

YUKON-KUSKOKWIM DELTA SUBSISTENCE

REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Yupit Piciryarait Cultural Center
Bethel, Alaska
August 21-23, 2024

Invocation:

Council member Henry Parks provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order Wednesday, August 21, 2024, at 9:05am. Council members John Andrew, Jacqueline Cleveland, Norma Evan, Robert Hoffman, Walter Morgan, Henry Parks, Phillip Peter, Sr., and Myron Naneng, Sr. were present in-person. Vice Chair Alissa Nadine Rogers attended via teleconference on the first day and in-person on subsequent days. Chair Raymond Oney and member Wassily Alexie were absent and excused. With 9 out of 11 seated Council members present, a quorum was established. There are currently two vacant seats on the Council. Due to the absence of the Chair, member Cleveland presided as Chair on day one, and Vice Chair Rogers was acting Chair on days two and three.

Attendees:

** Denotes attended virtually*

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Brooke McDavid, Scott Ayers, Kevin Foley, Pippa Kenner, Cory Graham*, Tom Plank*, Robbin La Vine*, Orville Lind*
- Interpreter: Patrick Samson
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Regional Office – Jill Klein*, Boyd Blihovde*; Fisheries and Ecological Services – Holly Carroll, Pete Fasbender*; Northern Alaska Field Office – Neesha Strellrecht*; Habitat Restoration: Trent Liebich; Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) – Laurie Boeck, Christopher Tulik, Stanislaus Sheppard, Christian Alexie Jr., Aaron Moses
- National Park Service (NPS): Regional Office – Dillon Patterson*, Eva Patton*, Victoria Florey*
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Regional Office – Donna Elliott Bach*; Chris McKee*
- U.S. Forest Service: Greg Risdahl*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Wildlife Conservation – Todd Rinaldi*, Keith Oster*, Phillip Perry*; Commercial Fisheries – Sam Decker, Deena Jallen*, Chuck Brazil*; Subsistence – Alida Trainor*
- Tribal and Native Organizations: Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) Natural Resources – Jennifer Hooper, Ashley Johnson, Janessa Esquible*; Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal

Fish Commission (KRITFC) – Terese Vicente, Avery Hoffman; Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (YRITFC) – Karma Ulvi*; Orutsararmiut Native Council (ONC) – Mary Matthias, Dellen Hooper, Briana Henry, Kara Domnick; Calista Corporation – Rose Bennett*

- Other Organizations: Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) – Serena Fitka*; Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association – Karen Gillis*; Fairbanks Soil & Water Conservation District – Aditi Shensy, Colin McKenzie
- Public: Susan Taylor, Lucinda Alexie, Sinka Crane, Jr.

Tribute to the late Council Member Richard Slats

Prior to beginning their business, the Council took time to pay tribute to Council Member Richard Slats of Chevak who passed away unexpectedly in late spring. There was a moment of silence for Richard, followed by sharing of memories and expressions of gratitude for Richard’s contributions to the Federal Subsistence Management Program.

Review and Adopt Agenda:

- Motion by Member Naneng, seconded by Member Andrew, to adopt the agenda as amended with reports added by ONC and YRDFA. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

- Motion by Member Peter, seconded by Member Parks, to approve the Winter 2024 Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Advisory Council Meeting minutes and the Joint Councils’ Meeting minutes. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Henry Parks of Nunapitchuk reported that there were a lot of migratory birds this year and it was good to see them in big numbers. They fished under the ice for pike. Member Parks was thankful for the opportunity to fish for salmon during the summer and was able to get what his family needed. Drying weather was great for the first two openings, but then it got rainy. The berry season was good. He explained how important it is to harvest subsistence foods, it is what people live by. He asked fisheries managers to consider not having openers on Sundays because it is the day of rest.

Myron Naneng of Bethel reported about trail projects they are working on in Hooper Bay and nearby villages to limit all-terrain vehicle impacts to the tundra and nesting grounds for migratory birds. Typhoon Merbok damaged some of the work, but they are in the process of repairing it and completing the project, so people have access to the areas they need for subsistence without damaging the resources. Member Naneng explained that flooding has been getting worse in coastal communities in recent years and it is a major concern related to climate change. He is also troubled by the potential for the Izembek Road to impact Black Brandt and other migratory birds that are important resources, especially in the springtime. Member Naneng is upset that ADF&G did not consult with any Tribes on the Yukon River prior to implementing a seven-year moratorium on Chinook Salmon fishing. He worries about the ability

to pass on cultural traditions to younger generations if no fishing is allowed. He also feels it is unjust for commercial fishing to be allowed in the marine waters while subsistence users are completely shut down and criminalized for harvesting the foods they have utilized for centuries. Member Naneng iterated that all management decisions need to involve Tribes and people living in villages.

