

NORTHWEST ARCTIC SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

By teleconference due to travel restrictions during the COVID-19 pandemic.
February 18, 2021

*These minutes are an abbreviated record of the business conducted at this meeting.
For full details, transcripts of this three day meeting are available at:
<https://www.doi.gov/subsistence/library/transcripts/8-northwest-arctic>*

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Thursday, February 18, 2021 at 9:00 am. Council members Thomas Baker, Elmer Armstrong, Jr., Wilbur Howarth, Sr., Michael Kramer, Calvin Moto II, Robert Schaeffer, and Enoch Shiedt, Sr. Council members Vida Coaltrain and Barbara Atoruk were not present and were excused. Council member Bryan Jones was not present and was not excused. A quorum was established with 7 of 10 seated Council members participating by phone.

Attendees:

Via teleconference

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): George Pappas, Robbin La Vine, Hannah Voorhees, Brent Vickers, Karen Hyer, Steve Fadden, Zach Stevenson.
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Tom Sparks, Nome.
- Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): Brittany Sweeney, Kotzebue, Bill Carter, Kotzebue; Susan Georgette, Kotzebue.
- National Park Service (NPS): Carlos Fyie, Kotzebue; Raime Fronstin, Kotzebue; Marcy Okada, Fairbanks; Anchorage; Dr. Joshua Ream, Anchorage; Victoria Florey, Anchorage; Hannah Atkinson, Kotzebue; Martha Fronstin; Maija Lukin, Kotzebue; Scott Sample.
- Bureau of Indian Affairs: Pat Petrivelli, Anchorage.
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Alex Hanson, Kotzebue; Beth Mikow, Fairbanks; Carmen Daggett, Utqiagvik; Mark Burch, Palmer; Rick Merizon, Palmer.
- NANA Regional Corporation: Damon Schaeffer, Anchorage; Liz Cravalho, Kotzebue.
- Alaska Resident: Mark Richards, Fairbanks.

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Baker, seconded by Mr. Howarth, to adopt the agenda as read. The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Officers

Mr. Thomas Baker was elected the Council's Chair.

Mr. Michael Kramer was elected the Council's Vice-Chair.

Mr. Elmer Armstrong was elected the Council's Secretary.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Vice-Chair Kramer, seconded by Mr. Shiedt, to approve the fall 2020 meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Wilbur Howarth, Sr. of Noorvik didn't even see caribou until winter. Berries were hard to find last summer, but cranberries were good. His son brought him a caribou and had to go far up to get it. Moose are declining. The Life Below Zero folks were filming and shot about a dozen cow and calf caribou about two years ago.

Calvin Moto II of Deering had nothing to report.

Enoch Shiedt, Sr. of Noatak reported the late arrival of salmon and char following freeze up. Sheefish arrived late too. Caribou were late too with reduced numbers. Noatak residents were the only ones that hunted some. Some caribou were sighted near Buckland and Selawik and looked skinny, presumably because they were chased by wolves. Then some more were sighted between Selawik and Noorvik, and near Noatak. Mr. Shiedt also added that he is sure the caribou numbers are down. Mr. Shiedt thinks that there is a need for an emergency meeting.

Vice-Chair Michael Kramer of Kotzebue reported that caribou hunting in his area was poor. Ambler and Shungnak didn't get any caribou until very late, and only a few animals. Vice-Chair Kramer got only one caribou. The salmon run was poor, but Sheefish are now coming to Kotzebue area. Vice-Chair Kramer was really concerned that non-resident and non-local hunters were allowed to come and hunt during pandemic. The outside hunters were acting insultingly and disrespectfully towards other passengers and employees at the airport, where Vice-Chair Kramer works. He heard racial slurs directed at the local people. Vice-Chair Kramer said that he has a medical condition that makes him more susceptible to COVID-19, and he was really worried when he worked at the airport and saw that outside hunters were allowed to come in. Vice-Chair Kramer heard a lot of people in the Kotzebue and Noatak area are harvesting wolves.

Secretary Elmer Armstrong of Noorvik reported that hunting caribou was difficult this year and that a couple of boats that went hunting got stuck and the Coast Guard had to rescue them. Some hunter had success harvesting caribou on the Seward Peninsula towards Buckland. Secretary Armstrong had to pull his net because he was getting only a few Chum Salmon and mostly Pink Salmon. Thin ice conditions prevented fishing for whitefish. There were some cranberries, blueberries, and salmonberries. Secretary

Armstrong was not successful in filling his RM880 (moose) tag. There was a big pack of wolves between Noorvik and Selawik, so wolves are having an impact on caribou and moose.

Chair Thomas Baker of Kotzebue reported the scarce harvest of caribou during the fall and winter in Kotzebue. Some were lucky to fill their RM880 (moose) tag, but he noted that he had not been able to fill his moose tag. Less than 10 people were lucky enough to get more than one caribou. Some caribou crossed the ice from the Sisolik side over to Kotzebue in late October/November. The people had been successful jigging for Sheefish, sometimes right out of town and by Pike's Spit.

