

WESTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via Teleconference Due to Covid-19
October 14-15, 2020

Invocation

Jenny Pelkola gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Wednesday, October 14, 2020 at 9:00 a.m. Council members Jack Reakoff, Jenny Pelkola, Timothy Gervais, Donald Honea, Jr., Tommy Kriska, and Goodwin Semaken were on teleconference. Absent: Pollock Simon, Jr. (excused). A quorum was established with 6 out of 7 seated Council members participating by phone. (Council has three vacant seats).

Attendees:

Via teleconference

Karen Deatherage, Fairbanks, Office of Subsistence Management (OSM)
Greg Risdahl, Orville Lind, Hannah Voorhees, Robbin LaVine, Jarred Stone, Lisa Maas, George Pappas, Anchorage, OSM
Patricia Petrivelli, Anchorage, Bureau of Indian Affairs
Carol Damburg, Anchorage, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
Vince Mathews, Matt Keyes, Gerald Maschmann, Fairbanks, USFWS
Bob Rebarchik, Wyatt Snodgrass, Galena, Innoko/Nowitna/Koyukuk National Wildlife Refuge (NWR)
Tina Moran, Joanna Fox, Chris Harwood, Fairbanks, Kanuti NWR
Boyd Blihovde, Aaron Moses, Ray Born, Gary DeCossas, Bethel, Yukon Delta NWR
Frank Harris, Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office, Soldotna
Bonnie Million, Bruce Seppi, Walker Gusse, Anchorage, Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
Tim LaMarr, Jen McMillan, Fairbanks, BLM
Joshua Ream, Anchorage, National Park Service (NPS)
Marcy Okada, Kyle Joly, Fairbanks, Gates of the Arctic National Park & Preserve (GAAR)
Eric Row, Fairbanks, Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC)
Serena Pitka, Catherine Moncrieff, Anchorage, Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA)
Deena Jallen, Jeff Estensen, Nick Smith, Anchorage, ADF&G
Christy Gleason, Alida Trainor, Chris McDevitt, Fairbanks, ADF&G
Joshua Peirce, McGrath, ADF&G
Susi Sam, Galena, Loudon Tribal Council
Mary Peltola, Terese Schomogyi, Bethel, Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC)

Kevin Whitworth, McGrath, KRITFC
Laramie Maxwell, Fairbanks, Northern Alaska Environmental Center
Mary Martinez, Anchorage, Calista Corporation

Review and Adopt Agenda

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

- Add: Mulchatna Caribou Herd (ADF&G)
- Add: BLM: Ambler Road & Dalton Highway Corridor Hunting (recent surveys update and guide permits)
- Add: Kanuti, Innoko/Nowitna/Koyukuk and Yukon Delta NWR Reports
- Add: USFWS Subsistence Division Update
- Remove Service Awards
- Move YRDFA, KRITFC and USFWS/ADF&G reports prior to Fishery Proposal Deliberation
- Move BLM to an earlier position on agenda.

The motion passed unanimously.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mrs. Pelkola, seconded by Mr. Gervais, to approve the winter 2020 meeting minutes as with the following modifications:

Mrs. Pelkola asked to be referred to as Mrs. Pelkola in minutes, not Ms.

The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Jenny Pelkola of Galena reported her continued concern over the vacancies on the Council and the need to get these seats filled. She stated that fishing was very poor this last summer, with high water, lots of drift and multiple fishing closures. Mrs. Pelkola shared that local community members were very happy with the opportunity to get their moose permit in Galena. There were lots of cows and calves, and they looked healthy. She didn't notice many non-local hunters in boats and believes this allowed for more locals to get their harvests for the winter. Mrs. Pelkola reported seeing very few birds compared to previous years, including ducks and geese. Mrs. Pelkola also shared she had observed more grizzly bears and fewer low bush cranberries this summer and fall.

