

WESTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Pikes Waterfront Lodge
Fairbanks, Alaska
February 24-25, 2026

Invocation

Council Member Donald Honea provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order at 9:03 am Tuesday, February 24, 2026. Council Members Donald Honea, Jr., Robert Walker, Tim Gervais, and Chair Jack Reakoff were present in-person. Members Jenny Pelkola and Tom Kriska were delayed due to weather and were able to join in-person prior to the lunch break on the first day, and Member Darrell Vent joined the meeting telephonically prior to the lunch break on the first day. Member Pollock Simon, Sr. was absent and excused. After the lunch break on the first day of the meeting, with seven of eight seated Council members present, quorum was established. There are currently two vacant seats on the Council.

Attendees

** Denotes attended virtually*

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Nissa Pilcher, Lisa Gredigan, Crystal Ciisqu Leonetti, Orville Lind, Kristen Morrow, Brian Ubelaker*, Robbin La Vine*, Cory Graham
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Regional Office – Jill Klein*; Kanuti/Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko National Wildlife Refuge (NWR) Complex – Jeremy Havener*, Marie Cleaver*, Tina Moran, Jenny Bryant*, George Yaska*; Yukon Delta NWR – Aaron Moses*, Laurie Boeck*, Christopher Tulik* Christian Alexi*, Emmit Nicorri*; Northern Alaska Fish and Wildlife Field Office – Keith Herron*; Office of Law Enforcement – Cody Smith, Curtis Stevens
- National Park Service (NPS): Regional Office – Victoria Florey, Kim Jochum; Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve (GAAR)/Yukon-Charlie Rivers National Preserve – Marcy Okada, Matt Cameron, Mark Dowell
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Regional Office – Craig Townsend*, Donna Bach; Central Yukon Field Office – Anna O'Malley, Steve Taylor, Kent Slaughter
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): State Liaison – Aaron Poetter*; Subsistence Division – Tim Bembenic, Brooke Fisher
- Alaska Department of Public Safety: Alaska Wildlife Trooper Division – Lieutenant Daniel Valentine*
- Tribal and Native Organizations: Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission (KRITFC) – Justin Leon

- Yale School of the Environment: Ross Martin
- Public: Percy Lolnitz, Ben Stevens, Vince Mathews

Election of Officers

- Jack Reakoff was re-elected as Council Chair
- Don Honea was elected as Council Vice Chair
- Tommy Kriska was elected as Secretary

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Member Gervais, seconded by Member Honea, to adopt the agenda. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

The fall 2025 minutes will be reviewed and approved at the fall 2026 meeting.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Robert Walker of Anvik reported that he recently attended the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) meeting and the Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) Alaska Peninsula / Aleutian Island / Chignik Finfish (Area M) meeting for the Anvik Tribal Council. He informed the Council that he was not very impressed with how the NPFMC interacted with tribal representatives at the meeting, and neither the NPFMC or the BOF members could answer questions to his liking about the current salmon disaster on the Yukon River, and that he informed them that the lack of salmon is changing the ecology of the region, that grizzly bears are needing to find other prey such as black bears and moose since there is no more salmon to eat. He expressed concern over how the Department of Commerce is operating, especially considering the lack of a tribal seat on the NPFMC, which was asked for in 2017. Member Walker expressed concern over subsistence users not having the same deference as commercial fishermen at the BOF meeting.

Don Honea of Ruby reported that it was a mild winter, with not a lot of snow, which, he felt, was good for the moose. He expressed grave concern over the current salmon disaster happening on the Yukon right now, noted that there were many different variables across salmon's life cycle and that he used to be able to sit at his fish camp and watch the salmon jump as they swam upstream but now everything is eerily quiet. Member Honea expressed interest in hearing from the Kanuti Refuge about any moose population studies that may have been conducted as he is not seeing much moose sign on the Novi [Nowitna River]. Member Honea said that while he does not know personally what is going on in other areas of the region, like the GASH [Grayling, Anvik, Shageluk, and Holy Cross subregion] or where the Mulchatna Caribou Herd is located, he wants to protect what resources are left. Member Honea concluded his report by expressing appreciation for those who attend and testify at the BOF and the NPFMC meetings. He also shared deep concern about the changes occurring on the landscape and their impact on subsistence

resources, including the ongoing Secretarial Review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program, noting that these decisions can have lasting repercussions.