Walter Morgan, Sr. of Lower Kalskag reported that local people limited their Chinook Salmon harvest to 30-40 fish per family at the most. He said there are only about 40 fishermen from Kalskag to Aniak and upriver, so they have a low impact. They learned through the five-year moose moratorium how conserving can help bring back numbers of animals. Member Morgan shared that he does not fish in the early part of the king (Chinook) salmon run because there are few fish, the water is always high, and they swim really deep. He said most people main target Chum Salmon and that is their staple fish to put up. There are local customs that dictate that you shouldn't eat kings or Coho Salmon if you have any cuts or other ailments, but Chum Salmon will not bother you in the same way. Long ago they never used to see red (Sockeye) salmon, but they see them more now. He said that berries and migratory birds were good this year. People are upset about not being able to hunt caribou and have it as part of their diet. Member Morgan is hopeful for a successful moose season since there is no caribou hunting. He said the Gravel-to-Gravel Initiative is very important and that subsistence users need to keep pushing for marine commercial fisheries to do their part in conserving salmon.

Phillip Peter, Sr. of Akiachak began his report by sharing that there were good numbers of ptarmigan and migratory birds. He described the salmon fishing openers for the season: the first six-hour opener for king salmon was bad weather and they didn't catch much even though they went down to the lower Kuskokwim. For the second opener he fished with others from Akiachak at their traditional fishing grounds and it was a lot better conditions, which allowed people to get kings, chums, and reds. The third opener was okay but not as good as the second. The last opener he caught some really big sized king salmon in his six-inch mesh drift net, sizes he had not seen in a long time. Most of them had roe, so they were female. He was really happy to see them again and thinks they were swimming higher in the water column and easier to catch this year because it was a cold summer. Member Peter also fished an opener for silver (Coho) salmon. There were good numbers of silvers, but they were smaller in size, and some could swim through the six-inch mesh. For the second silver opener he used a four-inch mesh net and caught several different kinds of fish including Pink Salmon and trout. It has also been a long time since he had caught a Pink Salmon. Member Peter explained that the elders foretold of bigger storms and typhoons coming that never did before, ones like we are seeing more of now. They taught him how the world is ever-changing. He said that everyone can learn a lot from the elders and to remember to be patient. The Western world is always in a hurry.

Robert Hoffman of Bethel reported that there are so many meetings about subsistence, both on the Federal and the State side, but that many times the recommendations local people make are not adhered to. He does not like the word subsistence because it is related to regulations that restrict people from carrying out their traditional way of life. It is not fair that people can be jailed for trying to get food they need. He said real subsistence is not being practiced anymore because Tribes are just being told what they can and cannot do and do not have any authority. Member Hoffman would like to see Tribes collect

their own resource monitoring data and be able to independently verify things like salmon spawning escapement, but they need funding to do that.

Norma Evan of Marshall reported that there were a lot of blueberries, raspberries, and blackberries (crowberries), but fewer salmonberries this year. She said that summer Chum Salmon numbers came back in much better numbers this year and that people in Marshall were able to dry fish. It was a colder summer and they saw less lesions on the fish. Member Evan stated that fall Chum and Coho salmon are coming in low numbers again and that remains a concern. Whitefish sizes seemed larger this year. She is concerned about the local Calista rock quarry scaring wildlife away from the community, especially cranes, but the quarry is also scaring bears and wolves away, which might help reduce predation locally. She saw lots of Canadian geese feeding on blueberries before the fall migration. Marshall families have started to hunt moose in August. Member Evan ended by saying there have been no muskox or beluga this year.

John Andrew of Kwethluk thanked the other members for their reports and said he agreed with all that they shared. He agreed that the Coho Salmon are small this year and shooting through six-inch nets. He did not see the big kings like Member Peter, mostly smaller ones. He wanted to support Member Henry and agree that there shouldn't be fishing openers on Sundays. Member Andrew missed the peak of the salmon runs this year because he was waiting on parts to repair his boat motor. In Kwethluk, not everyone was able to meet their subsistence needs. There were not enough openers, and they were short. Not enough people had working boats and had to rely on what was shared with them by their relatives. He reported that climate change remains a major concern in the region and that summer flooding is becoming worse over time. The flooding makes it difficult to fish for salmon because debris tears up the nets. He said that migratory bird numbers were okay but not as high as in the past. Gas and ammunition prices prevent people from going hunting as much as they would like. Member Andrew noticed an unusual occurrence, the ptarmigan migrated from the coast toward the hills much earlier than usual. He thinks they knew windstorms were coming and they were seeking shelter, now it is very windy. Less people are trapping than the past, but a few people still do. It was a poor salmonberry year due to a late frost, but the blueberries were great, and they are waiting for the fall frost to pick cranberries.

