

NORTHWEST ARCTIC SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL Meeting Minutes

Teleconference
November 8, 2024

Invocation:

Chair Thomas Baker called for a moment of silence for the family of Jim Magdanz who recently passed. Mr. Magdanz life-long work was in Northwest Alaska, researching, writing about, and photographing rural Alaska's Indigenous residents, hunter-gatherer economies, and ways of life.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was originally scheduled for October 28–29 in Kotzebue with an option to join via teleconference. However, a severe storm struck Kotzebue just days before the meeting, causing extensive flooding and significant damage to the community. As a result, the meeting was rescheduled as a one-day teleconference on November 8, with a streamlined agenda focused on action items. Most scheduled reports were deferred to the Council's winter 2025 meeting.

The meeting was called to order Friday, Wednesday, November 8 at 9:03 am by Council Chair Baker. Chair Baker, and Council members Elmer Armstrong, Jr., Verne Cleveland, Sr., Wilbur Howarth, Sr., Michael Kramer, and Clyde Ramoth, Sr. were present via teleconference. Council Members Tristen Pattee, Enoch Shiedt, Sr., and Raymond Woods were absent. Member Bobbie Schaeffer resigned prior to the meeting. With five of nine seated Council members present (Council has one vacant seat), the quorum was established. Quorum was present for all voting of action items taken up before lunch. After lunch, there was one member short of a quorum.

Attendees:

- **Tribal and Nonprofit Organizations**
Cyrus Harris (representing both Maniilaq Association and the Qikiqtagrugmiut Tribe of Kotzebue)
- **Alaska Department of Fish and Game**
Kevin Clark, Commercial Fisheries Area Manager, Nome
Alex Hansen, Caribou Biologist, Kotzebue
Brendan Scanlon, Fisheries Biologist, Fairbanks
Jenefer Bell, Fisheries Biologist, Nome
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service**
George Yaska, Indigenous Knowledge Liaison, Alaska Region
Wil Wiese, Selawik National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Manager, Kotzebue
Brittany Sweeny, Assistant Refuge Manager, Selawik NWR, Kotzebue
Ray Hander, Fisheries Biologist, Northern Alaska Field Office

- **Bureau of Land Management**
Walker Gusse, Park Ranger, Pilot, Anchorage
Deanna DePue, Anchorage
- **Bureau of Land Management**
Chris McKee, Statewide Subsistence Coordinator, Interagency Staff Committee Member
- **National Park Service**
Jeanette Koelsch, Superintendent, Bering Land Bridge National Preserve, Nome
Matt Cameron, Wildlife Biologist, Fairbanks
Dr. Kim Jochum, Regional Subsistence Program, Interagency Staff Committee Member
Eva Patton, Regional Subsistence Program Manager, Interagency Staff Committee Member
Dillon Patterson, Subsistence Program, Anchorage
Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Fairbanks
Lisa Docken, Coastal Ecologist and Ocean Program Coordinator, Alaska Region, Anchorage
- **Office of Secretary of the Interior**
Eric Werwa, Assistant Secretary for Policy and Environmental Management, Department of Interior
- **Office of Subsistence Management**
Tom Plank, Wildlife Biologist
Karen Hyer, Fisheries Biologist
Robin La Vine, Subsistence Policy Coordinator
Brooke McDavid, Acting Council Coordination Division Supervisor
Dr. Hannah Voorhees, Anthropologist
Orville Lind, Native Liaison

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Armstrong, to **approve** the agenda as presented on paper, and posted on the Council's website, and read. The *motion passed* on a unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Armstrong to **approve** the March 5-6, 2024, Joint-Council Meeting Minutes, the March 7, Quadrilateral Council Meeting, and the Council's March 7, 2024, Winter Meeting Minutes as presented. The *motion passed* on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Wilbur Howarth, Sr. of Noorvik reported that the fall has been unusually warm, with temperatures still around 20 degrees above normal in Noorvik. While no caribou have been spotted recently, a few passed through a couple of weeks ago heading toward Selawik and Buckland. Fishing is ongoing. There have been many moose sightings this fall, suggesting they are healthy, with one trip yielding seven moose in just three hours. He was busy at work but one day his son went out and hunted for *oogruk* (Bearded seal).

