

NORTHWEST ARCTIC SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Northwest Arctic Heritage Center
Kotzebue, Alaska
March 31 – April 1, 2026

Invocation

A moment of silence was held for Pete Schaeffer.

Clyde Ramoth supplied an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Tuesday, March 31, 2026. Council Members Clyde Ramoth, Verne Cleveland, Karmen Monigold, Tristen Pattee, and Chair Thomas Baker were in person, and Member Michael Kramer was present on the phone. There are currently two vacant seats on the Council. With six of eight members initially present, quorum was established. Members Wilbur Howarth and Elmer Armstrong joined later in the morning and afternoon respectively, both by phone.

Attendees

** Denotes attended virtually*

- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Anchorage Field Office – Craig Townsend*, Jake Vialpando*
- National Park Service (NPS): Regional Office – Victoria Florey*, Elizabeth Bella*; Western Arctic National Parklands – Annie Carlson, Emily Creek, Ramie Fronstin*; Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve – Kyle Joly*, Marcy Okada*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): Regional Office – Jill Klein*; Kobuk National Wildlife Refuge – Wil Wiese, Bill Carter, Brittney Sweeney*; Northern Alaska Field Office – Ray Handler
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Wildlife Conservation Division – Alex Hansen, Kelly Marcus; Sport Fisheries Division – Brendan Scanlon*; Commercial Fisheries Division – Luke Henslee*; Subsistence Division – Helen Cold*
- North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (NSRAC): Leonard Barger
- Other Organizations: Ambler Access Project – Craig Jones; University of Alaska, Fairbanks (UAF) – Caitlin Luby, Todd Brinkman; Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), Arctic Beringia Program– Taylor Stinchombe, Kevin Fraley; Red Dog Community Reporter Program – Erica Quade; Red Dog Environmental Program – Johanna Salatas
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Grace Cochon, Robbin La Vine, Kevin Foley, Liz Williams*, Thomas Plank*, Nissa Pilcher*, Hannah Voorhees*

Election of Officers

- Thomas Baker was re-elected as Council Chair
- Tristen Pattee was elected as Council Vice Chair
- Karmen Monigold was elected as Secretary

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Cleveland, to adopt the agenda as presented.
The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Cleveland, to approve the minutes with the following changes.

- Correct spelling of Member Ramoth's name under Invocation

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Tristen Pattee of Ambler reported the caribou arrived early in October, leading to increased boat traffic at Onion Portage despite poor river conditions from a storm. Many were able to harvest, and Member Pattee stressed the importance of taking bull caribou for population recovery. Fishing results were mixed: sheefish harvests were good, salmon fishing was hindered by high water, and northern pike nets were productive. Member Pattee also raised concerns about rising wolf activity near Ambler, with wolves approaching homes and targeting dogs, possibly due to the declining caribou herd, which remains a safety issue for the community.

Clyde Ramoth of Selawik emphasized listening to local voices, sharing ecological knowledge, and maintaining transparency. He mentioned the upcoming Beaver workshop in Kotzebue in June is still seeking community representatives. Member Ramoth expressed concern about climate change and concluded that caring for the land, people, and resources with open communication is essential.

Verne Cleveland of Noorvik shared there was little to report since the last meeting. He mentioned the winter was very cold, many healthy caribou stayed near Noorvik, and residents enjoyed Sheefish from Callahan that were also healthy and tasty. Member Cleveland closed by thanking everyone for the meeting.

Karmen Monigold of Kotzebue recently returned to her subsistence camp at Ivvik and observed many healthy caribou heading north, including pregnant cows. She observed numerous wolves following the herd, noting that this is something that is normally not directly observed, which is concerning. Some caribou have rested near her camp after being chased. She reported a dog was killed by a bear and cubs at another camp this summer, leaving only the leash, and advised vigilance as wolves and bears appear to

lack sufficient wild food. Member Monigold concluded that most area trails are rough, but the ice road on the Kobuk River is in good condition.

Michael Kramer of Kotzebue shared concerns raised at the recent Kotzebue Sound State Fish and Game Advisory Committee meetings about increased bear activity and the high harvest of cow caribou, which is discouraging for those working to help the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH) recover. He emphasized the need for collective action to protect the herd, though he believes stricter harvest limits may be inevitable. Member Kramer also reported frequent sightings of bears and wolves near communities, and foxes close to schools, calling for more support from ADF&G and Wildlife Troopers in managing these animals. He concluded by mentioning worries about declining salmon runs and expressed hope that a sonar project this summer will improve monitoring for future runs.

Wilbur Howarth of Noorvik confirmed Member Cleveland's earlier report about caribou wintering behind Noorvik, with wolves keeping them close to town. He mentioned he was unable to fish this summer, but others did and found the Sheefish healthy, although the run was possibly earlier than usual. Member Howarth also stated there are many bears near town; when he last set a net outside Noorvik, a bear destroyed it and ate most of the catch.

