BRISTOL BAY SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes

Hyatt Place Conference Room
Anchorage, AK
January 12, 2026

Invocation:

Orville Lind provided the invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order on Monday, January 12, 2026, at approximately 8:51 a.m. by Acting Chair Dan Dunaway. Acting Chair Dunaway noted that Chair Nanci Morris Lyon was unable to attend, and he presided over the meeting. Council members Kenneth Nukwak, Sr., Richard Wilson, John Christensen, Jr., Robert Hill, and Walter Kanulie were present. With six out of eight seated Council members in attendance (Council has two vacant seats), a quorum was established.

Moment of Silence

A moment of silence was observed in honor of former Council member Billy Trefon and Alaska Department of Fish and Game Biologist John Landsiedel.

Attendees:

**indicates teleconference attendance*

- **Office of Subsistence Management (OSM):** Robbin La Vine, Kendra Holman, Dr. Jason Roberts, Jarred Stone, Grace Cochon, Gisela Chapa, and Orville Lind
- **National Park Service (NPS):** Eva Patton, Grant Hilderbrand, Liza Rupp, and Kim Jochum
- **U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS):** Jill Klein; Stan Culling*, Truett Cawlfield*, Jannelle Trowbridge*; Brian Wehausen*; Bryce Woodruff*
- **Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G):** Amy Vandervoort*
- **Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA):** Dan Breeden, Gayla Hoseth, Cody Larson*, and Jorjana Dray*
- **Tribal and Intertribal Representatives:** George Anderson (Chignik Intertribal Coalition); Leilani Luhrs (Togiak Tribal Representative)

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Christensen, seconded by Member Nukwak, to **approve** the agenda as amended to include discussion of a letter of thanks and condolences to the family of former Council member Billy Trefon.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Member Nukwak, seconded by Member Wilson, to **approve** the Council's 2025 Winter Meeting Minutes as presented.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Kenneth Nukwak, Sr. of Manokotak reported that last year's winter was poor, limiting hunting activity for many, with most hunters not going out until March or April. As a result, few moose were taken during the winter. During the summer moose hunt, populations in the Manokotak, Nushagak River, and Togiak areas appeared sufficient. However, wolf activity on the Manokotak side was notable, including a pack of 8–10 pups observed in prime moose hunting areas, highlighting a potential need for predator management. Ptarmigan remained abundant, caribou populations in the Nushagak area appeared steady, and fish availability was plentiful.

Walter Kanulie of Togiak noted that he had not traveled much recently but observed that the bay did not fully freeze over despite cold temperatures, suggesting the water remained relatively warm. He noted that the moose season was open in the area, but snow conditions were still soft and not yet blown over, which could affect travel. Some hunters were expected to go out, but activity had been minimal.

Robert Hill of Naknek noted the recent cold snap was beneficial, potentially limiting invasive species. Iliamna Lake froze completely, with ice thick enough for travel. Winter moose hunting had not yet been successful, though animals were present in the area. The Kukaklek Shelf caribou population appeared healthy, and collaboration with the Park Service has helped improve community access. Beaver populations between Kokhanok and Naknek, including along the Kaskanak River, were robust, with many active ponds observed.

Richard Wilson of Naknek commented on recent unusually severe temperatures, with lakes and rivers nearly frozen and improved snow coverage providing better travel and access. Fall harvests were decent, though this winter hunting activity had been minimal, with only one or two moose taken. Small groups of Northern Alaska Peninsula caribou herd have been seen near the neighborhood and appear healthy, including a recently harvested bull. While smelting, a very thin coyote was observed, likely struggling to survive the winter. Overall, conditions are challenging but wildlife populations observed appear to be generally stable.

John Christensen, Jr. of Port Heiden reported that ptarmigan populations near Pilot Point and Port Heiden were extremely abundant, at times covering runways. Caribou numbers increased from about 20 observed two weeks ago to roughly 500 more recently. Wolf tracks were frequently seen near rivers and in town, likely following the caribou. Moose populations were strong, and hunters were generally successful, selecting animals meeting state regulations of 50 inches or larger. Rabbit populations had also returned, though they were smaller in size.

Dan Dunaway of Dillingham reported that the moose season had been decent. The season was extended, though he was unable to hunt due to early snow and periods of bad weather. A few moose were taken during the winter season by others. Cold and windy conditions affected smelting and foraging, with salmonberries scarce and blueberries and blackberries nearly absent, though highbush cranberries remained abundant. Ptarmigan were observed in good numbers, including near Dillingham. Rivers were expected to freeze down to the cape, allowing access to Nushagak Peninsula caribou.