Timothy Gervais of Ruby reported on his summer fishing experiences, including the need for subsistence users to adjust to changing climates, different species and animal behaviors. This includes switching from drift to set nets to improve success, and the importance of being prepared. The Village of Newtok lost fish this summer due to power outages. Mr. Gervais reported that Sockeye Salmon runs were low in

the Copper River, and extremely low in Chignik. Kotzebue and Southeast Alaska had weak Chum Salmon runs, and Prince William Sound and Southeast Alaska had weak Pink Salmon runs. Kodiak had an excellent Pink Salmon run and commercial harvest, and Chignik had a good Pink Salmon run but no harvest due to closures to protect Sockeye Salmon. Mr. Gervais continued to express concerns over Chinook and Sockeye Salmon bycatch. He also mentioned that many fish are much smaller, resulting in younger and smaller fish on the spawning grounds. This will most likely contribute to smaller fish in the near future. Mr. Gervais called on the State of Alaska to work on reversing this smaller fish trend. Mr. Gervais also remarked that the large number of state and foreign hatchery production is likely causing big starvation events, such as those experienced in 2014-2016, for wild stocks. He stressed the need for more information on the food supply in the marine environment to understand why there is bad survivability for salmon in the rivers. Mr. Gervais did state that there was good moose hunting which helped to make up for the lack of fish.

Mr. Gervais also commented on the Council membership and stressed his concern over Tommy Kriska's application. He stated that Mr. Kriska had insured him that he handed his application in to OSM. Mr. Gervais suggested the Council write a letter to the Federal Subsistence Board asking for an exception, in part due to the Covid-19 issue, for Mr. Kriska's appointment to the Council in 2021. Mr. Gervais stated that the Council is already facing multiple seat vacancies, and Mr. Kriska's participation was imperative to the Council's success.

Donald Honea, Jr., of Ruby appreciated hearing about waterfowl observations. Mr. Honea sits on the Tanana Chiefs Conference Migratory Bird Committee, and will pass these observations forward. Mr. Honea agreed with other Council members that this season's fishing was poor. High water was problematic and prevented subsistence users from getting to some of the sloughs. The hunting was good, however, and most of his community got a moose. Mr. Honea believes that the lack of a check station on the Nowitna River this year allowed for abuse to occur. Mr. Honea stressed the need for Council representation from the Kuskokwim area.

Tom Kriska of Koyukuk reported that although the water was high in the rivers, the fish were there. Mr. Kriska switched from drift nets to set nets, and was much more successful. Mr. Kriska also believes that high water drives the waterfowl further inland to the willows and alders where they feed. He observed ducks back off the Koyukuk River, swans and cranes in flight but few geese. The moose season was good with many moose along the Koyukuk for miles. Mr. Kriska recommends a check station on the Koyukuk River as there were high numbers of hunters, particularly on the upper river. Mr. Kriska understood there would only be 5-10 permits, but saw over a 100 hunters along the Koyukuk River. Mr. Kriska did feel confident that he submitted his application for the 2021 Council appointments and was frustrated that it had not been received. He wants to encourage more participation on the Council from the lower Yukon River.

Goodwin Semakan of Kaltag reported that everyone got their moose because no hunters came into the area due to Covid-19. Fishing was low on the creeks and the Council needs more representation from the

Kuskokwim area to help understand the issues there. Mr. Semakan also reported that he heard wolves howling along the rivers.

Jack Reakoff Wiseman delivered the Chair's report. Mr. Reakoff reported that the Council's input for the Board of Game proposals went well. He specifically noted the success of the proposal to lengthen the moose hunting season in Unit 24B from September 25 to October 1. Moose are migrating later in the season, so this extension is important for subsistence opportunity. The BOG lengthened the sheep season on the Dalton Highway, however, by over two weeks. The proposal passed despite the fact that there has been an 80% reduction in sheep population in this area. Further, there was no survey and no data to support this extension. Sheep and moose populations continue to be low in the Brooks Range due to deep snow or rain on snow events. There are more guides operating than ever, with multiple guides operating off the same permit. Guides are taking sublegal rams, and recruitment was at 3 lambs for 31 ewes. There are lots of wolves and lynx, which both prey on Dall's sheep. Both BLM and the State of Alaska are increasing guide use during this critical period, which presents a significant impact to the resource. Mr. Reakoff participated in the Kuskokwim River Working Group for in-season management of salmon, which had weak runs this summer. He noted that he saw several Facebook posts of fish caught during closures. The Covid-19 issue is very challenging for subsistence users. There is very little work and villages are relying heavily on subsistence resources. Mr. Reakoff reiterated frustration over the decreased Council membership and lack of appointments. Mr. Reakoff believes that the Department of Interior is trying to reduce Council participation, which goes against Section 805 of ANILCA requiring meaningful participation.