Clyde Ramoth, Sr. of Selawik (Secretary) reported that spring fishing was abundant, especially at the lake where people caught sheefish under the ice using jiggers. The spring was relatively warm, and bird hunting was normal, with many birds flying over, though the timing of their egg-laying seemed affected by migration or possibly climate change. Caribou were caught in the spring, and seining in the river getting about 100 Sheefish. Despite some rain, it was a good year for berries, including salmon berries, blueberries, and cranberries, and people gathered plenty of edible plants. Fall fishing saw nets set under the ice for *suvaich* (fish with fish). The river froze in mid-October, and people remained cautious about global warming. Some caribou were harvested although migration was later than usual. A bear was killed upriver in self-defense, and the community continues to share their catch, keeping traditional practices alive. There was also some muskox traps set, and the community remains well-fed. Overall, it's been a safe and productive winter.

Elmer Armstrong, Jr. of Noorvik reported that fishing was slow this year, with a late salmon run and one fishery in Kotzebue closing early, though some salmon were caught and preserved. High water made moose hunting difficult; he didn't catch one, but others were successful. Duck and bird hunting, including for snow geese, was good. Whitefish were caught in September, after the ice froze; Member Armstrong put out a net under the ice and caught a lot of Sheefish and whitefish. He caught a whitefish with eggs, one burbot, and a mud shark. Warm weather led to unsafe ice, so the nets were pulled. Caribou started moving towards the area, although snow made travel difficult. He was encouraged to see younger generations learning to hunt and butcher caribou.

Michael Kramer of Kotzebue (Vice-Chair) reported that this spring saw good bearded-seal hunting and bird hunting in Kotzebue area, with many people successful in both. However, the salmon season was poor, with only about 53,000 pounds of salmon harvested, raising concerns about the impact of trawling on subsistence resources. Caribou started coming through Paatitaaq (Onion Portage), although there were some concerns about their arrival and the lack of a caribou census due to weather. Moose hunting was good, with many people able to fill their freezers. There were reports of wolves and bears harassing hunters in their tents, with some groups experiencing continuous wolf harassment. Despite concerns, some grizzly bears were hunted in the spring. Member Kramer has growing concern about caribou numbers, especially as hunters from outside the area begin to arrive in Kotzebue, but the situation remains uncertain. He expressed concern that the State still allows hunting of caribou for any Alaska resident during times when the herd is declining severely.

Vern Cleveland of Noorvik reported the summer has been tough due to high water, making it difficult to fish and hunt moose. Caribou hunting has been challenging since the season opened in August, but recently, a large herd was spotted near Noorvik, prompting urgency to hunt before they move further away. With the high cost of living, hunting caribou is a necessary way to secure affordable meat, as buying store-bought meat is too expensive. There's also a concern about the lack of snow, which makes hunting more difficult because caribou move through quicker, and there is lack of necessary equipment like boats or snowmobiles to assist in hunting. Despite challenges, there's an abundance of caribou near the village, and the community is encouraged to hunt while they can.

Thomas Baker of Kotzebue (Chair) shared that both commercial and subsistence fishers expressed concern for the low number of salmon coming through. This year's commercial salmon harvest was dramatically low, with only 30,000 to 50,000 pounds of salmon caught, far below the usual 1.5 to 3 million pounds, due to poor runs and high fuel costs. This also affected subsistence fishing. Poor salmon returns, possibly linked to ocean temperature and past runs, have raised questions for the community. Caribou hunting was also scarce, with many hunters waiting for movements that didn't materialize until the season ended. The presence of outfitters bringing hunters north, further disrupting caribou migration, remains a major concern. Despite these challenges, some moose were harvested, and as the tundra froze, there was hope for reindeer and caribou hunting. The year was marked by low harvests across many resources.

Public and Tribal Comments on Non-Agenda Items:

Morning Session:

Clyde Ramoth, representing the Selawik Tribe reported that the Tribe is focused on addressing the high cost of living and appreciates support from the Selawik NWR for helping with issuing of hunting licenses and explaining to the Tribe the caribou limits and lower moose abundance. They are also collaborating on beaver trapping project with the school, Tribe, and residents. Climate change remains a key issue, with discussions with the Tribe on integrating Traditional Ecological Knowledge into a climate action plan.

Cyrus Harris, representing the Maniilaq Association and the Native Village of Kotzebue echoed concerns shared by others emphasizing the impact of climate change, which has been a common topic in meetings. Due to prevailing winds and rain, the summer saw high water levels that severely affected salmon fisheries, resulting in the lowest salmon run the speaker has ever witnessed. While there was a successful *oogruk* (bearded seal) hunt, there were few other hunting successes. Beluga sightings were scarce, with only a few reported in the Deering, Shishmaref, and Riley Wreck areas. He also expressed appreciation for the Council's inclusion of climate change in ongoing discussions.

