

WESTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Pikes Landing
Fairbanks, AK
February 25 – 26, 2025

Invocation:

Jenny Pelkola provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order Tuesday, February 25, 2025, at 9:24 am. Council Chair Jack Reakoff, and Council members Tommy Kriska, Jenny Pelkola, Robert Walker, Donald Honea, Jr., Pollock Simon, Sr. were present in person. Council members Timothy Gervais attended telephonically, and Member Darrell Vent, Sr. was absent and excused on the first day, but present in person on the second day. The Council has two vacant seats. With seven out of eight seated Council members present, quorum was established.

Attendees:

*Asterisk * identifies if present via teleconference.*

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Central Yukon Field Office – Erin Julianus, Geoff Beyersdorf
- National Park Service (NPS): Regional Office – Victoria Florey*; Gates of the Arctic (GAAR) National Park and Preserve (NPP) – Marcy Okada, Matt Cameron
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): Regional Office – Jill Klein*; Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex – Jeremy Havener*, Marie Cleaver*; Kanuti NWR – Clayton Merrill, Joanna Fox, Tina Moran, Chris Harwood; Yukon Delta NWR – Laurie Boeck*, Aaron Moses*; Arctic NWR – Merben Cebrian; Fisheries Division – Shane Ransbury, Keith Herron; Kenai Fish and Wildlife Conservation Office – Frank Harris*; Science Applications – George Yaska
- United States Forest Service: Regional Office – Greg Risdahl*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Commercial Fisheries Division – Deena Jallen, Matt Olson, David Runfola; Subsistence Division – Tim Bembenic, Brooke Fisher; Wildlife Conservation Division – Mark Nelson, Jordan Pruszenski, Glenn Stout
- North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC): Council Members – Ann Vanderhoeven, Rachel Baker, John Moller, and Steve Williams; Support Staff – Kate Haapala and Sarah Marrinan

- Other Organizations: Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) Tribal Resource Stewardship Division (TRSD) – Diloola Erickson, Krystal Lapp; Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) – Justin Leon; Yukon River Drainage Fisheries Association (YRDFA) – Serena Fitka; Intertribal Agriculture Council, Katie Herzner*
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Brent Vickers, Cory Graham*, Liz Williams, Nissa Pilcher, Brian Ubelaker, Pippa Kenner*, Chris McKee*, Brooke McDavid
- Public: Ross Martin, Douglas Patsy, Vince Mathews, Brooke Woods, Olivia Henaayee Irwin

Election of Officers:

There were no changes to Council Officers. The following members were re-elected by unanimous consent with no other nominations made:

- Chair – Jack Reakoff
- Vice Chair – Jenny Pelkola
- Secretary – Darrell Vent, Sr.

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Kriska, to adopt the agenda with the following changes:

- Move agenda item *WP24-01 Statewide sale of brown bear hides* from **15. Other Business** to **12.b Action Items**
- Under **14. Reports**, add
 - *TCC TRSD and KRITFC Joint Presentation on Chum Bycatch* at a time certain on 2/25 at 4:00 pm
 - *ADF&G Subsistence Division Research Update and Wildlife Conservation Division Unit 26A Update*
 - *NPS GAAR Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) Update*

The motion passed unanimously.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Honea, to approve the fall 2024 meeting minutes with the following correction.

- Include Member Honea would have liked to make closing comments but was unable due to teleconferencing issues.
- Recognize Chief Green’s Louden report in a different location of the minutes.

The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Tim Gervais of Ruby reported on recent decisions by the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) to not pass a proposal during the 2024 Southeast and Yakutat Finfish and Shellfish Regulatory Meeting that sought to reduce Alaskan salmon hatchery production by 25%, which has been a topic of discussion at previous Council meetings. He also commented that the new administration will lead to new Secretaries, new

Federal Subsistence Board (Board) makeup, and potentially new policies and funding reductions for the Federal Subsistence Management Program, which has ramifications for all Councils and subsistence users.