Darrel Vent of Huslia reported that this year was another high-water year in the fall, coinciding with fall hunting season. He also expressed concern over interruptions to migration patterns of caribou, specifically the Teshekpuk and the Western Arctic herds. Member Vent speculated that predation pressure as well as a lack of large lead bulls may be affecting caribou movement and expressed concern that trophy hunting may be affecting genetics by the removal of these animals from the breeding pool. He compared the loss of larger bulls to what happened with large Chinook Salmon on the Yukon – noting that the biggest fish were the ones migrating to Canada, and because they were targeted and removed from the gene pool, Alaska is now unable to send enough salmon across the border to meet Treaty obligations. Member Vent noted that the State of Alaska gets money from commercial fishing, perhaps a portion of those funds should be diverted to fund research on addressing the current salmon crisis on the Yukon. Member Vent concluded his report by expressing deep concern about the rising cost of food and fuel in villages, noting that these expenses continue to increase and communities are struggling. He emphasized that the hardship is compounded by the lack of salmon and the ongoing decline in moose and caribou populations, which further threatens subsistence food security.

Tim Gervais of Ruby reported that today was the last day of the BOF Area M [Alaska Peninsula / Aleutian Island / Chignik Finfish] meeting, and the BOF would be taking up the Council's proposal that day and he would inform the Council after the BOF deliberates on it. He reported that other organizations submitted proposals that sought to limit the commercial fleet to allow for the passage of Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim (AYK) bound salmon. Member Gervais observed that some commercial fishermen blame the current salmon decline on the Chum roe stripping fishery in the 1990s. He urged Yukon residents to openly share their perspectives so fishermen can better understand the real causes, rather than attributing the current crash to these past commercial fishing operations from decades ago. Member Gervais expressed deep concern over the current lack of salmon in the Yukon as well as the long-term trend that was occurring before the crash over the diminishing size of returning salmon. Member Gervais noted that it is inconceivable that rural residents are being told to stand down with subsistence practices when commercial fishing operations that catch AYK bound salmon are still being conducted. He expressed concern over the lack of action by the NPFMC and the ADF&G, as well as the ecological ramifications of the Ambler Road. Member Gervais concluded his report by noting that the Council still lacks representation from the Kuskokwim Drainage and expressed hope that this gap will be addressed soon.

Jenny Pelkola of Galena* reported that her community has received a significant amount of snow since the last Council meeting – more than she recalls in recent years. She noted that this heavy snowfall could make spring breakup difficult. She expressed concern over the potential for the Yukon River flooding during breakup due to this. Member Pelkola reflected that the most recent major spring flood was in 2015 in Galena, and hopefully the community will be prepared if it happens this year. Additionally, Member Pelkola noted a significant increase in wolves near the community, many of which were harvested – an outcome she said is beneficial for the local moose population. Chairman Reakoff asked if she had seen

any ptarmigan as they tend to have periods of localized migration within the region, and she had noted that she had not seen any.

Tommy Kriska of Nulato* informed the Council that Nulato had also seen much higher snow levels than average teamed with very cold weather and that the ice near the community is twice as thick as it normally is and frozen overflow is adding to the thickness. He reported that the wolf-trapping team that operates out of Nulato, which he is a part of, was able to take wolves earlier than typical this year, but he remains concerned about the strength of the moose population and how the animals will make it through the winter given the high snow level and extreme cold – conditions that significantly affect winter survival of moose. He did note that in the early part of the winter he observed a good number of healthy moose on the landscape.

Jack Reakoff of Wiseman reported on the activity of the Koyukuk River State Fish and Game Advisory Committee (Koyukuk River AC), which he chairs, and about discussions of BOF Area M proposals. He noted that all at the Koyukuk River AC meeting were very interested to see the outcome of the BOF Area M meeting and if there will be actual protections offered to the AYK bound salmon. He relayed some moose concerns in Unit 24A that may result in a future Alaska Board of Game proposal. Chair Reakoff relayed that while the winter was cold, there wasn't as much snow in sheep and caribou country around Wiseman, which is great for the continued recovery of the sheep population and to hopefully reverse the downward trend of several caribou herds. He also commented on the high water and flood events experienced during the fall hunting season and noted it was the fourth highest flood event in the 120-year history of Wiseman – the erosion and riverbed scouring were the worst he has ever seen. Chair Reakoff noted that the hare population is starting to upswing, and with it the lynx population. The wolves that made it through the winter are not in the best of health, which he believes is due to the lower snow levels making it harder for them to take down ungulates. Chair Reakoff closed by expressing concern over his observed changes in weather patterns, the landscape, and subsistence food availability over the course of his life.