Afternoon Session:

Carmen Monigold, of Kotzebue, representing herself, spoke to inform the Council that the proposed Ambler Access Road, previously denied by the Department of the Interior, is now attached to the Department of Defense bill, which hasn't been voted on yet. She requested from the Council to submit a letter against the road and reminded Council that they voted against it at a previous meeting, considering the subsistence concerns.

Chair Baker provided comment that the Council would need to have a quorum to vote to write a letter and was short one member for a quorum during the afternoon session.

State and Federal Fishery Reports:

- *Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) Update*, presented by Alex Hansen, Wildlife Biologist, Division of Wildlife, ADF&G, Kotzebue.
- *Climate Action Plan Presentation and TEK Discussion*, presented by George Yaska, Indigenous Knowledge Liaison, Science Applications Program, USFWS, Fairbanks.

Action Items:

Federal Fishery Proposals for Northwest Arctic Region

There were no fisheries regulatory proposals in the Northwest Arctic Region for the Council to provide recommendations on, and the Council did not make any other recommendations.

2026 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) Priority Information Needs (PINs) Development

Karen Hyer, Fishery Biologist with OSM, and Dr. Hannah Voorhees, Cultural Anthropologist with OSM, presented a draft list of eight PINS for the Northwest Arctic Area to the Council. This included three new PINS and five from the list that the Council approved at the fall 2023 meeting because funding for FRMP projects was not available in 2024, so these priorities were rolled forward.

The PINS include:

1. Inventory and baseline data of fish and major rivers tied to subsistence use in Northwest Alaska. Investigators should consult with local subsistence users and draw on Traditional Ecological Knowledge literature in designing and carrying out the research. When possible, applicants are encouraged to include fisheries proximal to the communities of Shishmaref, Buckland, Deering, Selawik, Kivalina, Point Hope, and villages along the Kobuk and Noatak Rivers.
Chair Baker requested that Kotzebue be added to the list considering that fish come though Kotzebue Sound on way up the rivers.
2. Evaluate changes in water levels, discoloration and mineral deposits, water temperature and reduced oxygen in major river systems associated with subsistence fisheries resources in the Northwest Arctic Region and how these changes will affect fish vital for subsistence. Investigators should consult with local subsistence users and draw on their knowledge of historic and recent water conditions in designing and carrying out research.
3. Study the effects of expanding beaver populations and range on subsistence fisheries, including whitefish and Northwest Arctic region. Include effects of dams on fish migration and effects of changes to water quality on fish health. Investigators should consult with local subsistence users and draw on their knowledge of historic and changing beaver impacts in designing and carrying out research. Researchers should also consider the impacts of these changes on subsistence users themselves.
4. Document herring abundance, seasonal movement and health and investigate causes of large herring mortality events in Northwest Arctic. Investigators should consult with local subsistence

users and draw on their knowledge in designing and carrying out research.

Chair Baker requested that community of Kotzebue and Kotzebue Sound be included in the language in the PIN.

5. Document the effects of changing river and tributary conditions on salmon spawning in the Noatak and Kobuk River drainage, with a focus on potential effects of factors such as erosion, water discoloration, and mineral deposit, and changing precipitation on spawning viability. Investigators should consult with local subsistence users and draw on their knowledge in designing and carrying out research.
6. New PIN - Document abundance and migration timing of salmon in the Noatak and Kobuk River drainages to address changing availability of subsistence fisheries resources. Investigators should consult with local subsistence users and draw on their knowledge in designing and carrying out research.
7. New PIN - Document abundance and migration timing, especially of Dolly Varden, Arctic char, lake trout, and whitefish species in northwest Arctic to address changing availability of subsistence fisheries resources. Investigators should consult with local subsistence users and draw on their knowledge in designing and carrying out research.
8. New PIN - Identify the spawning areas, critical habitat and range expansion in major rivers tied to subsistence for whitefish, Northern pike, salmon, grayling, and Dolly Varden in Northwest Alaska. Investigators should consult with local subsistence users and draw on their knowledge in designing and carrying out research.

- *Motion* by Member Howarth, seconded by Member Ramoth, to **support** the eight PINs as presented for the Northwest Arctic Region with the edits made by the Council. The *motion passed* on a unanimous vote.