Jacqueline Cleveland of Quinhagak reported that they had a good ptarmigan, rabbit, seal, and migratory bird hunting season in her community. Migratory birds were a little late, but they came in good numbers. Increases in Northern Pike numbers remain a concern because they prey on trout, which are important for local subsistence. Too many pike get in the net when fishing for trout. Member Cleveland said that her family met their subsistence needs for salmon. Putting up the salmon is a lot of work because she is the primary cutter and climate change is making it more difficult to dry salmon. There is so much moisture now. She recalled when their fish racks didn't even have roofs on them because it rarely rained in June and July. Member Cleveland said that the Kanektok River does not have a real salmon escapement plan. There is no weir or sonar; fish are only counted by aerial survey, which are not as accurate. The community has received grants for community-based salmon monitoring as well as testing the use of drones to monitor escapement. They would love to have data sovereignty one day. She explained that Native Village of Kwinhagak was successful with some Alaska Board of Fisheries proposals aimed to

reduce overfishing and combat fishing in the bay. However, a lack of law enforcement has prevented the new regulations from being as effective as they could be. Member Cleveland would like to see a revitalization of Leave No Trace outreach due to the amount of trash left in the Togiak Refuge along the Kanektok River. Quinhagak has been experiencing more flooding like a lot of coastal areas and erosion is causing a loss of infrastructure and cultural sites. She looks forward to moose hunting and their new extended season that was passed in both State and Federal regulations.

Wassily Alexie¹ of Russian Mission shared his concerns about the use of four-inch mesh nets for fishing and said that they kill future stocks of fish. He wants to be able to use six-inch mesh nets in side sloughs to target bigger whitefish, pike, and sheefish. Member Alexie said it was a difficult summer because of rainy weather and very limited summer Chum Salmon fishing. Not many people were able to go fishing and the ones that did struggled to dry their fish. He anticipated being shut down for Coho Salmon fishing. Member Alexie wished everyone good luck for moose season and shared his condolences for the passing of Member Slats.

Alissa Nadine Rogers of Bethel reported an increase in ptarmigan numbers. She said that this year she caught almost five gallons of sticklebacks in the Kuskokwim near Bethel, which was unusual since they are ocean fish found more commonly along the coast. The smelts this year were fat and oily. Member Rogers saw more black Brandts this year than typical and hopes it is a good sign since they were declining previously. There have been healthy numbers of moose around Bethel, so much so that there have been more reports of people being charged. Member Rogers gathered wild greens in the springtime. She observed an increase in juvenile smolt that went out with the ice breakup but wasn't able to identify the species. She agreed that Leave No Trace messaging needs to be increased because of the amount of trash found out on the tundra. Salmon fishing continues to be restricted on the Kuskokwim River. The incidence of ichthyophonous and poor-quality salmon has increased. As for berries, Member Rogers said that salmonberries and blackberries were fewer in number, but blueberries and cranberries were plentiful.

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda Items:

Day 1 – Stanislas Sheppard of Mountain Village commented about the increase in non-local sport hunting of moose in the lower Yukon River region and the conflicts it is creating with local subsistence users. He suggested putting in a proposal to require trophy destruction could be one way to discourage people only hunting for antlers and not taking care of meat. Serena Fitka with YRDFA gave a brief update on their organization's projects and then provided a personal comment in agreement with Mr. Sheppard's concerns over the need to address conflicts due to the influx non-local moose hunters to the lower Yukon River.

Day 2 – Jacqueline Cleveland notified the Council of recent regulatory proposals and special action requests submitted by Native Village of Kwinhagak, and their efforts to engage with Togiak NWR to address user conflicts. Patrick Samson of Bethel discussed the impact increasing numbers of beavers are

¹ Member Alexie called in on the last day to give his Council member report but was unable to participate in the rest of the meeting.

having to the ecosystem and subsistence users. He suggested a proposal might need to be put in to all the destruction of beaver dams with beavers inside.

