

WESTERN INTERIOR SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via teleconference
February 16-17, 2022

Invocation

Jack Reakoff gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Wednesday, February 16 at 9:00 am. Council members Donald Honea Jr., Pollock Simon Sr., Kevin Whitworth, Jack Reakoff, Arnold Demoski, Timothy Gervais, and Darrell Vent Sr. were present. Rebecca Wilmarth was present only briefly in the morning of the first day and provided her Council member report. Jenny Pelkola and Tommy Krista were not present and were excused. The Council has no vacant seats. A quorum was established with seven of ten seated Council members participating by phone.

Attendees:

Via teleconference

- Katerina Wessels, Brian Ubelaker, Lisa Grediagin, Scott Ayers, Dr. Hannah Voorhees, Thomas Plank, Robbin La Vine, Elizabeth Williams, Nissa Pilcher, Dr. Jason Roberts; Office of Subsistence Management, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Boyd Blihovde, Aaron Mosses, Joanna Fox, Tina Moran, Chris Harwood, Bob Rebarchik, Gerald Maschmann, Jeremy Havener, Christopher Tulik, Holly Carrol, Rob Hirschboeck, Jill Klein, Emmitt Nicori; U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- Marcy Okada, Mat Cameron, Will Deacy, Dr. Kim Jochum, Victoria Florey; National Park Service (NPS)
- Tim LaMarr, Bruce Seppi, Chris McKee, Walker Gussey, Jennifer McMillan, Erin Julianus, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Glenn Stout, Deena Jallen, Mark Burch, Sara Longson, Christie Gleason, Shane Ransbury, Lisa Stuby, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
- Pat Petrivelli, Bureau of Indian Affairs
- Greg Risdahl, U.S. Forest Service
- Bruce Irvin, Dr. Jim Simon; Tanana Chiefs Conference
- Terese Schomogyi, Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission
- Catherine Moncrieff, Serena Fitka; Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Honea, seconded by Mr. Vent, to adopt the agenda as read with the following changes:

- Move presentation from Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority (AIDEA) on Ambler Access Project Update from old to new business
- Add the following items to the agenda
 - Calls for Proposals: Fisheries/Shellfish and Nonrural Determination
 - Fisheries Closure Review Discussion
 - Bycatch Update; Dr. Diana Stram, North Pacific Fishery Management Council
 - Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Kuskokwim River Salmon and Refuge report
 - Receive information on Dall sheep, BLM
 - Special Action Request for Dall sheep in Units 24A and 26B
 - Joint Council Bycatch Letter for review
 - Discuss Fisheries Special Action Request FSA22-01

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Election of Officers

Mr. Jack Reakoff was elected the Council's Chair.

Ms. Jenny Pelkola was elected the Council's Vice-Chair.

Mr. Darrel Vent was elected the Council's Secretary.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Vent, to approve the Fall 2021 meeting minutes as written. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Don Honea of Ruby reported that his community has been taking wolves to try to help the moose out this winter; the weather has been hard on the moose with all the snow that fell this winter. He hopes that all communities have an incentive program to help folks take more wolves like Ruby does.

Pollock Simon, Sr. of Allakaket reported that this winter has been cold. This summer, there weren't any salmon in the rivers. The moose population has been down. It has been tough. Not everyone in the community got a moose, so Allakaket shared. Mr. Simon also said that teleconferencing is very difficult for him to do. He has a hard time hearing, and the teleconference system is difficult to use.

Kevin Whitworth of McGrath reported that the Mulchatna Caribou Herd is struggling. Dall sheep in the Alaska Range in Unit 19 are struggling after two years of bad winter weather. There was a rain event in December as well as January this year. Some areas have low moose numbers. There are concerns with Chinook Salmon on both Kuskokwim and Yukon rivers for over a decade, and the Chum Salmon have crashed the last two years. Chum Salmon are heavily utilized fish and are a keystone species. With limited fish, brown bears will turn to moose and caribou and even black bears – there were fewer black bears around McGrath. These are all food security issues for the people up and down these rivers.

Arnold Demoski of Nulato reported that while the community was grateful for the salmon that had been donated to the people on the river, people would have rather been able to fish for themselves. The Middle Yukon Fish and Game Advisory Committee authorized a winter moose hunt for the second year in a row; the moose population in this area is doing ok. Nulato has a wolf bounty program that the Council office instituted and that has helped. There are brown bears moving into the Kaiyuh Flats area. Also he hasn't seen nearly as many moose kills (on Facebook) as have been posted last year. Mr. Demoski noted that there is a very smart black wolf that is the pack leader down by Galena, and no one has been successful in getting him. He said he is looking forward to their upcoming Stickdance, which will pull a lot of folks together. Lastly, he noted that no one has really been trapping beaver around there.