Action Items:

Secretarial Review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program

Sara Taylor, Policy Advisor for the Office of the Secretary, gave the Council an overview of the Secretaries' scoping process for the Program. The Council then offered the following feedback on the process:

- **OSM Relocation to PMB:** The Council expressed concern over the relocation of the Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) from USFWS to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget, citing unclear administrative and technical support responsibilities. The Council did not support additional organizational changes, emphasizing the need for stability.
- **RAC Membership Criteria:** The Council supported maintaining current structure and membership criteria but noted gaps in subsistence representation, particularly among Yup'ik speakers and residents of smaller communities. Recommendations included improved outreach, language access, and allowing applicants to identify multiple user groups.
- **Federal Subsistence Board Membership:** The Council highlighted regulatory complexity and confusion for users and encouraged consistency where possible, while recognizing the need for federal regulatory flexibility to accommodate essential subsistence uses.
- **Federal vs. State Regulations:** Council members emphasized the importance of having regulations published in a single, accessible location. Federal regulations should remain distinct from state regulations due to differing mandates. Efforts to resolve inconsistencies where possible are encouraged.
- **Special Actions Authority:** The Council strongly supported continued use of special action regulations, emphasizing their importance in responding to variable environmental conditions and subsistence needs.
- **Role of ADF&G:** The Council underscored the importance of Alaska Department of Fish and Game staff participation in Council and Board meetings for informed management decisions.
- **Non-Rural Determinations:** The Council noted limited experience with non-rural determinations, expressed concern about potential impacts if criteria change, and stressed that Bristol Bay communities should remain designated rural under ANILCA.

Additional Considerations – The Council highlighted:

- The importance of consistent ANILCA implementation
- Concerns about predator control and commercial hunting impacts on subsistence resources
- Need for translated regulations and materials for non-English speakers
- Potential use of community-based permits tied to harvest conditions rather than fixed season dates
- Improved law enforcement training on cultural and traditional practices
- Holding joint meetings of all ten Regional Advisory Councils to discuss Secretarial review recommendations

The Council also received public testimony on the Secretarial Review.

Public Comments

Public testimony emphasized the importance of maintaining a strong and stable Federal Subsistence Management Program. Commenters expressed concern regarding recent administrative changes, including the relocation of the Office of Subsistence Management, and the potential impacts to program consistency and support.

Commenters supported continued implementation of the federal subsistence priority under ANILCA and emphasized the need to maintain rural protections. The importance of local and Tribal representation in the program, as well as the value of Indigenous knowledge in informing management decisions, was highlighted.

Additional comments addressed regulatory complexity and the need for improved communication, outreach, and access to information, including materials in local languages. Concerns were also raised regarding subsistence resource availability, including salmon declines, bycatch, and predator-prey dynamics, and the importance of continued coordination among agencies.

North Pacific Fishery Management Council Chum Salmon Bycatch DEIS

The Council discussed the Chum Salmon Bycatch Environmental Impact Statement (EIS) and alternatives for the Bering Sea pollock fishery. Members emphasized the critical importance of Chum Salmon to subsistence users in Western Alaska and noted that declining stocks have caused severe restrictions, affecting food security and cultural practices.

The Council expressed concern that current monitoring and enforcement may be insufficient and that voluntary or post-season measures do not adequately protect subsistence resources. Broader environmental impacts of trawl fisheries, including effects on the seafloor, marine mammals, and other subsistence species, were also noted.

The Council strongly supported **Alternative 5**, implementing in-season corridor closures triggered by Chum Salmon caps, as a proactive and enforceable approach. Members urged the North Pacific Fishery Management Council to prioritize the protection of Western Alaska Chum Salmon and the subsistence users who rely on them.

Federal Wildlife Proposals for Bristol Bay Region

Kendra Holman, OSM Wildlife, and Dr. Jason Roberts, OSM Anthropology provided an overview of the wildlife proposals and closure reviews for the Bristol Bay Region to the Council.

WP26-36: Unit 9 wolverine; shorten hunting season dates

Motion by Member Wilson, seconded by Member Nukwak, to **support** the proposal.

The Council supports this proposal to conserve wolverine populations while maintaining sustainable subsistence opportunities. Harvest data show a long-term decline in reported take, which members noted may reflect reduced participation and variable travel conditions rather than wolverine population abundance alone. The proposal provides additional protection during sensitive biological periods, including denning and reproduction, and aligns federal and state regulations, reducing regulatory confusion and promoting consistent, precautionary wildlife management.