Tommy Kriska of Nulato expressed frustration over the past three decades of action by the Councils and other entities that still resulted in commercial fishermen being able to fish while those that live on the Yukon, "...no longer know what a salmon looks like." He noted that the tribes that go to Washington D.C. to advocate for the rural users meet with individuals that seem to be unaware of the subsistence users plight in Alaska, which makes him wonder where all the comments and recommendations from the Council go. Member Kriska remarked that subsistence users are left footing the bill for the profits made by commercial fishermen, and that Alaska is only looked at for development purposes to the detriment of tribes and those that still live a subsistence way of life.

Pollock Simon, Sr. of Allakaket reported on the absence of any salmon harvest opportunity in the Allakaket River for multiple years that has affected his community greatly and makes living a subsistence way of life very hard, especially since the caribou have not returned for many years and moose and black bear numbers are low. Member Simon noted that he believes that there will be less federal funding for programs within his village and that this will make things even harder for people to stay in the village. He noted that he was taught to respect the animals and the fish, to only take what was needed, but that others must have not been taught this since there is no more salmon and expressed concern for the sheefish and whitefish populations that are now being harvested in greater number for subsistence needs due to the lack of available salmon. Member Simon also noted that his grandfather told him of other times of lean salmon years in 1940 to the degree that subsistence users were self-regulating catches, and the salmon recovered in a few years, but that since times are so much different now between weather oscillations and fishing technology that he does not believe that recovery in that amount of time is viable any longer.

Jenny Pelkola of Galena expressed joy to see so many members of Council are present in person, and expressed concern over the two vacant seats and urged members to help get those filled. Member Pelkola informed the Council that she attended a training session put on by the TCC TRSD about the NPFMC and the NPFMC's special February 2025 Chum Salmon Bycatch meeting in Anchorage to learn their process, give testimony to the Advisory Panel, and hear others concerns and points of view. She hopes other tribes take up the TCC's NPFMC training offer in the future. Member Pelkola finalized her report by informing the Council that the snow had been very high in Galena this winter, and she was thankful for those in the communities that go out and take wolves.

Robert Walker of Anvik expressed his appreciation for the attendance of Vince Mathews, who was a former Council Coordinator, and commended the civil service of BLM's Geoff Beyersdorf, noting he is due to retire shortly. Member Walker also noted his attendance at the NPFMC's special February 2025 Chum Salmon Bycatch meeting and expressed concern over the amount of time people had to testify to the Advisory Panel, and the lack of attention that some Panel members were giving those testifying. He noted he spoke for his Tribe and for the animals since no one speaks for them. Member Walker reported

that brown bears are changing their behavior and coming into the village to kill dogs and taking moose a lot closer to Anvik than they ever have before. Member Walker noted his frustration with having been told that subsistence users under state regulations have a seven-year moratorium on Chinook Salmon harvest with no consultation process, all while no real steps have been taken to limit the take of Chinook Salmon in commercial fisheries.

Donald Honea, Jr. of Ruby reported that he is concerned over the lack of representation from the Kuskokwim River on the Council and noted that having a robust membership is beneficial to the other members and the resources. He reported a large wolf pack near the Novi [Nowitna River] and expressed concern over the impact that these animals may have on the moose population. Member Honea concluded his report by expressing concern over the lack of summer and fall Chum [Salmon], much less kings [Chinook Salmon] and expressed concern over what is happening to salmon in the marine environment that is resulting in the poor returns including highly variable weather, increase of hatchery raised salmon, and commercial fishing interception.