Tim Gervais of Ruby reported that he is concerned with the makeup of the State of Alaska's Salmon Bycatch Task Force. There is not a lot of subsistence representation. There is, however, plenty of commercial representation, including lobbyists and others who were instrumental in framing the current North Pacific Fishery Management Council's (NPFMC) Amendment 91. Mr. Gervais noted that this amendment to the Bering Sea and Aleutian Island Fisheries Management Plan appeared to be a conservative measure, but ultimately legalized the bycatch of prohibited species. The trawl fleet is trying to bring up other issues that do affect salmon numbers like global warming, illegal underreported fishing, and an increase in salmon shark. The NPFMC is not able to affect any changes to these issues the trawl fleet is raising, but the NPFMC is able to put restrictions on the trawl fishery. It seems that others regard salmon as a trash fish and do not understand the significance of what subsistence is to rural Alaska. Mr. Gervais heard reports that there were more Sockeye Salmon catches in the Kuskokwim River last summer and noted that this is a bright spot.

Rebecca Wilmarth of Red Devil reported that Red Devil got 14 inches of snow last night, so she was unable to call in to the meeting until directly before her report because they had to clear the long-distance satellite dish. This means there was over 100 inches of snow that fell this winter and it's just been one cold spell after another. With the cold spells freezing the river and the snow events, it is going to be a very wet spring. There are a lot of moose around the community, which has also brought wolves in close to the village. There were even a few wolves taken inside the village this winter. All the snow made it difficult for animals to move around.

Darrell Vent of Huslia reported that there have been quite a few calves and cow moose killed by wolves near Huslia, and the packs are getting larger. The snow is deep, so they are having an easier time getting moose. There were a few rain events that created an ice layer. This cuts up the legs of moose, so they are even more vulnerable to wolves. Mr. Vent expressed concern about bycatch and how it seemed that money was ruling fishing decisions regarding this and hatcheries pumping out fish into the ocean. He noted that while it is difficult to fight this, those on the river need to learn to work together to try to solve these problems. In the 1970s, Huslia lost access to caribou because the migration pattern shifted. Huslia had moose issues in the 1980s, ongoing Chinook Salmon run problems for the last decade, and now the Chum Salmon has crashed too. This summer, there was no salmon fishing, so Huslia depended on other food like whitefish and Sheefish. The bears have started behaving differently as well and are preying on the moose population harder in the summer. There are few jobs in the villages, so reliance is heavy on

these traditional and cultural foods. Dialog must be started between us, the State, and the Federal government to work together.

Jack Reakoff of Wiseman reported that he filled in for Mr. Simon at the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group Meeting (WACH Working Group); the caribou herd population has declined to 188,000. Currently 12,000 animals are taken annually, and a lot of that harvest is cows. At their last meeting, the WACH Working Group discussed drafting a proposal seeking to reduce the amount of cow caribou harvested from this herd, but ultimately did not have enough support within the working group to advance, which is very concerning. The Porcupine Caribou Herd is large, and they crossed the Dalton Highway over a long stretch of the road from Coldfoot all the way to Finger Mountain, which is abnormal. There was deep snow this year – one event was 41.5 inches in a 30-hour period. There was no rain like there was in the lower Koyukuk River and on the Yukon River. The rain events that happened in other places teamed up with the deep snow in Wiseman and the previous bad winters to make it very problematic for the Dall sheep population. There is going to be virtually no moose calf survival. There has been high bear predation on moose as well. The old saying “if you take a moose or caribou, it’s your obligation to take a bear or wolf” should come back. Subsistence users must start taking more predators.

Old Business

Deferred Wildlife Special Action Request WSA21-01a (caribou)

The Council clarified that the caribou are overwintering in different areas, their migration timing and paths are changing. Concern was expressed that too many cows are being harvested especially during their migration but the Council believes that this herd is out of their region.

- Motion by Mr. Vent, seconded by Mr. Demoski, to defer to the home regions; the motion passed on a unanimous vote.

AIDEA Ambler Access Project Update

Ms. Charlene Ostbloom presented the update to the Council.