2026 Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program

Karen Hyer informed the Council of an upcoming competitive funding opportunity through the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program.

Chair Baker encouraged Council members to share this opportunity with their Tribes. Member Ramoth thought that the Selawik Tribe might be interested and asked that his community receive more information.

Annual Report

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

Lisa Hutchinson, Council Coordinator, provided an overview of the Board's replies to the Council's FY-2023 Annual Report topics.

Identify Issues for FY2024 Annual Report

The Council identified the following issues to include in their FY2024 annual report. The Council was asked as they listed their issues to identify whether each one is an item for Board's information only, or if it is a request to the Board and the Council would like to receive a reply.

1. Address the impact of caribou migration displacement by non-local and non-resident sport hunters on Federal and State lands in Unit 23. – Response requested.
 2. Support the expansion of statewide qualitative and quantitative research on salmon returns and climate change factors. – Response requested
 3. Support the expansion of research studies that include local observations and traditional knowledge of climate change impacts to subsistence resources and subsistence opportunities. – Response requested
 4. The Council plans to submit two wildlife proposals to the Alaska Board of Game during the 2026 meeting cycle for the Northwest Arctic region, aimed at mitigating the impact of non-resident hunting on caribou populations. If approved by the Council at that time, the proposals would be as follows: – Informational Item
 - i. A proposal to close hunting to non-resident hunters on State land as a mean of preserving the herd.
 - ii. A proposal requiring non-resident hunters wishing to hunt on state lands in Unit 23 to physically obtain permits in Kotzebue between June 1–15. This would help manage hunting activities and support efforts to protect the caribou population.
 5. Concerns about migratory waterfowl and water quality. The Council expresses ongoing concerns regarding the health of migratory waterfowl populations and the impact of water quality on these species. The Council would like to invite the local Council Member for the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council to provide a status report at a future Council meeting – Informational Item.
- *Motion* by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Howarth, to **approve** the five topics for the FY24 Annual Report to the Board. The *motion passed* on a unanimous vote.

Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) Updates and Member Appointment

Dr. Kim Jochum provided updates on behalf of the Cape Krusenstern and Kobuk Valley SRC's. The Cape Krusenstern and Kobuk Valley SRCs provide local subsistence users an opportunity to inform the management of subsistence resources in WEAR and the surrounding areas. She informed the Council that the Kobuk Valley SRC was asking the Council to fill an expired and inactive SRC seat, and Council member Elmer Armstrong expressed interest in serving as a member on this Commission.

Chair Baker asked Member Armstrong if he would like to be appointed to the Kobuk Valley SRC and Member Armstrong concurred.

- *Motion* by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Howarth, to appoint Elmer Armstrong of the Northwest Arctic Council to the Kobuk Valley SRC. The *Motion passed* on a unanimous vote.

Future Meeting Dates:

- *Motion* by Member Cleveland, seconded by Member Ramoth, to **confirm** Winter 2025 meeting dates and location: March 27-28, Kotzebue. The *Motion passed* on a unanimous vote.
- *Motion* by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Cleveland, to have the Fall 2025 meeting dates and location to October 27-28, Kotzebue. The *Motion passed* on a unanimous vote.

Other Business:

805c Report

Ms. Hutchinson, Council Coordinator, provided a summary of the 805(c) Report outlining Board action on wildlife proposals and closure reviews impacting residents of the Northwest Arctic Region.

Council Member Application/ Nomination Season

Ms. Hutchinson advised the Council that the application period is anticipated to open in January and will likely be shortened to about six weeks in hopes of streamlining parts of the appointment process. She encouraged the Council to help with outreach to fill vacant seats. The Council will have five vacancies to fill: four of which are seats held by current Council members whose terms expire December 2, 2025, and one vacant seat. Council members with expiring seats will be informed when this window opens, and outreach will be done across the region at that time.

Summary of Council Correspondence

Ms. Hutchinson provided an update on the following correspondence sent on behalf of the Council to the Board since the winter 2024 meeting in Anchorage. These letters included:

- Member appointment letters to Kobuk Valley and Cape Krusenstern SRCs.
- The Quadrilateral Council letter to the Board regarding WACH Concerns.
- Joint Council Letter to the Board regarding caribou concerns statewide.
- Joint Council letter to the Board regarding concerns over bycatch and salmon management.
- The Council co-signed a joint letter advocating for fair compensation for Council members' service while attending meetings and requested the Board elevate this concern to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture on November 22, 2024.
- Board Correspondence to Secretaries: The Board conveyed the Council's concerns about subsistence prioritization and fair Council member compensation to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture on July 29, 2024.