Motion by Mrs. Pelkola, seconded by Mr. Honea, to send a letter to the Federal Subsistence Board regarding both the timing and number of Council membership appointments. The Council is requesting a full complement of membership on the Regional Advisory Councils, which is imperative to adopting subsistence regulations, and fulfilling the statutory requirements under Section 805 of ANILCA

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Honea, to send a letter to the Board and Solicitor requesting that the Board take a non-customary action, and submit Tommy Kriska's application for service on the Council in 2021. Mr. Kriska's application was misplaced and his participation on the Council is critical to the Western Interior Alaska Region. The Council believes that the regulation framework is currently strained due to the high seat vacancy on Regional Councils. The Council cannot afford to lose a seat over an administrative issue.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Old Business

- Ms. Deatherage presented the 805c report from the Board to the Council.

New Business

Fisheries Proposals and Closure Reviews

Regional:

FCR21-04: Yukon Drainage/Jim River Closure – All Fish

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mrs. Pelkola to support elimination of the closure per the OSM recommendation with the following modification: Allow a bag/possession limit of 10 grayling per day by rod and reel in the Jim River, including Douglas and Prospect Creeks.

This closure was authorized to minimize the disruption of the State's continuing fish and game management of subsistence, while at the same time fulfilling the requirements of ANILCA. The Jim River is currently excluded from the list of rivers where subsistence use is permitted along the Dalton Highway Corridor. Under this regulation, use has been closed to Federally qualified subsistence users but open to sport fishing under State regulations. The Council believes there is verifiable traditional use of salmon in this river and a limited harvest by rod and reel should be allowed to occur. The Council also believes that if subsistence users are going to travel down the river for grayling, the bag limit should be increased to justify time and expense. Allowing for a small traditional harvest of salmon, along with a reasonable harvest of grayling would re-establish a subsistence priority use of this resource.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Crossover:

FP21-01: Repeal Subsistence Closure, Kuskokwim River Salmon

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Semaken to adopt FP21-01 repealing the subsistence closure for Kuskokwim River salmon.

The Council believes this is a housekeeping issue. Adopting this proposal will allow alignment with current management practices that have been in place on the Kuskokwim River since 2003.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

FP21-02: Modify Set Gillnet Spacing, Kuskokwim River Tributaries - All Fish

Motion by Mr. Honea, seconded by Mrs. Pelkola to adopt FP21-02, which would modify set gillnet spacing on Kuskokwim River tributaries for all fish species.

The Council was very concerned with the high potential of nets being very close together under this regulation. This would not only create crowding in traditional fishing areas but also have the potential to

increase harvest. Salmon can be sucked into eddies on the river and be easily caught. This is especially challenging right now due to recent low Chum Salmon runs. The Council agrees with the Yukon Kuskokwim Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council that this regulation would not protect the resource, would create crowding, and reduce in-season management capacities.

The motion failed on a unanimous vote.

FP21-03: Clarify Set Gillnet Orientation, Kuskokwim River - All Fish

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Honea to adopt FP21-03 clarifying set gillnet orientation on the Kuskokwim River for all fish species.

The Council believes this is a housekeeping issue validating that set drift nets represent a customary and traditional fishing method in the tributary streams of the Kuskokwim River. Adoption of this proposal will clarify this use under current Federal subsistence regulations.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

FCR21-06: Toklat River Closure – All Fish

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mrs. Pelkola to support eliminating the closure for the Toklat River.

The Council is in agreement with the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council that this closure should be eliminated. The Council also recognizes that two communities within the Western Interior Region have Customary and Traditional Use in this drainage and may benefit from additional traditional subsistence fishing opportunities in the Toklat River.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

FCR21-07: Yukon Drainage/Nome Creek Closure – Grayling

Motion by Mr. Gervais, seconded by Mr. Semaken, to defer action to the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council.

The Council defers action to the EIRAC due to the fact that Nome Creek lies deep within the Eastern Interior region. The Council believes the communities within this region will have the knowledge and resources needed to make the best decision regarding this current closure.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

2022 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program

Ms. Robbin LaVine with OSM presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) Priority Information Needs (PINs) working group discussion results. Mr. Jarred Stone of OSM responded to inquiries regarding the FRMP program.