Review Draft Joint Council letter to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council

The Council reviewed the draft joint Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, Western Interior, Eastern Interior, and Seward Peninsula Regional Advisory Councils letter to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) on bycatch.

Council discussion focused on past NPFMC actions on bycatch, concerns over the impacts of having no or reduced fishing opportunities for subsistence users on their food security and ability to pass down and participate in culturally important activities while commercial trawling continues, the genetic makeup of salmon caught as bycatch, concerns over how the salmon stocks are not going to rebuild if something doesn’t change, concerns over hatchery fish from the United States and other countries being released into the ocean in large numbers and their ability to out compete native stocks, decreased carrying capacity in the ocean due to changing climate, concern over the impacts to the overall food web, and methodology of the trawl fleet in how to avoid catching salmon.

- Motion by Mr. Whitworth, seconded by Mr. Vent, to approve the Joint Council letter to the NPFMC with amended language – to make this an immediate action, and setting hard cap for Chum Salmon of 250,000. Motion passed on a unanimous vote.
- Motion by Mr. Vent, seconded by Mr. Gervais, to draft a letter to the NPFMC requesting an immediate reduction to all salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea/Aleutian Islands commercial fishery, and to address concerns of current unfettered salmon hatchery production into the Northern Pacific Ocean, which is problematic for native stocks and needs to be moderated. Motion passed on a unanimous vote.
- Motion by Mr. Demoski, seconded by Mr. Gervais, to select Mr. Gervais, Mr. Vent, and Mr. Whitworth to be the Council’s delegation to the NPFMC June meeting. Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

New Business

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Proposals

Mr. Cory Graham informed the Council that the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) will soon 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.

- After passing the gavel to Secretary Vent in the absence of Vice Chair Pelkola, Mr. Reakoff made a motion, which was seconded by Mr. Demoski, to submit a fisheries proposal to rescind the closure to the harvest of non-salmon fish in the Jim River drainage by Federally qualified subsistence users and modify regulations to allow rod and reel gear only and a Grayling harvest and possession limit of 10 per day.

Fisheries Closure Review Discussion

Mr. Graham presented to the Council the information on the Fisheries Closure Reviews that will come for Council’s review and action during the fall 2022 meeting, which will include the Jim River, Bonanza Creek, and the Kanuti River in the Western Interior Region, and the Nome Creek and Delta River in the Eastern Interior Region. The Council asked clarifying questions regarding the closure review process.

Call for Non-rural Determination Proposals

Ms. Liz Williams informed the Council that the Board will be accepting proposals to change non-rural determinations in Federal regulations. The Council did not develop any non-rural determination proposals during this meeting.

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Update

Mr. Graham presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program update. Mr. Gervais and Mr. Whitworth volunteered to represent the Council to develop priority information needs for the region this coming summer.

Council Charter Update

Ms. Katerina Wessels provided the Council with updates to the 2021 Council Charter. Some of the irrelevant language was removed, and the charter now has the clause on carryover terms that provide for members to continue to serve after their term expiration date if the new appointments by the Secretaries have not been made by the time the Council's winter meeting occurs.

The carryover clause reads, *"If appointments for a given year have not yet been announced, a member may continue to serve on the Council following the expiration of his or her term until such appointments have been made. Unless reappointed, the member's service ends on the date of announcement, even if that member specific seat remains unfilled."*

The Council commented that this ability for the Council to carryover terms is a good thing and the Council is happy to see this change.

Ms. Wessels also gave a brief update on the current Council Application Nomination open season; that the nomination period is currently open, and that the Western Interior Region had received very few applications. It was noted that if anyone knew of anyone qualified or interested, please have them call the OSM office so they can assist in getting nomination paperwork submitted.

Review and approve FY2021 annual report

- Motion made by Mr. Vent, seconded by Mr. Whitworth, to approve the FY-2021 Annual Report as written. Motion passes on a unanimous vote.

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

Ms. Robbin La Vine presented to the Council information on the current report reply process. The Council provided the following feedback. The Councils developed their reports from the inception, and it is important that the Board reviews these reports. If the Councils are instructed to direct their correspondence directly to the agencies as opposed to the Board, those agencies need to respond. This Council has directed letters to specific agencies and no response was ever received. Agencies should be obligated to respond to the Councils. If Councils are directed to write to agencies, and the Councils do not get a response, then the Council should be able to write directly to the Secretaries after two nonresponses. If the Agencies continue to not respond, then the Council will return to directing our correspondence to the Board.