Jack Reakoff of Wiseman reported to the Council on the latest GAAR SRC activities, including information on an ongoing ADF&G sheep GPS collar project that he received during the SRC's last meeting. He informed the Council that the Brooks Range had a very different weather than other places in the state, that Wiseman had received 51 inches of snow in January, and over 90 inches of snow this year, and that he was glad that the moose are of hearty stock that survived the rain on snow events and other abnormal weather during previous winters. Chair Reakoff shared his observation of good lamb recruitment even with the low number of ewes on the landscape, and that there was a recent high wind event that had blown a lot of the snow off the mountains in the Brooks Range that the caribou were taking advantage of. He commended Member Kriska's service to the Middle Yukon, with his ongoing efforts to take predators to assist the moose numbers, and he shared his observations about low insect numbers last year, and that there were nearly no ravens or hawks around due to bird flu. Chair Reakoff noted high grouse and ptarmigan numbers, and that the lynx population is doing well. He expressed his concern over the current state of salmon in the Yukon drainage, he is worried that the stocks are too depressed and won't be able to come back.

Darrell Vent Sr. of Huslia was absent on the first day of the meeting but gave his member report during closing comments on the second day. He informed the Council that he sits on a lot of different councils and boards to try to help his people but has seen a marked reduction of subsistence foods at tables at potlatches while more processed foods are present, and that is leading to diseases like diabetes and cancer. He noted that the inability of rural users to get fish onto their own table is a huge issue, especially since commercial fishermen are not also standing down even though subsistence is supposed to be a priority with both the State and Federal government. Member Vent expressed concern that the studies that have and are currently being conducted are not going to be enough and the salmon won't come back like the caribou never came back to Huslia. He said that the many years of trying to work with the NPFMC, BOF and the BOG have not resulted in much of benefit for subsistence users, and he is growing weary of all of the arguing about making others understand that our children need to eat and learn how to live the way he did growing up.

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda items:

Day 1 – Vince Mathews of Fairbanks introduced himself to the Council as being a previous State of Alaska Fish and Game Advisory Committee Coordinator, as well as Council Coordinator for this region and the Eastern Interior region before moving to work as a Subsistence Resource Specialist for several Interior Alaska NWRs. He recently visited with an elder from the Western Interior region who had been doing poorly. Mr. Mathews noted that elders are like having encyclopedias of knowledge to share if they are listened to. Mr. Mathews commented that it was unsettling for him to hear the Council has similar concerns now that it did when he was the coordinator.

George Yaska of Fairbanks and Huslia introduced himself as an Indigenous Knowledge Liaison for the FWS, and he had been given permission to speak to the Council on issues that he is familiar with. He relayed his experiences learning how to fish on the Yukon in his youth and watching the changes in the salmon physiology over the years. Mr. Yaska shared observations about seeing oil slicks on the river from the land releasing hydrocarbons into the water due to melting permafrost. He thinks that there is correlation to the increase in release of hatchery Pink Salmon to the weight and productivity of kings [Chinook Salmon]. Mr. Yaska also commented on the lack of black bears and the large numbers of grizzlies [brown bears] that are now found in the Novi [Nowitna River].

Doug Patsy of Nulato commented that he had been learning from Member Kriska on the take of predators, and that these efforts had really helped the moose population in the Middle Yukon. During the fall, he ran into some younger men on his way to Kaiyuh who had taken a grizzly bear that was like a spring black bear — it didn't smell bad, the meat was good, and the fat was white, and that it must have been eating vegetation and moose all summer and not salmon. Mr. Patsy was concerned about the large jet boats operating on the tributaries like the Anvik and Nulato rivers, which are washing out gravel beds where salmon spawn. Mr. Patsy concluded his testimony by thanking the Council members for their service and informed them he intends to apply for Council membership during the next open period.

Day 2 – Ross Marin of Fairbanks and PhD student with the Yale School of the Environment updated the Council on his research, which focuses on subsistence politics and has included developing a searchable Council meeting transcript database for the Eastern and Western Interior regions. The Council made suggestions for phrases and words he could search for to better understand their concerns over time.

Council Training – Proposed Changes to Federal Subsistence Hunting and Trapping Regulations:

Brian Ubelaker, OSM Wildlife Biologist, presented information on the process and timeline of how to submit proposed changes to Federal subsistence hunting and trapping regulations.

