood, Fairbanks, Kanuti NWR
Jeremy Havener, Galena, Koyukuk, Nowitna,
Innoko NWR
Bob Ribarchik, Galena, Koyukuk, Nowitna,
Innoko NWR
Ken Chase, Anvik, Koyukuk, Nowitna, Innoko
NWR
Aaron Moses, Bethel, Yukon Delta NWR
Ray Born, Bethel, Yukon Delta NWR
Marcy Okada, Fairbanks, GAAR
Alissa Rodgers, Bethel, Yukon Kuskokwim
Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
Dan Sharp, Anchorage, BLM
Bonnie Million, Anchorage, BLM

Mark Burch, Palmer, ADF&G
Todd Rinaldi, Palmer, ADF&G
Holly Carroll, Anchorage, ADF&G
Deena Jallen, Anchorage, ADF&G
Brooke McDavid, Fairbanks, ADF&G
Christine Gleason, Fairbanks, ADF&G
Steve Wackowski, Anchorage, U.S. Department
of the Interior
Brian McKenna, Fairbanks, Tanana Chiefs
Conference (TCC)
Erie Roe, Fairbanks, TCC
Wayne Jenkins, Anchorage, Yukon River
Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)
Catherine Moncrieff, Anchorage, YRDFA

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion #1 made by Mr. Simon, seconded by Ms. Pelkola to adopt the agenda as read with the following changes:

- Add 10:30 time for USFWS Award for Jack Reakoff
- Add Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Commission to Tribal/Organization Reports
- Add Bering Sea Western Interior Resource Management Plan and Ambler Road Draft Environmental Impact Statement under Bureau of Land Management Agency Reports.

Motion #1 passed on a unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion #2 by Mr. Honea, seconded by Ms. Pelkola, to approve the winter 2019 meeting minutes with the following modification: Remove “snowmachine” from Chair’s report on Page 8.

Motion #2 passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Jenny Pelkola of Galena reported that moose hunting and King Salmon fishing went well for most community members. The berry crop was not good due to a hot and dry summer but those conditions helped with fish drying. Ms. Pelkola heard from several community members that non-local moose hunters had been disrespectful and caused concern in Galena. Ms. Pelkola received a letter from the Louden Tribal Council regarding predator control, and will read the letter on behalf of the Tribe under Tribal comments later during the meeting.

Raymond Collins of McGrath reported a late but good moose season in the area. Mr. Collins did note that there were not many yearlings or small moose observed, and this may result in a dip in the breeding population in the future. There was less escapement in the upper Kuskokwim River, perhaps due to earlier fishing down river. Restrictions were put in place however, and King Salmon escapement went from 2,000 last year to 6,000 this year in the Salmon River Fork of the Pitka River. Berries were spotty due to dry conditions.

Pollock Simon, Sr., of Allakaket, reported that Chum Salmon came up the river but not many Chinook Salmon. High snow and water made it difficult to keep the nets in the water for Chinook Salmon. Deep snow depths also caused poor moose survival and low populations. Subsistence users had difficulties finding moose as many were staying in the hills. There was not much fat on those that were harvested. Mr. Simon concluded in his report that hunters were being harassed by people for licenses and permits, including questions about where people were going to hunt.

Timothy Gervais of Ruby reported that there were concerns regarding contamination from fire-fighting foams at Air Force bases in Galena and McGrath, as the chemicals used do not break down readily. Mr. Gervais is working to contact toxicology representatives from USFWS regarding concerns with toxin buildup in fish and wildlife. Mr. Gervais stressed the remarkable impacts of high water temperatures this past summer, where long stretches with no rain pushed temperatures above 70 degrees Fahrenheit on the Kuskokwim River. He stated that 64-68F degree water temperatures become detrimental to salmon as it lowers oxygen capacity and increases heart rates and metabolism, which uses up stored energy. Alaska Department of Fish & Game (ADF&G) biologists on the Koyukuk River in mid-July found dying Chum Salmon from Hughes to Huslia. Over 800 dead fish were observed. Therefore, thousands could have died from the high water temperature event. There was a significant lack of spawning performance at Henshaw Creek. The Henshaw weir escapement showed 33-35,000 salmon when the season average is 100,000. In Chignik the water temperature was 6 degrees higher than normal. Mr. Gervais said there was good moose hunting and King Salmon fishing around Ruby. Mr. Gervais noted appreciation for the email Mr. Reakoff sent to the Council regarding Salmon Shark predation on Chinook Salmon. He will be trying to learn more about Salmon Shark populations and their impacts on salmon. Mr. Gervais discussed the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) meeting he attended in April. He was impressed with the input from the Regional Council Chairs and pleased that all but one of the Council's proposal recommendations were accepted by the Board. Mr. Gervais mentioned that the Association of Village Council Presidents withdrew their support for the Donlin Mine this past fall. The Council is on record opposing this mine due to the potential impacts on subsistence resources in the region.