- Motion by Mr. Vent, seconded by Mr. Demoski, to transmit the Council's discussion points to the Board on this topic for when this is reviewed. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Receiving Public Testimony Protocol – Guided Discussion

Ms. La Vine led the Council through a guided discussion on how they would prefer to receive public testimony. The Council noted that the public must first be aware of Council meetings and the agenda

topics with plenty of lead time in order to have the public present and engaged at their meetings. The Council prefers comments to the Council be made in person, but oral comments over teleconference and written comments were also acceptable. The Council would prefer that written comments be relayed on the record in a summarized fashion, but to be available to Council members in their entirety. The Council does not believe there should be a deadline to submit comments as they wish to be as accommodating as possible for any member of the public who wishes to engage with the Council and testify on the Council's business.

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

Ms. La Vine presented the Council with a briefing on Council comments on proposed actions to automate Federal subsistence permits. The Council commented that the State of Alaska has similar online permits set up already, some were familiar with that and it seemed to work.

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

Ms. La Vine presented to the Council information on this topic. The Council had no comments.

Discussion on Fisheries Special Action Request FSA22-01

Ms. Pippa Kenner presented information on this request to the Council. The proponent of the request spoke to his request. The Council discussed previous fisheries special action requests that requested the same management, where Federal public waters are located within the Yukon Drainage, who can fish and help with fishing and putting up the fish. With input from the proponent, the Council discussed adding Coho Salmon to the request. Motion by Mr. Vent, seconded by Mr. Whitworth, to support FSA22-01 with the modification to include Coho Salmon. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Special Action Request on Dall Sheep in Units 24 and 26

- Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Vent, to submit a special action request seeking to close the hunting of sheep in Unit 24A and Unit 26B, west of the Sagavanirktok River, to be closed to all users for the 2022-2024 wildlife regulatory cycle. Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Agency Reports:

- Tanana Chiefs Conference report presented by Bruce Ervin
- Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association report presented by Catherine Moncrieff
- Kuskokwim River Intertribal Fish Commission report presented by Terese Schomogyi
- Yukon River Subsistence Salmon Report presented by Holly Carrol, Yukon River Federal Subsistence Fisheries Manager, and Gerald Maschmann, Fisheries Biologist, USFWS

- 2022 Season Forecast and ADF&G's Yukon River projects presented by Christy Gleason, Yukon Fall Season Fisheries Manager and Deena Jallen, Yukon Summer Season Fisheries Manager, ADF&G
- North Pacific Fishery Management Council Overview and Salmon Bycatch Management in North Pacific Groundfish Fisheries presented by Dr. Diana Stram, Senior Scientist, NOAA
- Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Report, including an update on the Kuskokwim River salmon presented by Aaron Moses, Refuge Subsistence Coordinator, and Boyd Blihovde, Project Leader, USFWS
- Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko Wildlife Refuge Report presented by Jeremy Havener, Refuge Subsistence Coordinator, USFWS
- Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Committee Update presented by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator, NPS
- Gates of the Arctic National Park Update on moose and caribou presented by Matt Cameron, Wildlife Biologist, and on Dall Sheep presented by Will Deacy, Wildlife Biologist, NPS
- Bureau of Land Management Central Yukon Field Office Report presented by Tim LaMarr, Field Manager, and an update on Dall sheep presented by Jenn McMillan, Wildlife Biologist, BLM
- Bureau of Land Management Anchorage Field Office Report presented by Tom Sparks, Associate Field Manager, BLM
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game Report presented by Glenn Stout, Wildlife Biologist, ADF&G
- Office of Subsistence Management Report presented Katerina Wessels, Supervisory Program Analyst, OSM was given on the first day of the meeting.

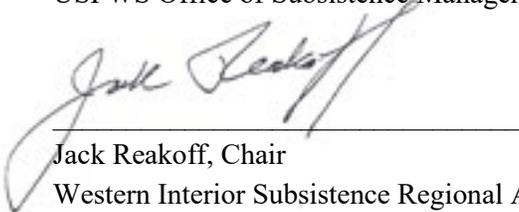
Future Meeting Dates:

Fall meeting dates confirmed for October 19-20, 2022, in Fairbanks

Winter meeting dates selected are April 4-5, 2023, in Aniak



Nissa Pilcher, Subsistence Council Coordinator for Katerina Wessels, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management



Jack Reakoff, Chair
Western Interior Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Western Interior 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 Nissa Pilcher at 1-800-478-1456 or (907)891-9054, email nissa_batespilcher@fws.gov.