Action Items:

Call for Federal Wildlife Proposals

Mr. Ubelaker informed the Council that the Board is accepting proposals to change Federal regulations for the subsistence harvest of wildlife on Federal public lands and waters for the 2026–2028 regulatory years.

Development of Regulatorily Wildlife Proposals

Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Kriska, to submit a proposal to reduce the area of Upper Kuskokwim Controlled Use Area (UKCUA) in Unit 19D to match current extent under State regulations.

The motion passed unanimously.

This proposal would align Federal hunting regulations with State regulations. Adopting this proposal would reduce the size of the UKCUA under Federal regulations which is currently larger than it exists in State regulations. The current extent of the Federal UKCUA outside of the State UKCUA only applies to federally qualified subsistence users, making Federal regulations more restrictive than State.

Motion by Member Kriska, seconded by Member Pelkola, to submit a proposal to establish a draw permit hunt for muskoxen in Units 21D and 24D to match the current State season.

The motion passed unanimously.

This proposal would establish a Federal muskox hunt in Units 21D and 24D in alignment with State regulations.

The Council chose to not submit a proposal to extend the closure for Dall sheep in Unit 24A and 26B that was set to sunset this year due to lamb recruitment observed last fall.

WP24-01 Statewide Sale of Brown Bear Hides

Liz Williams, OSM Cultural Anthropologist, presented the revised analysis and OSM recommendation to the Council. Motion by Members Honea, seconded by Member Kriska, to support WP24-01 with the revised OSM modification.

The motion passed unanimously.

The Council supported WP24-01 as modified by OSM in February of 2025. Brown bear hides must be sealed before they can be sold, so harvest is tracked. The harvest of brown bears is not constraining brown bear populations. If harvest rises above harvestable surplus, regulation changes can reduce the legal harvest of brown bears in a hunt area. Only federally qualified subsistence users will be eligible, a smaller number of hunters than is eligible to harvest brown bears in general.

Council Charter Review

Nissa Pilcher, Council Coordinator, provided an overview of the Council Charter for review and renewal. Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Simon, to adopt the charter with no changes.

The motion passed unanimously.

Review and Approve FY24 Annual Report

Ms. Pilcher presented the draft FY2024 Annual Report to the Council with included eight topics, six of which included request of the Board and two were informational items. The Council previously discussed the Council's *Sheep Management Strategy Guidelines* (Guidelines) document. Motion by Member Walker, seconded by member Pelkola, to direct OSM to use these Guidelines while developing future analyses of relevant proposals was made at that time.

The motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Honea, to approve the FY2024 Annual Report after adding this direction under **Item 7. Continued Efforts to Finalize the Council's Sheep Management Strategy Guidelines.**

The motion passed unanimously.

Call for Alaska Board of Game Proposals

The Council reviewed the Call for Proposals for the State of Alaska Board of Game for the 2025–2026 Regulatory Year but took no action on this agenda item.

Alaska Board of Game Statewide Meeting Proposal Comments

The Council voted to submit comments on two Statewide Alaska Board of Game proposals.

Proposal 95 & 96 – Repeal the age criteria for the definition of full-curl horn ram.

Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Kriska, to support Proposals 95 & 96.

The motion passed unanimously.

As the Council submitted one of these proposals, rationale for support is within the proposal itself, namely that accurately aging a sheep in the field at a distance is extremely difficult even for experienced sheep hunters.

Proposals 119: Change the boundary between Units 21E and 21D

Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Kriska, to support Proposal 119.

The motion failed unanimously.

The Council noted that the Middle Yukon Fish and Game Advisory Committee is opposed to this boundary change and the Council believes that any change in boundaries should be agreed upon by all relevant Advisory Committees. Additionally, the passage of this proposal would misalign State and Federal boundaries for the Unit 21 subunits, which would lead to increased regulatory complexity.

Call for Alaska Board of Fisheries Proposals

The Council reviewed the Call for Proposals for the State of Alaska Board of Fisheries for the 2025–2026 Regulatory Year.

Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Simon, to submit an updated proposal on aggregate seine length in the South Unimak and Shumagin islands June salmon fishery for the Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian Islands/Chignik Finfish Meeting.

The motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Simon, to submit a proposal on increased genetic testing of Chum Salmon in the South Unimak and Shumagin islands June salmon fishery for the Alaska Peninsula/Aleutian Islands/Chignik Finfish Meeting.

The motion passed unanimously.

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed its fall 2025 meeting dates and location as October 7 – 8 in McGrath.

The Council selected its winter 2026 meeting dates and location as February 24 – 25 in Fairbanks and its fall 2026 meeting dates as October 6 – 7 in Aniak.

North Pacific Fishery Management Council Outreach and Engagement Session on Chum Salmon Bycatch Management in the Bering Sea:

Outreach Session (Day 1 – Evening)

A special outreach and engagement session was held the evening of the first meeting day with the goal to increase awareness of Chum Salmon bycatch management measures being considered by the NPFMC and to facilitate dialogue between members of the NPFMC and the Council. The session began with a presentation by NPFMC support staff, followed by a roundtable discussion between the Council and NPFMC Members.

Public Comments and Council Action (Day 2 – Morning)

The next morning, the Council continued their discussion of Chum Salmon bycatch and received public comments on the topic before taking action.

Oliva Henaayee Irwin of Nenana gave public testimony to express her concern with the status of salmon in the Yukon drainage. As an Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (EIRAC) member, she commented on the differences between the two evening sessions. She and the Council discussed EIRAC's potential action on items regarding the NPFMC.

Brooke Woods of Fairbanks/Rampart gave public testimony telephonically and directed her testimony at the NPFMC where she expressed concern over what the lack of salmon had done to those on the Yukon who depend on the resource for subsistence both physically and culturally.

Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Honea, to write a letter to the NPFMC to be submitted during the to-be-announced open comment period for the draft environmental impact statement on Chum Salmon bycatch management.

The motion passed unanimously.

Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Pelkola, to select Members Kriska and Walker to represent the Council if a working group about bycatch is to occur between the EIRAC and this Council.

The motion passed unanimously.

Reports:

The Council received updates on the following topics:

- KRITFC Report presented by Justin Leon, KRITFC Research Director
- TCC TRSD Report presented by Diloola Erickson, TRSD Director
- TCC TRSD and KRITFC Joint Report on Chum Salmon Bycatch Environmental Impact Statement Report and Update on NPFMC Special February 2025 Chum Salmon Bycatch Meeting presented by Krystal Lapp, Natural Resource Policy Analyst
- YRDFA Report by Serena Alstrom, YRDFA Executive Director
- ADF&G
 - Division of Commercial Fisheries Yukon River Coho Salmon Radio Telemetry Project Update presented by Andrew Padilla, Assistant Yukon Fall Season Research Biologist
 - Subsistence Division Research Update presented by Brooke Fisher and Tim Bembenic, both Subsistence Resource Specialists
 - Wildlife Conservation Division Unit 26A Update presented by Carmen Daggett, Wildlife Biologist
 - Wildlife Conservation Division Update on Central Arctic Caribou Herd presented by Mark Nelson, Wildlife Biologist
- FWS
 - Yukon River Research Update presented by Shane Ransbury, Fishery Assessment Biologist for the Yukon River
 - Yukon River Management Update for 2025 presented by Keith Herron, Assistant Fishery Manager for the Yukon River
 - Kuskokwim River Broad Whitefish Study Update presented by Frank Harris, Fisheries Biologist, Southern Alaska Field Office
 - Kanuti NWR Update presented by Clayton Merrill, Subsistence Specialist
 - Yukon Flats NWR Moose Collaring Moose Study Update presented by Mr. Merrill
 - Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko NWR update presented by Jeremy Havener, Subsistence Specialist
 - Yukon Delta NWR Update presented by Aaron Moses, Subsistence Specialist

- NPS
 - GAAR NPP Update presented by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator
 - GAAR SRC Update presented by Ms. Okada

Motion by Member Vent, seconded by Member Honea, to reappoint Member Simon to the GARR SRC.
The motion passed unanimously.

