

BRISTOL BAY SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Dolly Hall
Naknek, Alaska
February 18, 2025

Invocation:

Orville Lind provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order Tuesday, February 18, 2025, at 8:57 am. Council members Nanci Morris Lyon, Dan Dunaway, Richard Wilson, John Rhyshek, William Trefon, and Walter Kanulie were present in person. Members John Christensen and Kenneth Nukwak participated via phone. Member Robert Hill was absent. With eight out of nine seated Council members present (Council has one vacant seat) the quorum was established.

Attendees:

- Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA): *Cody Larson*
- Katmai National Park and Preserve: *Mark Sturm, Jenya Anichtchenko, Leslie Skora, Suzanne Sanders, and Mallory Zharoff*
- Lake Clark National Park and Preserve: *Liza Rupp*
- National Park Service (NPS): *Dillon Patterson*
- Togiak National Wildlife Refuge (NWR): *Andy Aderman and Jonathan Cawlfeld*
- Office of Subsistence (OSM): *Kendra Holman, Jarred Stone, Leigh Honig, Pippa Kenner, Lisa Grediagin, and Orville Lind*
- Alaska Peninsula and Becharof NWR: *Bryce Woodruff and Brian Wehausen*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): *John Landsiedel, Amy Vandervoort, and Greta Hayden-Pless*
- Fish and Wildlife Service: *Jon Gerken*
- Bureau of Land Management: *Glenn Chen*
- Members of the public: *Dan O'Hara and Bill Kane*

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Dunaway, seconded by Member Wilson, to adopt the agenda with the following amendments:

- Wildlife Proposal WP24-01 was moved to agenda item 12.b.

- Aniakchak Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) appointment request was added as agenda item 12.f.
- Add recent actions affecting Alaska Native Claim Settlement Act 17(d)(1) lands (D-1 lands) to correspondence agenda item 14.a.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Election of Officers:

Ms. Nanci Morris Lyon was elected the Council's Chair.

Mr. Dan Dunaway was elected the Council's Vice Chair.

Mr. Richard Wilson was elected the Council's Secretary.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Member Dunaway, seconded by Member Trefon, to approve the fall 2024 meeting minutes.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

John Christensen of Port Heiden reported that the winter had been extremely mild. The caribou herd wasn't able to come into town, so few caribou were harvested by the community. There were plenty of ptarmigan in his area.

John Rhyshek of King Salmon reported an atypical winter, with temperatures around 40 degrees and minimal snowfall. Ptarmigan numbers were very low compared to last winter, and snowshoe hare populations were also suffering due to predators and hunters, as their white fur makes them easy targets against the brown background. The moose hunt was successful in the fall, the winter hunt was nearly nonexistent because of the lack of snow and open rivers, making it difficult to hunt moose and caribou. Overall, the winter conditions had a significant impact on local wildlife and hunting.

Walter Kanulie of Togiak shared the winter had fluctuating ice conditions. Togiak Bay had frozen and thawed multiple times, making ice fishing and upriver activities impossible. People went smelting when the slough froze. With the open water, some participated in the moose hunt using skiffs. He reported that many hunters used their skiffs to target seals in the open bay. He also noted that he saw various birds, like mergansers, remain in the area when the weather stayed above freezing. The mild conditions made it easier on heating fuel.

Richard Wilson of Naknek thanked the new Tribal administrator for all the work he and local electricians had done to prepare the building for the meeting. He shared that the winter had been unusually long, affecting both the community and wildlife. Hunting had been challenging due to excessive foliage in September, and the winter moose hunt was not feasible due to safety concerns with ice conditions. There

had been caution due to risks associated with ice, especially following recent fatalities in Alaska. Ptarmigan populations declined as they became easy to spot against the brown background. The smelt population, which had been abundant in December, had since disappeared. Member Wilson saw a few belugas early in the year but not recently, and seals were scarce in their area.

Dan Dunaway of Dillingham reflected on the anomalous winter, noting that while people appreciated less wear on their boilers and furnaces, it created challenges for those that rely on firewood due to lack of snow and difficult access. He expressed concern about the potential impact on next year's berries and the increased risk of summer fire hazards due to the lack of snowpack. Member Dunaway also mentioned past salmon die-offs in the Igushik River and worried about potential damage to salmon spawning beds due to flooding from heavy rains.

The moose season was decent, about 170 moose harvested, but the lack of snow prevented the winter hunt and hampered biologists from completing a survey. Member Dunaway noticed an increase in ptarmigan and rabbits in his area. The lack of access to the Nushagak Peninsula affected caribou hunting, which could lead to overgrazing of the herd.