Old Business

Wildlife Special Action WSA21-01

Ms. Voorhees gave an update on WSA21-01, which requested a closure to caribou and moose hunting on Federal lands in Units 23 and 26A. The Council voted to submit this Special Action in November, 2020. Vice-Chair Kramer noted that they want to see the caribou herd count as soon as it is available. Ms. Voorhees explained that this is not an action item, but asked if the Council wanted to weigh in on the draft analysis for the Special Action Request. Mr. Sheidt reported that he had been hearing that the caribou numbers were down. Mr. Howarth noted that the caribou seemed to be staying up high in the mountains and up north near the calving grounds. Mr. Hanson noted that the 2019 caribou census was the most recent count and was 244,000 caribou. He noted that the herd numbered 495,000 animals in 2003 and had declined to 201,000 animals in 2016. They plan to do another count in summer 2021. He noted that female caribou mortality and calf recruitment are very important considerations. He noted that they do separate counts for the Western Arctic Herd and the Teshekpuk Herd. Chairman Baker noted that the flood of outside hunters, charter services and outside outfitters are a real concern. Ms. Voorhees noted that moose are declining in the area. Chairman Baker explained that both moose and caribou numbers seem to be declining. Mr. Hanson noted that brown bear predation seems to be one of the bigger challenges right now. Ms. Daggett noted that in Unit 26A you can't use an airplane during July, August, and September, and January, February and March to hunt moose. Mr. Hanson noted that there had been a steady decline between five and 12 percent in the Unit 23 moose population over the past decade. Mr. Howarth noted the high brown bear population in the Kotzebue to Noatak areas.

Individual C&T

Dr. Ream gave a report on the recent process used to make customary and traditional use determinations for individuals. This isn't an action item for the Council. Individual C&Ts are not a new thing, but they are very rare. Less than 10 people have applied for individual C&Ts over 40 years. The NPS incorporated the input from the 10 Councils and the 7 Subsistence Resource Commissions (SRC). The Federal Subsistence Board will retain the final decision making authority on individual C&Ts based on recommendations from the Council(s) and affected SRC. The process will be completed in a timely manner. Dr. Ream noted that the Federal Subsistence Board welcomes feedback.

New Business

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Update

Ms. Hyer gave the update. OSM took the priority information needs developed by this Council in fall 2020 and included them in an announcement seeking fisheries research proposals. The window for proposals closes on March 15. OSM will update the Councils at the fall 2021 meetings. Mr. Howarth requested that water temperature information be collected from the lower Kobuk River.

Call for Federal Wildlife Proposals

Mr. Stevenson and Mr. Pappas informed the Council that the Board is accepting proposals through April 20, 2020 to change Federal regulations for the subsistence harvest of wildlife on Federal public lands for the 2022-2024 regulatory years. The Board will consider proposals to change Federal subsistence wildlife seasons, harvest limits, methods, and means related to taking of wildlife for subsistence uses, as well as customary and traditional use determinations.

Mr. Howarth made a motion seconded by Mr. Schaeffer to work with staff to create a wildlife proposal on beaver, so at a later meeting, the Council could act on it. The motion passed unanimously, but the Council didn't have a quorum. The proposal would be crafted to match the State's harvest limits in Units 22 and 23.

Council Charter Review

Mr. Pappas informed the Council about Charter requirements. After discussion, Mr. Howarth made a motion, seconded by Mr. Armstrong that Council membership be increased from 10 to 12 members. The motion passed unanimously.

Enforcement

Mr. Scott Sample (NPS) provided a law enforcement update. They had 456 visitors to the Noatak Preserve with 366 caribou, 16 brown bear, one moose and one wolf taken last year. He noted that he is working together with NANA Trespass, the Alaska State Troopers, BLM and the FWS. Mr. Damon Schaeffer join to discussion to explain some of NANA's wildlife enforcement programs.

Agency Reports:

- Mr. Merizon (ADF&G) gave a report on Alaska hare and snowshoe hare.
- Ms. Susan Georgette, Refuge Manager for Selawik National Wildlife Refuge gave an overview of Selawik Refuge activities.
- Ms. Maija Lukin, Superintendent for the Western Arctic National Park Lands (Cape Krusenstern National Monument, Kobuk Valley National Park, Kobuk Valley National Park) gave an overview of park activities. Hannah Atkinson, Cultural Anthropologist talked about the Cape Krusenstern National Monument SRC and the Kobuk Valley National Park SRC. Ramie Fonstin, Wildlife Biologist, explained cooperative efforts with ADF&G and the FWS and wildlife surveys.

- Ms. Marcy Okada, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve gave an overview of the SRC and other activities. Kyle Joly, Wildlife Biologist for Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve and lead NPS caribou biologist for the Western Arctic Herd gave an update on caribou and moose and responded to questions about the Ambler Road.
- Ms. Liz Cavalho with NANA gave an update related to Ambler Road litigation and asbestos issues.
- Ms. Brittany Sweeney with the FWS made comments concerning beaver regulations.
- Mr. Tom Sparks with BLM in Nome gave an update on BLM activities.
- Mr. Alex Hanson, Wildlife Biologist with ADF&G gave an update on activities.
- Mr. Ramie Fronstin, Wildlife Biologist with the NPS gave an update on seals.
- Mr. Steve Fadden, Wildlife Biologist gave the OSM report.

Future Meeting Dates:

The NWA Council is scheduled for their next meeting on November 1 and 2, 2020.

While the Council did not have a quorum, Vice-Chair Kramer made a motion to have the winter, 2022 NWA Council meeting on February 14 and 15. Chairman Baker and Mr. Howarth both agreed with these dates. Chairman Baker asked staff to poll the full Council and send information out to the full group.

_____/signature on the original/_____

Tom Kron on behalf of the OSM, Council Coordination Division
 USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

_____/signature on the original/_____

Thomas Baker, Chair
 Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were formally considered and approved by the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2021 meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Katerina Wessels at 1-800-478-1456 or 1-907-786-3885, email katerina_wessels@fws.gov.