*Members Pelkola and Kriska gave their member reports after the lunch break on the first day, as they had been weathered out the previous day and arrived at the meeting in the afternoon.

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-agenda Items

Day 1 (February 24)

Chief Pollock Simon, Jr. of Allakaket testified on the revocation of PLO 5150, and the effects that will have on caribou hunting for his Tribal members. He expressed support for hatchery fish enhancements for the Yukon River, and the Ambler Road and mine as a much-needed potential employment and income source for his Tribal members.

At the request of the Council, Cody Smith, USFWS Law Enforcement Officer, and Lt. Daniel Valentine, DPS Wildlife Trooper, relayed information on regulations involving trespass and avenues open to the public on what to do to assist in preventing trespass issues as well as what to do when people catch trespassers.

Leonard Lolnitz provided comments regarding recent trespass issues, concerns over the lack of co-management on the Yukon River, and other fisheries concerns.

Day 2 (February 25)

Vince Mathews expressed his thanks to the Council members for their contributions to the program and for their subsistence knowledge and sharing their ways of life.

Brooke McDavid, Eastern Interior Council Coordinator commented on two topics from the Eastern Interior Council: 1) depicting Native Corporation lands on Federal subsistence maps to decrease trespass issues. 2) requesting fisheries Delegation of Authority letters be modified to also require consultation with TCC, YRDFA, and other Tribal entities as step toward co-management.

Action Items

Call for Federal Fisheries and Rural Determination Proposals

Corey Graham, OSM Fisheries Biologist, informed the Council that the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) is accepting proposals to change Federal regulations for the subsistence harvest of fish and shellfish on Federal public lands and waters for the 2027–2029 regulatory years, as well as accepting proposals to change rural determinations of communities. *The Council submitted no proposals.*

Notification on the Upcoming Fisheries Closure Reviews

Mr. Graham presented the following Fisheries closure reviews to the Council:

- FCR27-01: Kanuti River, closed to salmon fishing
- FCR27-02: Bonanza Creek, closed to salmon fishing
- FCR27-03: Jim River, closed to salmon fishing

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program Updates

Kristien Morrow, OSM Anthropology Pathways Intern, provided the Council with an update on the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) and the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program.

Selection of Working Groups Participants for Development of FRMP Priority Information Needs

Members Honea, Walker, Pelkola, and Kriska volunteered to serve on the working group to develop Priority Information Needs for the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program for the Western Interior Region. Chair Reakoff volunteered to be an alternate.

Call for Alaska Board of Game Proposals

The Council was informed of the current call for proposals for the Alaska Board of Game for the Western Arctic / Western Region – Units 18, 22, 23, and 26A and the Interior and Eastern Arctic Regions – Units 12, 19, 20, 21, 24, 25, 26B, and 26C. *The Council submitted no proposals.*

Review and Approve FY25 Annual Report

Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Pelkola, to adopt the FY25 Annual Report as written, and include the amended Council's Sheep Management Strategy Guidelines. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Sheep Management Strategy Guidelines

Motion by Member Honea, seconded by Member Gervais, to finalize the Council's Sheep Management Strategy Guidelines with an amendment regarding the composition data collected in aerial surveys, and to submit the document to the Board for approval. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Special Action Requests

WSA26-01: Reduce harvest limit for Caribou in Units 22, 23, and a portion of 26A and WSA26-02: Close federal public lands in Unit 22 to caribou hunting by non-federally qualified users for the 2026-2028 regulatory cycle

Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Honea, to take no action and defer both to the home regions. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

As written, the Council believes this request does not adequately protect the interest of subsistence users, since if this were to pass, there would be disparities between state and federal regulations, making federally qualified subsistence users' harvest limits significantly lower than the State bag limit, and because not all of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd's (WACH) range is included in this request. Additionally, the Council feels that the harvest of cows should be eliminated when the population is this low.