Final Rule to Strengthen Alaska Tribal Representation to The Board

Ms. Hutchinson also gave brief update on a letter sent to all Alaska Tribes by the Office of the Secretary sent on October 17, 2024, announcing the new rule adding three new public member seats was published, and welcomed Tribes to nominate or recommended public Board members for these seats. Any questions and nominations should be directed to Raine Thiele at raine_thiele@ios.doi.gov or Sara Taylor at sara_taylor@ios.doi.gov.

DOI Declining Balance Card for Council Travel

Ms. Hutchinson provided information to the Council about proposed changes to the way OSM processes payment for invitational travel for Council members by use of a declining balance card. The Council was asked to provide comments or concerns about this program and was informed that it was not set in stone yet. Only one Council provided feedback saying that he thought the card was a good idea.

Proposed Changes to Delegation of Authority Letters

Tom Plank, Wildlife Biologist with OSM, briefed the Council on proposed changes to wildlife Delegation of Authority Letters.

Rule in Alaska National Preserve

Dr. Jochum provided a briefing on the final rule in Alaska National Preserves that amends its 2020 regulations for sport hunting and trapping. The rule applies only to sport hunting and prohibits bear baiting due to significant public safety concerns.

Council Requests for Reports at Winter Meeting

The Council did not formally vote, but requested the Council Coordinator to try to arrange for the following reports or presenters at the winter meeting:

- Invite a representative of Red Dog mine to discuss caribou migration studies along the mine road.
- Extend invites to FRMP investigators and researchers conducting the Beaver Network and rusting river studies in the Northwest region to present reports that were postponed from this meeting.
- Invite Cyrus Harris, a member representing the Alaska Migratory Bird Co-Management Council and Maniilaq Association to provide information about waterfowl studies.

Reports:

- *OSM Update* – Robin La Vine, Policy Coordinator, presented the update.

- *Alaska Department of Fish and Game* – Kevin Clark, Commercial Fisheries Area Manager, Nome, provided a short update for research plans, depending on funding for the Kotzebue area.
- *Other Agency and FRMP reports* previously scheduled on agenda and included in the meeting book, were postponed until the Council’s winter 2025 meeting due to the need to shorten this meeting from two days to one day.

Closing Comments:

- Member Howarth: Appreciated the meeting, noting it provided them with useful information and answers to their questions. Requested an update on the salmon traveling along the Russian side at the next Council meeting. He reported a high number of wolves and bears in their area, sharing an incident where his daughter and her boyfriend encountered a wolf near Selawik while on a snow machine trip. He expresses gratitude to Chair Baker and advised caution for those traveling with snow machines between Noorvik and Selawik. He looks forward to the next meeting where the Council can meet again in person.
- Member Armstrong: Thanked Chair Baker and said it was a good meeting. He believed if they had been able to meet in person there would have likely been more questions regarding caribou and salmon.
- Member Cleveland: Reported that he had learned that *tuttu* (caribou) were seen traveling about five miles out behind Noorvik and heading south, so he will be heading out after the meeting to hunt. He thanked everyone for a good meeting.
- Chair Baker: Thanked all the staff and others for joining the meeting, acknowledged the hectic changes in the past few weeks, and expressed appreciation for the flexibility of those who called in. He expressed gratitude for the opportunity to conduct the meeting by teleconference, despite it not being their preferred method, which is in person. He said that he looks forward to having the winter meeting in person in Kotzebue, appreciates the good conversations had, and anticipates follow-ups with the staff and Council on the identified issues.

Adjourn:

- *Motion* by Member Cleveland, seconded by Member Howarth, to adjourn. The *motion passed* on a unanimous vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 3:14 PM November 8, 2024.

Prepared Minutes / Signature on file

Lisa Hutchinson, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Subsistence Management

Signature on file

Thomas Baker, Chair
Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were considered and approved by the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its March 27-28, 2025, meeting in Kotzebue, Alaska.

A version of these meeting minutes was certified by the Chair for Accuracy on February 3, 2025.

For a more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcripts, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Lisa Hutchinson, Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-310-4097, email lisa_hutchinson@ios.doi.gov.