He also reported that a more restrictive land use policy, adopted by Bristol Bay Native Corporation and the Choggiung Tribal members, will affect non-members, particularly regarding moose hunting in the Nushagak drainage. This policy raised many questions in the community, and the full implications are still being worked out.

Billy Trefon of Nondalton discussed how the weather played a significant role in his area. The season started off well, with October being brown, and in November, they received about ten inches of snow for two weeks. However, after that, the temperature warmed up, reaching up to 52°F, making for a strange winter. The lake froze well for about a month and a half, as usual, and people crossed it with trucks. But when the temperature warmed up again at the beginning of the year, it caught many off guard. A family new to the area took risks by crossing the ice, and while one individual fell through, he was lucky to be in shallow water and only got wet up to his knees. The ice was described as having a green honeycomb texture, which was unusual, and slough and rivers that usually remained frozen until March or April for ice fishing were already open.

During the winter hunt, no moose were harvested, although three were taken in the fall. Most people got their meat from Port Alsworth, where they knew local hunters. As for fishing, the community managed to catch their usual fish. Ptarmigan and porcupines were not seen, which Member Trefon attributed to the strange weather. He mentioned ongoing discussions about changing weather conditions and evolution, including a conversation about the north and south poles shifting several degrees, which he believes might be contributing to the unusual conditions.

Kenneth Nukwak of Manokotak shared that the winter had been difficult and mentioned an opportunity to shoot a moose across the tundra, but he did not take the shot, expecting his son to do so at close range,

which didn't happen. He noted that the Igushik River was open, and some people had been boating up to the lake to see what they could find, but they had not been successful. No one had used snowmachines, as they only had a cold snap two or three weeks ago. During that time, his son-in-law and daughter went across the tundra to catch pike, getting a few to put in the freezer after cooking some for breakfast.

Nanci Morris Lyon of King Salmon said that her observations closely mirrored what others had shared and expressed concern about the potential impact of current weather conditions on summer, particularly for berries, fish, and animals. Chair Morris Lyon noted that there would likely be unforeseen repercussions from the weather, and it would be interesting for local biologists to record what happens so that in the future they could better understand and potentially mitigate these effects.

Public and Tribal Testimony:

Dan O'Hara, former long-time Council member spoke about his extensive history with the Council, sharing personal anecdotes and reflections on his time serving. He mentioned the origins of the Council, tied to the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act and Title VIII, which provided a boost to Native people in Alaska. Mr. O'Hara recalled his experience dealing with a proposal that would restrict personal use of rainbow trout to recreational anglers, an issue the Council fought successfully, winning by a narrow margin. He also shared a story about a rough boat trip to Nondalton with Chair Morris Lyon, highlighting her flying experience in Alaska. He expressed gratitude for the work of the Council and reflected on the challenges of integrating the dual management system. .

Council Training:

Kendra Holman, OSM Wildlife Biologist, provided the Council training on proposing changes to Federal subsistence hunting and trapping regulations.

Action Items

Wildlife Closure Reviews

Ms. Holman provided an overview of the wildlife closure reviews (WCR) to the Council.

WCR26-05 – Unit 9C, Naknek River, December moose season closure to non-federally qualified users

The Council discussed OSM's preliminary recommendation to rescind the closure of moose season on Federal public lands except by federally qualified subsistence users in Unit 9C, south of the Naknek River drainage.

Council members noted the area's limited accessibility for locals and the logistical challenges for non-local hunters, which result in minimal, if any, outside hunting or harvest. Concerns were raised about the stability of the moose population and the potential impact of increased harvest on its sustainability.

Additionally, members expressed concern over the growing bear population in the area and the potential effects on moose numbers.

Overall, the Council spoke of maintaining the closure.

WCR26-07: Unit 17, Nushagak Peninsula, closure to non-federally qualified users unless the population is greater than 900 caribou

The Council discussed OSM's preliminary conclusion to modify the closure by lowering the caribou population threshold to 600 animals. Members expressed concern about overgrazing, citing observations of caribou moving outside their traditional range in search of more productive habitat with more lichen.

Concerns were raised that if additional hunting opportunities are not provided, the population could exceed the habitat's capacity, potentially leading to a crash. However, members also noted that lowering the threshold could result in increased competition from non-local hunters, affecting local communities that rely on the herd for subsistence.

Additional concerns included the possibility of the herd moving away from its traditional area due to overpopulation. Members also noted that changing winter conditions have made travel more difficult, resulting in low harvest levels for surrounding communities.

Deferred WP24-01: Statewide sale of brown bear hides

A motion was made by Member Dunaway and seconded by Member Wilson to **support as modified by OSM** deferred Wildlife Proposal WP24-01.