Additional Action by the Council Concerning Special Action Requests

The Council strongly believes that federally qualified subsistence users should not have a more restrictive harvest limit than those hunting under state regulations, but the Council is concerned with the downward trend of this herd and believes action should be taken.

Motion by Member Vent, seconded by Member Honea, to submit a wildlife special action request to the Board if the State issues an emergency order to reduce the harvest limit on the WACH. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Other Correspondence

To BLM

Motion by Member Gervais, seconded by Member Vent, to send correspondence to the BLM, requesting definition of the legal parameters of continued federal subsistence uses on the lands affected by revocation of PLO 5150 within the Dalton Highway Corridor; and that a §810 analysis be conducted to meet statutory requirements. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Additional Comments on Secretarial Review

Motion made by Member Gervais, seconded by Member Walker, to submit additional comments to the Secretarial review requesting that the Secretary of the Interior and the Secretary of Agriculture liaise with the Secretary of State and the Secretary of Commerce at a Pacific Salmon Round Table Meeting and establish a Memorandum of Understanding to remove jurisdictional barriers and discuss national and international hatchery releases into the North Pacific. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

To Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Motion by Member Walker, seconded by Member Kriska, to draft correspondence to the ADF&G requesting that information be shared with the Council on how the ongoing seven-year moratorium on Chinook Salmon fishing that was added to the Treaty with Canada did not violate the Administrative Procedures Act.

Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Kriska, to table this motion until the fall 2026 meeting to allow further information on this topic to be gathered and presented to the Council. *The motion passed unanimously.*

To Alaska Department of Public Safety

Motion by Member Pelkola, seconded by Member Walker, to send correspondence to the State of Alaska Department of Public Safety Wildlife Troopers concerning wanton waste below the checkpoint at Ella's Cabin on the Koyukuk River and to request additional check stations. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

To USFWS

Motion by Member Gervais, seconded by Member Honea, to send correspondence to the USFWS to request that the permitting process for air and boat transporters on the Koyukuk, Nowitna, Innoko, and Kanuti National Wildlife Refuges be updated to require much tighter reporting requirements and to include other information pertaining to meat care to address wanton waste issues. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Future Meeting Dates and Locations

- October 6-7, 2026, Aniak was confirmed for the fall 2026 meeting
- February 23-24, 2027, Fairbanks was selected for the winter 2027 meeting
- October 5-6, 2027, Holy Cross was selected for the fall 2027 meeting

Reports

- *Current OSM Overview* presented by Crystal Leonetti, OSM Director
- *Kuskokwim Inter-Tribal Fish Commission Report* presented by Justin Leon, Research Director
- *ADF&G Division of Subsistence Research Update* presented by Tim Bembenic and Brooke Fisher, Subsistence Resource Specialists
- USFWS
 - *Kanuti/Koyukuk/Nowitna/Innoko NWR Report* presented by Jeremy Havener, Refuge Subsistence Specialist
 - *Yukon Salmon Management Report* presented by Keith Herron, Biologist/Yukon River Assistant Subsistence Fishery Manager
 - *Yukon Delta NWR Report* presented by Aaron Moses, Refuge Subsistence Specialist
- *NPS Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve Spring 2026 Report* presented by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator, and Kim Jochum, Acting Integrated Resources Program Manager for GAAR and Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve
- BLM
 - *Revocation of Public Land Orders 5150, North of Yukon River Update* presented by Kent Slaughter, Fairbanks District Manager (acting)
 - *Central Yukon Report* presented by Steve Taylor, Outdoor Recreation Planner, and Anna O'Malley, Ecologist
- *OSM Report* presented by Lisa Grediagin, Supervisory Wildlife Biologist

Other Business

- The Council received an update on correspondence sent since the last meeting and an overview of their 805(c) report from the previous Federal fisheries regulatory cycle

Nissa Pilcher, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Subsistence Management

Minutes were Chair certified for accuracy on 5/26/2026

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 fall 2026 meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Nissa Pilcher, Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9054, or email nissa_pilcher@ios.doi.gov.