Motion by Mr. Honea, seconded by Mrs. Pelkola to adopt the fifteen (15) PINs for the Kuskokwim River.

The Council agreed that all PINs should remain on the list as they are all very important to the region. Council members stressed, however, that those PINs focusing on incidental Chinook Salmon mortality and drop-out rates with gillnets were critical. There is also concern with the lack of information for stressors such as heat, mortality during migration, water velocity, and gear entanglement, all of which can negatively affect salmon spawning. The Council considers both of these research needs as high priorities for the Kuskokwim River region. The Council is also requesting that OSM allow for ranking of PINs for the next cycle, as some needs are clearly greater than others.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Mrs. Pelkola, seconded by Mr. Gervais, to adopt the twelve (12) PINs for the Yukon River, and add an additional PIN for research on distribution, abundance, condition and survival of juvenile and out-migrating salmon in the Yukon River drainage.

The Council agreed that all PINs, including the above addition, should be listed as they are all very important to the region. The Council would again like to emphasize, however, a priority for those PINs focusing on incidental Chinook Salmon mortality and drop-out rates with gillnets, as well as stressors on salmon such as heat, mortality during migration, water velocity, and gear entanglement, all of which can negatively affect spawning abilities.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Identifying Issues for FY2020 Annual Report

The Council identified the following topics for inclusion into the FY20 Annual Report:

- Board definition for ordinary mean high water mark
- Council member appointments and continuing incumbent terms due to late appointments
- BLM guide use permitting process

Proposed Review Processes for NPS Individual Customary and Traditional Use Determinations

Joshua Ream, NPS, presented proposed changes to the NPS individual customary and traditional use determinations review process, and requested the Council's action on the changes.

Motion by Mr. Honea, seconded by Mrs. Pelkola, to adopt the NPS's proposed changes to the Subsistence Eligibility Permits and Individual Customary and Traditional Use Determinations process.

The Council supports the NPS' proposed permitting changes for National Parks in Alaska. The Board would grant delegation of authority to the NPS Regional Director to issue individual customary and traditional use permits for parklands in Alaska. The Council believes that utilizing the Subsistence Resource Commissions will provide a beneficial interface with the users in their respective Park units. The Council recognizes that should an individual feel that the Regional Director acted inappropriately with the issuance of these permits, the individual could submit a proposal to the Board to rescind the delegation of authority to the NPS Regional Director.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Agency/Tribal/Organization Reports:

- Gerald Mashmann, USFWS, 2020 Preliminary Yukon River Summer Season Summary
- Deena Jallen and Jeff Estensen, ADF&G, 2020 Preliminary Yukon River Summer Season Summary
- Serena Fitka and Catherine Moncrieff, YRDFA Update
- Kevin Whitworth, KRITFC Update
- Ray Born and Gary Decosass, Yukon Delta NWR, In-season Management
- Eric Row, TCC 2020 Update
- Tim LaMarr, Jennifer McMillan, BLM, Ambler Road, Central Yukon Resource Management Plan, Dalton Highway Corridor Guided Hunting Updates
- Tina Moran, Chris Harwood, Kanuti NWR Update
- Bob Rebarchik, Innoko/Nowitna/Koyukuk NWR Update
- Aaron Moses, Yukon Delta NWR Update
- Vince Mathews, USFWS, Refuge Subsistence Program Update
- Alida Trainer, Chris McDevitt, ADF&G, Subsistence Division Update
- Todd Rinaldi, ADF&G, Mulchatna Caribou Herd Update
- Marcy Okada, Kyle Joly, NPS, GAAR and SRC Report
- Orville Lind, OSM, Tribal Guidelines
- Greg Risdahl, OSM, Office Update

Future Meeting Dates:

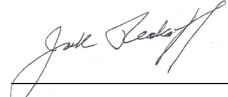
Winter 2021 meeting to be held February 17-18, in Fairbanks

Fall 2021 meeting to be held October 13-14, in Anchorage

KAREN DEATHERAGE Digitally signed by KAREN DEATHERAGE
Date: 2021.03.03 14:37:30 -0900

Karen Deatherage, Designated Federal Officer

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 winter 2021 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 Karen Deatherage at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-474-2203, email karen_deatherage@fws.gov