The Council expressed support for allowing the sale of brown bear hides, tanned or untanned, from areas with a bag limit of one or two bears. Members noted that the region has a healthy brown bear population and that allowing the sale of hides could encourage harvest, help reduce predation and provide economic benefits to subsistence users.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Call for Federal Wildlife Proposals

Unit 9D caribou fall season extension

Motion made by Member Kanulie, seconded by Member Dunaway, to submit a proposal to extend the fall season for caribou in Unit 9D to October 21 for federally qualified subsistence users. This hunt is for the Southern Alaska Peninsula Caribou herd. The Alaska Board of Game (BOG) extended the State caribou

season in Unit 9D to October 21 via adoption of Proposal 7 at their January 2025 meeting, effective July 1, 2025. This proposed change would maintain alignment of State and Federal seasons.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Reduce the wolverine hunting season

Motion made by Member Wilson, seconded by Member Rhyshek, to submit a proposal to shorten the wolverine hunting season in Unit 9 to September 1 – last day of February. The BOG adopted Proposal 22 at their January 2025 meeting to shorten the Unit 9 wolverine hunting season to close the last day of February, effective July 1, 2025. This proposal would maintain alignment of the State and Federal wolverine hunting season in Unit 9.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Methods and means restrictions for beaver trapping

Motion made by Member Wilson, seconded by Member Rhyshek to submit a proposal to remove the firearm restrictions for beaver trapping in Unit 9. This proposal is a simplification of regulations and aligns with recent changes to State regulations through adoption of State proposals 21 and 37 in January 2025, effective July 1, 2025. This simplification would be easier for users by matching State and Federal regulations as well as removing unclear regulations regarding beaver in Unit 9.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Methods and means restrictions for beaver trapping

Motion made by Member Dunaway, seconded by Member Trefon, to submit a proposal to remove the firearm restrictions for beaver trapping in Unit 17. This proposal is a simplification of regulations and aligns with recent changes to State regulations through adoption of State proposals 21 and 37 in January 2025, effective July 1, 2025. This simplification would be easier for users by matching State and Federal regulations.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Unit 17 brown bear season extension

Motion made by Member Dunaway, seconded by Member Trefon, to submit a proposal to extend the Federal subsistence season for brown bears in Unit 17 to year-round. This proposal requests the Federal Subsistence Board extend the season for brown bears in Unit 17. The BOG adopted Proposal 32 at their

January 2025 meeting to extend the Unit 17 brown bear season to year-round, effective July 1, 2025. This proposed change would maintain alignment of State and Federal seasons.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Alaska hare season closure

A motion was made by Member Dunaway and seconded by Member Rhyshek to submit a proposal to close the Alaska hare hunting season in Units 9 and 17. The intent is to align Federal regulations with State regulations. The Council discussed that while many communities rely on Alaska hare for subsistence, they are aware of the population decline and are already self-limiting their harvest. However, members emphasized that those in need should retain the opportunity to harvest in critical situations.

The motion **failed** on a unanimous vote.

Council Charter Review

Leigh Honig, Council Coordinator, provided an overview of the Council charter for review and renewal.

Motion by Member Kanulie, seconded by Member Trefon, to adopt the charter with no modifications.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Review and Approve FY2024 Annual Report

Motion made by Member Rhyshek, seconded by member Dunaway, to accept the FY2024 Annual Report with no modifications.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Aniakchak SRC Appointment

Motion made by Member Dunaway, seconded by Member Wilson, to appoint John Christensen to the Aniakchak SRC.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed their Fall 2025 meeting dates and location: October 29 – 30, in Dillingham. The Council selected their Winter 2026 meeting date and location: February 17 – 18, in Naknek.

The Council selected their Fall 2026 meeting date and location: October 28 – 29, in Dillingham.

Reports

- Bristol Bay Native Association report presented by Cody Larson.
- ADF&G, Unit 9 report presented by Amy Vandervoort, Wildlife Biologist.
- ADF&G, Unit 17 report presented by John Landsiedel, Wildlife Biologist.
- Togiak NWR report presented by Andy Aderman, Wildlife Biologist.
- Alaska Peninsula Becharof NWR report presented by Bryce Woodruff, Wildlife Biologist.
- Lake Clark National Park report presented by Liza Rupp, Subsistence Coordinator.
- Katmai National Park report presented by Mark Sturm, Superintendent, Suzanne Sanders, Natural Resource Program Manager, and Jenya Anichtchenko, Cultural Resource Manager.
- Office of Subsistence Management
 - Fisheries Resource and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program updates presented by Pippa Kenner, Anthropologist
 - General Update presented by Lisa Grediagin, Wildlife Division Supervisor

Other Business:

