

Kodiak/Aleutians Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

c/o Office of Subsistence Management
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Anthony Christianson, Chair
Federal Subsistence Board
c/o Office of Subsistence Management
1011 E. Tudor Road, MS 121
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199

Dear Chairman Christianson:

The Kodiak/Aleutians Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) appreciates the opportunity to submit its FY-2025 annual report to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) under the provisions of Section 805(a)(3)(D) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). At its public meetings held on September 17 – 18, 2025, the Council identified concerns and recommendations for this report. The Council approved this annual report at its March 4 – 5, 2026 meeting. The Council wishes to share information and raise a number of concerns dealing with implementation of Title VIII of ANILCA and the continuation of subsistence uses in the Kodiak/Aleutians Region.

The Council continues to be concerned about the ability to maintain necessary adequate data for effective fish and wildlife resource management. Regional fisheries data generally come from salmon weir counts or drone surveys, which often involve partnering, cooperating, or relying on the Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G). For wildlife, monitoring data usually come from broad wildlife surveys reliant upon ADF&G and U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS). Given the inherent tension between the need for data and the ability to pay for it, specific regional monitoring priorities are highlighted below.

1. Fisheries Research and Weir Funding

The Council expressed concern over funding inconsistency for fisheries research and weir projects, as well as the lack of communication regarding funding status decisions. A Council member noted that the McLees Lake Weir has been inactive for two years and funding to support its continued operation has not yet been secured on a consistent, long-term basis. Council members are frequently asked by community members for project updates but lack clear points of contact for information access during the funding process. Council updates are not available until decisions are publicly announced. Acknowledging that funding fluctuations present challenges for Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) staff, the Council emphasized

the need for improved communication and timely notifications for Council members serving as community liaisons, particularly when unusual changes or lapses in funding occur. The Council recommended continued prioritization of weir projects and consideration of regular funding status updates or a designated FRMP staff point of contact to ensure continuity of critical fisheries research and population monitoring.

2. Wildlife Population Studies

Similar to fisheries, Council members highlighted ongoing information gaps and challenges in wildlife population monitoring across the region. Incomplete surveys over multiple years for several species such as caribou and migratory birds have hindered accurate assessment of population trends. These gaps are often due to logistical constraints, such as limited availability of airplanes, pilots, and other resources needed by refuge staff to conduct surveys. The Council emphasized that reliable population data are essential for understanding the status of key species and for informing management decisions that support subsistence needs. Members noted that prior commitments from USFWS to prioritize surveys at Izembek National Wildlife Refuge had not consistently been fulfilled, leaving important monitoring incomplete. The Council recommended ensuring that refuges be adequately resourced, staffed, and supported to carry out consistent and comprehensive wildlife surveys necessary for effective management of sustainable subsistence uses throughout the region.

3. Enforcement Capacity

Council members expressed ongoing concerns about limited enforcement capacity in the region. Given constraints, they inquired as to whether refuge and agency staff received law enforcement cross-training or instead relied solely on a single officer. Members noted past examples of effective cross-agency coordination, including support from local police and the use of tools like remote cameras, but emphasized that such efforts had been inconsistent. The Council reiterated that inadequate and inconsistent enforcement continues to hinder subsistence users. Members recommended improving refuge staffing, cross-training, and coordination with state and local partners to ensure more reliable enforcement in support of subsistence needs.

4. Mortenson Sockeye Salmon Returns and Subsistence Access

Council members noted that Mortenson's Lagoon Sockeye Salmon returns remain well below levels observed eight to ten years ago. While there was a slight increase this year, the overall abundance is still much reduced. The impacts of these low returns are expected to be felt more acutely following the closure of the King Cove processing plant. When the processor was operating, community members were often able to meet subsistence needs through participation in the commercial fishery. With that option no longer available, residents may need to rely more heavily on direct subsistence harvests at Mortensen, potentially increasing pressure on that fishery. The Council recommended that the Board consider this issue as part of regional resource assessments and subsistence planning, noting that commercial catch declines can reduce the amount of fish available to households in our region. This also affects subsistence fishing that takes place during the commercial season, when residents often rely on commercial openings to meet household needs.

The remainder of this report is for information purposes only, and the Council does not require a response; however, the issues are significant and the Board may benefit from this knowledge.

5. Declining Goose Populations and Disproportionate Impacts of Management Actions

The Council remains concerned about continuing declines in emperor goose, brant, and cackling goose populations, largely driven by poor production on the Yukon–Kuskokwim Delta. These low numbers are expected to persist or worsen. Current management actions in response to declining populations, such as fall closures for emperor geese, the elimination of the fall brant season, and reduced cackler limits, are disproportionately impacting local hunters because most harvest in our region occurs when birds are present during the fall when sport regulations are in effect. In contrast, spring subsistence hunters have seen fewer restrictions, as brant and cackler harvests remain largely unchanged. The Council requests that managers closely evaluate how conservation measures are distributed across user groups and consider more equitable approaches as conditions decline.

The Kodiak/Aleutians Subsistence Regional Advisory Council appreciates the Board’s attention to these matters and the opportunity to assist the Federal Subsistence Management Program in meeting its charge of protecting subsistence resources and uses of these resources on Federal public lands and waters. The Council looks forward to continuing discussions about the issues and concerns of subsistence users in the Kodiak/Aleutians Region. If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact me via Leigh Honig, Subsistence Council Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management, at leigh_honig@ios.doi.gov or 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9051.

Sincerely,

Rebecca Skinner
Chair

cc: Federal Subsistence Board
Kodiak/Aleutians Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
Interagency Staff Committee
Office of Subsistence Management
Benjamin Mulligan, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Aaron Poetter, Federal Subsistence Liaison, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Administrative Record