Elmer Armstrong of Noorvik* shared that last summer's salmon runs were weak, but he managed to take a moose in Nasuruk. He noted an unusually warm fall and saw no caribou on his first trip, despite reports of them being upriver. A rapid freeze-up prevented him from being able to go caribou hunting again, and also from setting nets for gravid whitefish, though others in Noorvik were able and caught nice whitefish. He also reported that snow geese have started to migrate closer to Noorvik in the spring and summer, making harvests easier, and he looks forward to the return of ducks and geese after the ice melts.

*Member Armstrong gave his member report on the morning of the second day of the meeting.

Thomas Baker of Kotzebue praised the recent ADF&G and Western Arctic Caribou Herd Communication Committee brochure about caribou sex determination and the importance of harvesting only bulls, saying it effectively conveyed information that the Council had been relaying as well.

North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Report

Leonard Barger, an NSRAC member from Point Hope, offered condolences regarding the passing of Pete Schaeffer and conveyed his gratitude for the insights gained through discussions with elders who have highlighted ongoing changes in climate and landscape. Mr. Barger acknowledged the responsibilities inherent in Council membership, emphasizing the importance of representing both local communities and the Inupiaq way of life. He expressed appreciation to Alex Hansen, ADF&G Wildlife Biologist, for attending the previous NSRAC meeting in person, noting that face-to-face communication is significantly more effective than remote interactions via telephone.

Mr. Barger informed the Council that the North Slope region shares concerns about caribou populations. While his community utilizes multiple herds for subsistence, he raised apprehensions regarding certain

communities' ability to meet their needs due to conflicts arising from sport hunting. He underscored that regional residents rely on these animals for sustenance, whereas visitors often pay substantial amounts to hunt caribou for their antlers rather than for nutritional purposes.

Additionally, Mr. Barger reported preparations underway in his community for whaling season. He serves on the Alaska Beluga Whaling Committee to safeguard continued access to beluga meat, which holds significant nutritional and cultural importance.

Public and Tribal Comment on Non-agenda Items

Clyde Ramoth, representing the Selawik Tribe, addressed rising wolf and human interactions and called for stricter predator regulations. He also urged public awareness and caution.

Action Items

Call for Federal Fisheries and Rural Determination Proposals

Kevin Foley, OSM Fisheries Biologist, informed the Council the 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. *The Council chose not to submit any proposals on this topic.*

Special Action Requests

WSA26-01: Reduce harvest limit for Caribou in Units 22, 23, and a portion of 26A

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Pattee, to support WSA26-01 as amended to the harvest limit to bulls only. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

The Council believes that this request is in the best interest of the WACH, and to conserve the herd for future generations. The continued population decline of the WACH highlights the urgent need to implement sustainable practices so that the population may begin to recover. It is essential to protect our subsistence lifestyle and maintain the ability to pass on traditions and cultural knowledge to younger generations, ensuring the continuity of our way of life. The current situation demands that we do everything possible to conserve the WACH and safeguard subsistence uses into the future. The Council noted that while these measures may be challenging in the short term, they will benefit us in the long term and are not intended to be a permanent change; if we work together and act responsibly, the restrictions can be lifted once the herd rebounds. History shows that recovery is possible—the caribou population rebounded from 75,000 in the 1970s—and with collective action, it can happen again. Given the current rate of decline, the Council noted that there is a real fear that only a few years of hunting remain if the current level of take continues, which threatens our identity as caribou people. Ultimately, while these changes may be difficult now, they are a necessary investment for long-term benefit and the well-being of future generations.

WSA26-02 – Close federal public lands in Unit 22 to caribou hunting by NFQUs for the 2026-2028 regulatory cycle

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Pattee, to support WSA26-02 as written. *The motion passed 7-1.*

The Council referenced their comments made for WSA26-01

WSA26-03 Close Federal public lands in the southwest portion of Unit 26A to caribou hunting by NFQUs for the 2026-2028 regulatory cycle

Motion by Member Ramoth, seconded by Member Monigold, to support WSA26-03 as written. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

The Council believes that for the continuation of subsistence uses and for the conservation of the WACH, that this closure is necessary.

Call for State of Alaska Board of Game Proposals

The Council was informed that the Alaska Board of Game is accepting proposals to change hunting and trapping regulations for the Western Arctic/Western Region for its 2026–2027 meeting cycle.