Day 3 – Stanislas Sheppard commented about the increased reliance on whitefish during salmon closures and the desire to use bigger mesh nets to catch whitefish. He reiterated the conflicts between subsistence moose hunters and sport hunters on the lower Yukon River. Terese Vicente with KRITFC shared information with the Council about the alternatives in the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) Chum Salmon Bycatch Draft Environmental Impact Statement (DEIS).

Council Member Training on Delegation of Authority

Pippa Kenner, OSM Cultural Anthropologist, gave a presentation to the Council about Delegation of Authority. Thomas Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist, briefed the Council on proposed changes to wildlife Delegation of Authority Letters.

Action Items:

Fisheries Proposals and Closure Reviews:

Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Region:

FP25-15 Kuskokwim River Set Gillnet Restrictions to Align with State

Motion by Member Peter, seconded by Member Naneng, to support FP25-15. The motion failed on a vote of 0-8.

The Council voted to **oppose FP25-15**. The Council noted that when nets are spaced or set too close to one another, the net on the lower end catches all the fish and the net on the upper end has a difficult time harvesting any fish. The Council does not support aligning Federal and State regulations because they feel the greater distance between nets required in Federal regulation creates more equitable fishing opportunities between subsistence users.

Western Interior Region (Crossover):

FP25-16 Kanuti River and Bonanza Creek Gear Types and Harvest Limits

Motion by Member Evan, seconded by Member Naneng, to support FP25-16. The motion passed on a vote of 8-0.

The Council voted to **support FP25-15**. The Council supported the additional grayling harvest opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users and noted the increased importance of nonsalmon fish harvest during times of salmon conservation. Additionally, the Council supports the subsistence harvest of fish that prey upon juvenile salmon.

Eastern Interior Region (Crossover):

FP25-17 Delta River Add Rod and Reel with Limits Matching State

Motion by Member Peter, seconded by Member Parks, to support Proposal FP25-17. The motion passed on a vote of 8-0.

The Council voted to **support FP25-17**. The Council noted the importance of providing subsistence fishing opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users in the Delta River where sportfishing is currently allowed. The Council emphasized that if sportfishing is allowed in a system then there should always be subsistence harvest opportunity. If there is ever a conservation concern, sportfishing should be closed before subsistence.

FCR23-05 (deferred) Delta River Closure to Harvest of All Fish

The Council did not consider this closure review due to their action on FP25-17.

FCR25-02 Nome Creek Closure to Harvest of Arctic Grayling

Motion by Member Naneng, seconded by Member Andrew, to rescind the closure for Nome Creek Harvest of Arctic Grayling. The motion passed on a vote of 8-0.

The Council voted to **rescind the closure**. The Council supports establishing a subsistence opportunity for grayling by federally qualified subsistence users in the area.

2026 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and Priority Information Needs (PINs) development

Kevin Foley, OSM Fisheries Biologist, presented draft lists of PINs for the Kuskokwim Area and Yukon Area to the Council. The Council made slight amendments to the Kuskokwim Area list to add Sockeye Salmon and other non salmon fish species to some of the PINs.

Motion by Member Peter, seconded by member Cleveland, to approve the Yukon Area and Kuskokwim Area PINs as amended. Motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Annual Report

Federal Subsistence Board (Board) FY2023 Draft Annual Report Reply Summary

Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, provided an overview of the Board's replies to the Council's FY-2023 Annual Report topics. She informed the Council a final version will be sent to the Council after the meeting as soon as it is ready.

Identify Issues for FY2024 Annual Report

The Council identified the following issues to include in their FY2024 annual report:

1. More balanced geographic representation on the Council

2. The need for a public member of the Board from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta region
3. The need for the Board to take the lead on coordinating interjurisdictional management of salmon
4. ANCSA D-1 protections
5. Donlin Gold Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and mining impacts to subsistence and the environment
6. Crane habitat near Marshall from the Calista gravel quarry
7. Mulchatna Caribou population and support for ADF&G predator control efforts
8. Yukon River salmon crisis
9. Disappearing fish camps and the cultural impacts of little or reduced fishing
10. Meaningful Tribal involvement in decision-making and capacity building of Tribal organizations in management and science
11. North Pacific Fishery Management Council Non-Chinook (Chum) Salmon Bycatch Draft EIS
12. Need to reduce total allowable catch for pollock in commercial fisheries
13. Reductions in Halibut sizes and need to reduce bycatch of Pacific Halibut
14. Link between Coho Salmon harvest in Area M and low returns to Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim; need for 100% observer coverage in Area M commercial fishery and genetic sampling of Coho Salmon harvest for stock assessment
15. Impacts of hatchery salmon releases on wild stocks
16. Wrongful use of the term “anecdotal” to describe traditional knowledge held by elders and others
17. Need to monitor caribou near to and north of the Yukon River, understand if they are distinct residents or stragglers from other herds
18. Conflicts between local moose hunter and non-local sport hunters on the lower Yukon River
19. Support for the Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission and a co-management agreement

Future Meeting Dates:

The Council confirmed its winter 2025 meeting dates as March 4-5 in Bethel.