Donald Honea Jr., of Ruby reported that fishing was also good in Ruby and that he believes it is due to all the years of work at Council meetings and groups like the Kuskokwim and Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commissions. Mr. Honea commended Holly Carroll of ADF&G for the handling of opening and closings along the Yukon River and appreciated the pre-season meetings. He reported that hunting was good and about 15-20 caribou were seen, which is a good thing. Mr. Honea mentioned the retirement of Mr. Collins and shared his concern over the lack of representation from the Kuskokwim region without him on the Council.

Jack Reakoff of Wiseman delivered the Chair's report. Mr. Reakoff reported on the Koyukuk River Fish and Game Advisory Committee request to lengthen the State moose season in the Koyukuk region to the first week of October due to moose moving later in the season. The GAAR Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) had a meeting in Anaktuvuk Pass where many residents and hunters requested harvest limit of two versus one bear in Units 24B and 25A. Mr. Reakoff described a conference call where he and the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and Eastern Interior Alaska Regional Councils chairs discussed concerns over the low summer Chum Salmon run at the beginning of the season. Mr. Reakoff stated that the summer Chum Salmon run improved over time, but many fish died due to warm water, including Sockeye Salmon. Mr. Reakoff believes that climate change is killing salmon. Mr. Reakoff reported a high snow year with winter rain forming crust that resulted in mortality of yearling and two-year old moose. Sheep on the southside of the Brook's Range also suffered due to deep snow. Mr. Reakoff hopes the NPS will conduct a sheep survey on the southside of the range before increased harvests and seasons are considered. Mr. Reakoff described the lack of law enforcement for moose hunting on the Dalton Highway. Mr. Reakoff concluded with his concerns over the extraordinary decline of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd, down from a historical high of 200,000 animals to 13,500. Mr. Reakoff believes the herd will never recover if the population drops below a certain level.

Awards

Mr. Reakoff received the USFWS Region 7 Excellence in Partnership Award. Mr. Collins received a service award for 26 years on the Council. Mr. Reakoff and Mr. Simon Sr., received a service award for 25 years on the Council. Mr. Honea Jr., received a service award for 15 years and Mr. Gervais received a service award for 10 years on the Council.

Public and Tribal Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

Ms. Pelkola distributed and read a letter from the Loudon Tribal Council to the Council requesting predator control in the Galena area.

Old Business:

- Lisa Maas, OSM, provided updates on Wildlife Closure Reviews
- Karen Deatherage, OSM, presented the 805c Report from the Board.

New Business:

Wildlife Proposals:

Regional Proposals:

WP20-36/37: Revise hunt areas, to-be-announced seasons and permit requirements for moose in Unit 21D.

Motion #3 by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Ms. Pelkola to support WP20-37 with modification to define the winter hunt area. The Council proposes to define the December hunt area for Unit 21D *as that area southeast of Kaiyuh Slough and Nine-Mile Camp to Bonanza Creek Drainage to the Kaiyuh Mountains, and south to the Unit 21D boundary.* The Council discussed the extremely low bull:cow ratios near Galena of 10 bulls per 100 cows, and wanted to ensure that this area was not included in the December hunt. The modified hunt area would allow for harvests in a high-density moose area with good bull:cow ratios while applying conservation measures where needed. The Council also requested that the modification to WP20-37 be submitted to the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) to modify the Council's BOG Proposal 59, which would align the Federal and State regulations. The Council believes both State and Federal regulations will help conserve the moose population in the low-density areas of Unit 21D, while providing for subsistence opportunities in areas of high moose density. The Council's intention is also to provide moose harvest opportunities earlier in the winter within the described area of Unit 21D under both State and Federal Regulations. It is not the desire of the Council to add a disparate Federal hunt. Therefore, if the BOG fails to adopt Proposal 59 as amended, then the Council will withdraw the December hunt portion of WP20-37 from Board consideration.