Alaska Board of Game Comments

Proposals 126, 127, and 128

Motion made by Member Dunaway, seconded by Member Trefon, to submit a comment in opposition for the three proposals allowing the use of electronically enhanced night vision and forward-looking infrared devices for taking furbearers. The Council believed these technologies could be misused if the regulation were approved, creating an unfair advantage. Additionally, the Council saw no legitimate need for such devices in their region, aside from potential misuse.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Proposal 87

Motion made by Member Dunaway, seconded by Member Rhyshek, to submit a comment in opposition to Proposal 87, which would have restricted the use of boats for hunting waterfowl. The proposed requirement for a boat to be anchored or beached within 100 yards of anyone discharging a firearm was considered difficult to comply with and enforce. Existing regulations already prohibited waterfowl hunting from a motorboat unless the motor was off, and the boat's forward movement had stopped.

The Council was also concerned about the potential safety risks the regulation could have posed to waterfowl hunters. Hunters in the Bristol Bay region navigated tidal gullies with thick mud, steep banks, and tides of up to 24 feet. Requiring boats to be anchored or beached could have created hazardous

situations. Additionally, the Council expressed concern about how hunters would have retrieved dead or injured birds if the regulation had been enacted.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Proposal 133

Motion made by Member Dunaway, seconded by Member Trefon, to submit a comment in opposition to Proposal 133, which would have rescinded the regulation allowing hunters and trappers to use snowmachines to approach and pursue wolverines.

The Council and the Bristol Bay community had worked for many years to establish this regulation, as this method of harvesting wolves and wolverines was a long-standing subsistence practice in the region. Snowmachines were a critical tool for trappers in Alaska, where vast, rugged, and remote terrain made foot travel impractical. Restricting their use would have negatively impacted traditional trapping practices.

Wolverines cover large territories and move quickly, making snowmachines an effective way for trappers to access active trapping areas. Revoking this regulation could have harmed the subsistence economy, as many rural Alaskans relied on trapping as part of their livelihood. Limiting snowmachine use would have made trapping wolverines less viable, reducing income and fur availability.

Additionally, many hunters sell wolverine hides to fund fuel purchases for hunting other species. If enacted, this proposal would have reduced critical harvest opportunities for those in the Bristol Bay Region.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Proposal 131

Motion made by Member Dunaway, seconded by Member Trefon to submit a comment in opposition to proposal 131, which would have required trappers to place identification tags on traps and snares. The Council believed this regulation imposed an unnecessary burden on trappers.

Additionally, the Council was concerned about potential negative consequences if an identification tag was lost or destroyed. Wolverines and other animals could struggle vigorously when trapped, potentially breaking off the tag. Identification tags could also become buried or frozen, leading to unintentional violations.

The Council was also worried about the risk of trapper harassment from the public and the disruption that human presence and scents near traplines could have caused, potentially reducing the chances of harvesting furbearers.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Proposals 129 and 130

Motion made by Member Trefon, seconded by Member Dunaway, to submit a comment in opposition to Proposal 129 and 130, which would have established a minimum standard for centerfire rifle cartridges for taking big game. The Council felt it was an unnecessary restriction on hunters. Effective hunting depends more on shot placement than caliber size. A well-placed shot with a smaller cartridge can be more effective than a poorly placed shot with a larger one. If passed, the regulation could also impose additional costs and burdens on hunters who may be forced to purchase new firearms and ammunition, creating an unnecessary financial strain. In remote or rural areas, ammunition availability is often limited, and requiring a minimum cartridge size could make it even more difficult for hunters to find suitable ammunition.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Council Correspondence

Ms. Honig provided an update on the following correspondence sent on behalf of the Council since the fall 2025 meeting in Dillingham. The Council also discussed support for the Federal Subsistence Board to resubmit their previous letters of concern regarding ANCSA D-1 lands and fisheries management to the new administration.

Non-Voting Young Leader Seat

Ms. Honig provided an update on the non-voting young leader seat. The Board had advertised the open period for the non-voting young leader membership on Councils, which closed on February 16th. Staff began reviewing letters of interest, with applicant evaluations scheduled for the summer. An announcement was expected before the next winter meeting.

Declining Balance Cards

Ms. Honig provided an update to the Council regarding Council member compensation for travel and that two new payment options were to be implemented at the next fall meeting.

The meeting was adjourned at 5:05 p.m. on February 18, 2025

Leigh Honig, DFO

DOI Office of Subsistence Management

Nanci Morris Lyon, Chair
Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were certified by the Chair for accuracy April 30, 2025. These minutes will be formally considered by the Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its October 29 – 30, 2025, meeting in Dillingham, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcripts, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Leigh Honig at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9053, email leigh_honig@ios.doi.gov.