The Council confirmed its fall 2025 meeting dates as October 21-23 in Anchorage, with Bethel as the backup location. The Council requests permission to meet in Anchorage because it is a central location for many agencies and an opportunity for staff to present to the Council in-person who do not usually have the chance. The Council feels it is important for higher level agency staff to attend their meetings and discuss important subsistence issues with the Council, and meeting in Anchorage allows them to more easily do so. There are other important meetings and events happening in Anchorage in October around the time of the Council meeting, such as Alaska Federation of Natives Convention, that will allow the Council members to network with others on important issues. It will be a chance for people from the Yukon-Kuskokwim region who have moved to Anchorage to attend a Council meeting, discuss subsistence issues with the Council, and learn about the Federal Subsistence Management Program. The Council noted the last time they met in Anchorage they had good turnout.

The Council is still waiting to hear back on their request to add Emmonak, Hooper Bay, St. Mary's, and Toksook Bay to the list of approved hub communities for the region.

Agency and Organization Reports:

- ADF&G Subsistence Division Project Updates by Alida Trainor, Northern Division Program Manager
- Mulchatna Caribou Intensive Management Update by Todd Rinaldi, ADF&G Region IV Management Coordinator
- KRITFC Update by Terese Vicente, Policy and Programs Director
- YRITFC Update by Karma Ulvi, Executive Director
- AVCP Natural Resources Department Update by Jennifer Hooper, Natural Resources Director
- Bering Sea Fishermen's Association Update by Karen Gillis, Executive Director
- Yukon Area Federal Salmon Management Update by Holly Carroll, Federal In-Season Manager
- Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Update by Aaron Moses, Subsistence Coordinator, Christopher Tulik, Lead Refuge Information Technician, and Christian Alexie, Jr., Refuge Information Technician
- Gravel to Gravel Initiative Update by Boyd Blihovde, USFWS Senior Advisor and Gravel-to-Gravel Coordinator, and Becky Shaftel, BLM Gravel-to-Gravel Coordinator
- Office of Subsistence Management Update by Scott Ayers, Fisheries Division Supervisor

Correspondence

During the meeting the Council voted to send a variety of correspondence:

- Re-send all Council correspondence that has not been answered, to include all the letters the Council has asked to be elevated in the recent past and the Joint Councils' letters from the All-Council Meeting
- A letter to the Board and Commissioner of ADF&G, also requesting elevation to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture, the State Department, and the Alaska Congressional Delegation; asking all entities to coordinate in the management and protection of Yukon River salmon stocks in the U.S. and Canada, using the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council (AMBCC) framework as a template for the overarching structure and process. Copy all regional partners on the letter including Rural Alaska Community Action Program, Tanana Chiefs Conference, Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils, ADF&G Fish and Game Advisory Committees, Yukon and Kuskokwim Intertribal Fish Commissions, Association of Village Council Presidents, Bristol Bay Native Association, International Association of Fish and Wildlife Agencies, etc.
- A letter with comments on the Chum Salmon Bycatch DEIS to the NPFMC
- A letter to the NPFMC regarding need to reduce Halibut bycatch and cap the total allowable catch for pollock
- A letter to ADF&G supporting the continuation of predator control for Mulchatna caribou through 2026

- A letter to the AMBCC and the AVCP Waterfowl Conservation Committee outlining concerns for emperor geese, cackling geese, and Black Brandts and the need for hunting and eggging restrictions for conservation

Other Council Motions

Motion by Member Andrew, seconded by member Hoffman, to request to send two Council members to Anchorage to attend the February 2025 NPFMC meeting and comment on the Chum Salmon Bycatch DEIS. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Other Business:

The Council received briefings on the following topics:

- 805(c) Report and summary of Board wildlife regulatory actions
- 2025 Council application/nomination open season
- Correspondence update
- Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program update
- Briefing on Council Member Declining Balance Cards

Brooke McDavid, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Subsistence Management

certified by Chair for accuracy on November 7, 2024

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 Winter 2025 meeting in Bethel, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

For a more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9181, or email brooke_mcdavid@ios.doi.gov.