Motion #3 as amended passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion #4 by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Ms. Pelkola, to support WP20-36. The Council opposed WP20-36 because of its action taken on WP20-37. However, the Chair noted that he does not support eliminating the Federal-only hunts in Unit 21 as proposed in WP20-36, noting that while moose populations may not support an additional season right now, those seasons should be kept in regulation to provide subsistence harvest opportunity whenever the moose population increases.

Motion #4 failed on a unanimous vote.

Crossover Proposals:

WP20-27: Allow use of snowmachines to assist in the take of caribou in Unit 17.

Motion #5 by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Honea, to support WP20-27. The Council did not believe that this means and methods issue would result in additional take of the herd, but that limiting seasons and harvest would be more effective. One Council member, however, was concerned with additional take of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd, which has declined from a historical high of 200,000 animals to just 13,500 in recent years, including a 50% decline during the past 5 years. All Council members agreed that the use of snowmachines to take caribou is a customary and traditional practice, and should be permitted.

Motion #5 passed on a unanimous vote.

WP20-43/44/45/46: Eliminate bull closure and prohibition on calf harvest for caribou in Unit 23.

Motion #6 by Mr. Simon, seconded by Mr. Gervais, to support WP20-43/44/45/46. The Council believes this proposal would allow subsistence hunters to target younger, non-breeding bulls versus the older breeding bulls necessary for successful breeding. The bull:cow ratio is currently very good and above management objectives. The June cow:calf ratio is excellent, indicating good calf production. The Council feels confident that the Western Arctic Caribou Herd is stabilizing and that these additional opportunities would not negatively affect the herd's population growth.

Motion #6 for WP20-46 passed on a unanimous vote. The Council took no action on WP20-43/44/45.

Statewide Proposals:

WP20-08: Require traps or snares to be marked with name or State identification number for all furbearers in all units.

Motion #7 by Mr. Honea, seconded by Mr. Gervais, to support WP20-08. The Council believes conflicts may exist in urban areas, but not in rural Alaska. The Council considers this proposal a hardship for rural communities, and ineffective in resolving the proponent's issue. In rural Alaska, it is clear who is trapping from the community, and most trappers have multiple sets, making marking each one burdensome. Further, the BOG has found no evidence that marking traps with an identification deters illegal trapping activities. Finally, users would simply trap under State regulations to avoid compliance with Federal subsistence regulations.

Motion #7 for WP20-08 failed on a unanimous vote.

WP20-26: Allow use of snowmachines for positioning wolf and wolverine in Units 9B, 9C, 17B, and 17C.

Motion #8 by Mr. Simon, seconded by Ms. Pelkola, to support WP20-26. Subsistence hunters have customary and traditional use of the resources in Units 9B, 9C, 17B, and 17C. Although travel conditions are becoming more difficult due to climate change, using snowmachines allows users to access resources in an economically viable way. This proposal would only affect a very small portion of BLM lands.

Motion #8 for WP20-26 passed on a unanimous vote.

Special Actions:

WSA19-07: Temporary Special Action regarding the Mulchatna Caribou Herd (MCH)

Motion #9 by Mr. Honea, seconded by Mr. Simon, to send a letter with recommendations on WSA19-07 to the Bristol Bay and Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Chairs, as well as a copy to the Federal Subsistence Board. The Council supports the action requested in WSA19-07, but further believes it is imperative that the Federal and State winter hunts be closed to protect this critically declining herd. At the meeting, Federal and State managers shared increasing biological concerns about

the MCH, which has dropped from historic highs of 200,000 animals to an estimated 13,500 caribou in 2019, decreasing by 50% since 2016. There also appears to be a lack of reliable harvest information, which could be grossly underreported and negatively affecting the adult cohort of this herd. State biologists reported that pregnancy rates and cow:calf ratios are high, survivorship has been very good over the past few years, and there is no appearance of nutritional deficiencies in the herd. They stated there appears to be a lack of adult bulls. The Council feels confident that overharvest is the cause for the precipitous decline of the MCH and that an immediate management response is warranted.