Motion by Member Pattee, seconded by Member Howarth, to submit a proposal requesting to establish an intensive management plan within the range of the WACH. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Motion by Member Pattee, seconded by Member Cleveland, to submit a proposal requesting the closure of the take of caribou by nonresidents in Units 22, 23, and 26A Southwest. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Motion by Member Pattee, seconded by Member Cleveland, to submit a proposal to reduce the bag limit for caribou in Units 22, 23, and the southwest portion of 26A for resident hunters from 15 caribou, one of which may be a cow, to four bull caribou for all open and ‘to be announced’ seasons. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Review and Approve FY25 Annual Report

Motion by Member Kramer, seconded by Member Pattee, to adopt the FY25 Annual Report with the following edits.

- Item 4. Concerns about Contaminations from Mining and Potential Development Projects, include a request for a written report to be disseminated to local Tribes as well as the Council.

The motion passed unanimously.

National Park Service Proposed Rule 1024-AE96

Elizabeth Bella, Environmental Planning and Compliance Team Lead, provided the Council with a brief overview of the Proposed Rule (PR). The Council had an extensive discussion on the PR, which centered

around how the passage of this PR would impact subsistence users, the complexity of the PR, and concern over the comment deadline.

Motion by Member Pattee, seconded by Member Ramoth, to submit comments to the NPS requesting an extension to the comment period for the PR. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Motion by Member Monigold, seconded by Member Armstrong, to submit comments to the NPS on the Proposed rule outlining the Council's discussion. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Other Correspondence

To ADF&G

Motion by Member Pattee, seconded by Member Monigold, to send a letter to ADF&G, requesting that the ADF&G issue an emergency order to also close the take of cows for the 2026-2027 season in Game Management Units 22, 23, and 26A west of the Colville River drainage upstream from the Nuka River and drainages of the Chukchi Sea, south and west of and including the Kuk and Kugrua River drainages. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Motion by Member Pattee, seconded by Member Ramoth, to send a letter to ADF&G in support of the ADF&G's efforts to monitor Chum Salmon on the Kobuk River by exploring best methodologies for counting salmon. *The motion passed unanimously.*

To NPS

Motion by Member Armstrong, seconded by Member Howarth, in support of Member Pattee's continuation sitting on the Kobuk Valley Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC).

Future Meeting Dates and Locations

September 24-25, 2026, Kotzebue was confirmed for the fall 2026 meeting.

The Council also acknowledged that the SPRAC requested to meet with the Council during the fall 2026 meeting window to discuss caribou concerns, and are open to doing so and therefore shifting meeting dates and locations, if such a meeting can be held.

The Council requested that a Joint Meeting be held with this Council, the SPRAC and NSRAC during the week of February 15, 2027, Anchorage be approved for the winter 2027 meeting.

Motion by Member Pattee, seconded by Member Ramoth, to send a letter to the Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (SPRAC) and NSRAC requesting a Joint Council meeting during the winter 2027 meeting window to discuss caribou concerns with the understanding the selected meeting dates and location would need to be adjusted. *The motion passed unanimously.*

October 26-27, 2027, Kotzebue was selected for the fall 2027 meeting.

Reports

- *Environmental Monitoring Program Overview and Introduction to the Community Observer Program* provided by Erica Quaide, TEK Community Reporter Program Lead
- *Red Dog Environmental Monitoring Program Report* presented by Johanna Salatas, TEK Environmental Coordinator
- *Exploring the Changing Availability of Western Arctic Caribou and Community Implications, Master's Research Study Update* provided by Caitlin Luby, UAF Masters Student
- *Statewide Exploratory Study on Hunting Ammunition* provided by Todd Brinkman, UAF Professor of Wildlife Ecology
- *Arctic Beringia Research Update* provided by Taylor Stinchombe, WCS Social Science and Co-Production Specialist, and Kevin Fraley, WCS Fisheries Ecologist
- *NPS Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve Update* provided by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator
- *NPS Western Arctic Parklands Update* provided by Annie Carlson, Integrated Resources Program Manager
- *NPS Kobuk Valley SRC* provided by Emily Creek, Subsistence Coordinator
- *NPS Cape Krusenstern SRC Report* provided by Emily Creek
- *FWS Selawik River Sheefish Spawner Response to the 2004 Landslide Report and Summary of Sheefish Research and Knowledge Gaps* provided by Ray Handler, Fisheries Biologist, and Bill Carter, Fisheries Biologist
- *OSM Report* provided by Robbin La Vine, Subsistence Policy Coordinator

Fisheries Resource Monitoring and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program Reports

Kevin Foley presented an update on the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program. Member Cleveland and Member Armstrong volunteered to serve on the working group to develop Priority Information Needs for the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program for the Northwest Arctic Region.

Other Business

- The Council received an update on correspondence sent since the last meeting

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

Minutes were Chair certified for accuracy on 7/7/2026

Thomas Baker, Chair
Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2026 meeting in Kotzebue, 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.