- Western Arctic Caribou Herd Monitoring Update presented by Kyle Joly and Matt Cameron, both Wildlife Biologists
- BLM
 - Central Yukon Field Office Update presented by Erin Julianus, Wildlife Biologist
 - Statewide BLM Process and Responses to Executive Orders and Directives presented by Geoff Beyersdorf, Fairbanks District Office Manager
- OSM Update presented by Brent Vickers, Anthropology Division Supervisor

Other Business:

The Council received briefings on the following topics:

- Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program
- Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program
- Federal Subsistence Board 2025 Regulatory Meeting
- Council Correspondence
 - Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Pelkola, to send a letter of thanks to Mr. Beyersdorf expressing the Council's appreciation to his long service to the Council and the people of Western Interior Region during his career.
 - Council requested previously drafted letter to protect ANSCA D-1 lands be updated and resent to the Board to better inform the newly appointed members of the Council's concerns.
- Non-voting Young Leader Seat
- Updated per diem guidelines for Council member travel

Closing Comments:

Member Kriska noted that he enjoyed the meeting even though he felt conflicted as he was also supposed to attend the YRDFFA meeting that was held concurrently. He expressed his ongoing concern over the state of the salmon in the Yukon and his thanks for all that those in his area do to assist in bringing up moose numbers by the concentrated effort to take predators in the winter months.

Member Simon expressed the need for everyone to work together to bring the salmon back. He noted that there had been lean salmon years in the past, and that there aren't always a lot of salmon such as in 1940, but they came back. Now there is no salmon, but it is not just one entity's fault, and we don't need to point fingers, and everyone is in the same boat. Member Simon expressed his thanks for everyone

attending, and for Chair Reakoff and Vice Chair Pelkola for running the meeting and he is hopeful for getting more young people involved with the Council.

Member Pelkola thanked everyone for attending the meeting, including the NPFMC members, and noted that saying things like ‘things will never change’ is giving up hope and that things change so fast, and everyone needs to stay positive. She expressed the need for the Council to have representation from all parts of the region, the active role that the current members need to take on in recruiting those from unrepresented areas, and the need to get younger people on the Council.

Member Gervais thanked everyone for attending and contributing to the meeting, and echoed Member Pelkola’s comments on working towards getting Council membership from unrepresented subregions on the Council. Member Gervais noted that it is good to keep in mind that there are very few spots left in this country and world where there are places like Alaska has, that are undeveloped and where people are actually able to subsist of the land and have it be a meaningful component of how families and communities are supported, and implored everyone to stay positive and keep fighting.

Member Walker also expressed thanks for those attending, and the need for more voices from unrepresented subregions. Member Walker also outlined the importance of everyone being able to say their piece at Council meetings in their own time.

Member Honea noted that this was a good meeting, echoed comments about being able to say your piece at your own pace and that Council members need to try to assist in filling the Council fully especially with those from unrepresented subregions. He noted that he will look forward to the Fall meeting, wherever it may be.

Chair Reakoff thanked everyone for attending and echoed the desire for unrepresented subregions and younger Council members to step up. He noted that he highly values every current member on the Council and expressed his desire to hold meetings that are longer than two days so that there is more time for members to take the time that is needed to really flesh out ideas and concerns. Chair Reakoff also expressed his concern over what moving forward is going to look like for the Council with budget and other uncertainty but is hopeful that other councils and boards are out there to help pick up the slack if needed.

Adjournment:

The Council adjourned Wednesday, February 26, 2025, at 6:33 pm.

These minutes were Chair certified for accuracy on 5/23/2025

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 October 2025 meeting in McGrath, 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 Nissa Pilcher at 1-800-478-1456 or (907)891-9054 or email nissa_pilcher@ios.doi.gov.