The Council would like concurrence from the Bristol Bay and Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils for the following actions: 1) Request that the Board modify WSA19-07 to close the winter hunt for the MCH; 2) Submit an Emergency Order to the Alaska Board of Game to close the winter hunt for the MCH; 3) Implore Federal and State managers to implement measures that will accurately quantify the harvest of caribou from the MCH; 4) Work with the Tribes to ask local subsistence users to “stand down” on MCH harvest, wherever and whenever possible.

Motion #9 to submit recommendations for WSA19-07 passed on a unanimous vote.

2020 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program:

Mr. Collins recommended setting escapement goals for the Salmon River weir. Mr. Honea requested that customary trade be quantified for fish in the middle Yukon River. Several Council members remarked on the continued importance of the Henshaw Creek weir, Fall Chum Salmon populations and the Yukon River Coho Salmon radio-telemetry project.

Identify Issues for FY2019 Annual Report:

- The USFWS needs to coordinate with State and other Federal agencies to provide a uniform definition of mean/ordinary high water mark. The lack of a standardized definition creates confusion over interpretation and results in user and law enforcement conflicts.
- There is a disconnect between the USFWS and State of Alaska harvest recording system for the MCH. Wounding loss and under-reporting information needs to be captured to prevent overharvest and the continued decline of the herd.

Agency Reports:

- Radio-telemetry for Kuskokwim River Sheefish presented by Lisa Stuby, ADF&G.
- 2019 Yukon River Salmon Season presented by Fred Bue, USFWS and Deena Jallen, ADF&G.
- YRFDA Update presented by Wayne Jenkins.
- KRIFC Update presented by Jonathan Samualson and Kevin Woodward.
- Kanuti NWR Update presented by Tina Moran, Chris Harwood and Vince Mathews.
- Koyukuk, Nowitna, Innoko NWR Update presented by Bob Ribarchik, and Jeremy Havener.

- Yukon Kuskokwim Delta NWR Update presented by Ray Born and Aaron Moses.
- GAAR and GAAR SRC Update presented by Matt Cameron and Marcy Okada.
- BLM Central Yukon Resource Monitoring Plan presented by Tim LaMarr.
- Ambler Road Draft Environmental Impact Statement presented by Tim LaMarr, BLM.
 - Motion #10 by Mr. Honea, seconded by Ms. Pelkola, to submit a comment letter to the BLM regarding commercial uses of the proposed Ambler Mining District Road. The letter will be submitted via e-Planning by the comment deadline on October 29, 2019. Motion #10 passed on a unanimous vote.
- Bering Sea Western Interior Resource Monitoring Plan (BSWI) Resource Monitoring Plan Update presented by Bonnie Million, BLM.
 - Motion #11 by Mr. Collins, seconded by Mr. Gervais, to submit a letter to the BLM regarding inclusion of the Area of Critical Environmental Concern for the Big River in the preferred Alternative C of BSWI, with a copy to Tribal councils in Nikolai and McGrath, as well as to the Bering Sea Western Interior Inter-Tribal Commission. Motion #11 passed on a unanimous vote.
- Bering Sea Western Interior Inter-Tribal Commission Update presented by Suzanne Little, Pew Charitable Trusts.
 - Motion #11 by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Collins, to submit a letter to the BLM regarding support of the Bering Sea Western Interior Inter-Tribal Commission and their recommended actions for BSWI. Motion #11 passed on a unanimous vote.
- OSM Update presented by Frank Harris.

Future Meeting Dates:

February 11-12, 2020 in Fairbanks, Alaska

October 14-15, 2020 in Aniak, Alaska



Karen Deatherage, DFO
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management



Jack Reakoff, Chair
Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its February 11-12, 2020 meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

More detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Karen Deatherage at 907-474-2270, email karen_deatherage@fws.gov.