The motion **passed** on a vote of 5 in favor and 1 against.

WP26-37: Units 9 and 17 beaver; remove firearms restriction under trapping regulations

Motion made by Member Nukwak, seconded by Member Christensen, to **support as modified by OSM.**

The Council supports the proposal as modified by OSM to allow the use of firearms for beaver harvest throughout the season, consistent with the intent of the original proposal. Members noted that beaver trapping is low while abundance is high across the region, based on observations during regular travel. Beavers affect fish passage, trails, and travel routes, and the Council concluded that there are no conservation concerns. Adoption of the OSM-recommended language aligns Federal regulations with the State regulations, reducing confusion. The Council determined that the proposal provides reasonable harvest flexibility, reflects current conditions, and supports practical, effective wildlife management.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote

WP26-38/39: Unit 17 brown bear; increase harvest limit, eliminate permit requirement, and extend season

Motion made by Member Nukwak, seconded by Member Wilson, to **support** the proposal.

The Council supported aligning State and Federal brown bear regulations, including a year-round season, based on consistent local observations of healthy and abundant bear populations throughout the region. Members reported increased bear presence in villages and around fish camps, frequent nuisance bears, and repeated sightings of sows with three to four cubs, which is an indicator of strong population health supported by recent record salmon runs in Bristol Bay. Council members noted there is no conservation concern for brown bears in Unit 17 and that the proposal would not substantially increase harvest, but would reduce regulatory confusion, improve harvest reporting, and ease burdens associated with Defense of Life and Property situations. Members acknowledged regional variation in brown bear density and the importance of maintaining predator balance but expressed broad support for the proposal based on local knowledge and observed conditions.

The vote passed on unanimous consent.

WP26-40: Units 17A and 17C caribou, close federal public lands to caribou hunting except by residents of Togiak, Twin Hills, Manokotak, Aleknagik, Dillingham, Clark's Point, and Ekuk

Motion made by Member Wilson, seconded by Member Nukwak, to **support** the proposal.

The Council opposed WP26-40, noting that closing the hunt to non-federally qualified users (NFQUs) and some federally qualified subsistence users (FQSUs) was not warranted at this time. They noted that current regulations balance concerns of overharvest with those of overgrazing, agreeing with the OSM analysis. Closing the hunt to NFQUs when the Nushagak Peninsula Caribou Herd (NPCH) population estimate is below a population threshold provides a subsistence priority, while opening the hunt to all users when the NPCH exceeds that threshold helps keep the herd within the carrying capacity of its habitat and prevents unnecessary restrictions on non-subsistence users. The Council also noted their continued support for including Unit 9 residents in the customary and traditional use determination for the NPCH.

The motion **failed** on a vote of 2-4

WCR26-05: Unit 9C moose closure review

Motion made by Member Wilson, seconded by Member Kanulie, to **maintain the status quo.**

The Council discussed recent composition survey results, noting that while surveys are limited by timing, staffing, and animal distribution, data indicate acceptable calf:cow and bull:cow ratios. Members highlighted that moose concentrate seasonally in certain creek systems and that predation can affect counts. Given these factors, the Council emphasized limiting hunting to local FQSUs to maintain opportunity and avoid increased hunting pressure from additional hunters.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

WCR26-07: Unit 17 caribou closure review

Motion made by Member Wilson, seconded by Member Nukwak, to **maintain the status quo.**

Council members discussed recent caribou population data and habitat conditions, noting that while surveys are limited by timing, staffing, and animal distribution, current estimates support herd stability. Members acknowledged that lichen availability and seasonal movements influence herd location and harvest timing. Given these factors, along with past management objectives and concerns about potential overgrazing, the Council emphasized maintaining the existing closure and population threshold to preserve opportunities and priorities for local FQSUs. Council members supported the 900-population threshold due to this range expansion. Members also emphasized that local consultation and monitoring of the herd is important.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

WP26-35: Unit 9D caribou; modify season dates

Motion by Member Wilson, seconded by Member Nukwak, to **take no action**.

The Council took no action on the proposal as it does not have any customary and traditional (C&T) use determinations for caribou in Unit 9D and deferred to the Kodiak/Aleutians Regional Advisory Council, the home region with C&T.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

WP26-41/42: Unit 18 moose and caribou; eliminate take from boat moving under power

Motion made by Member Nukwak, seconded by Member Kanulie, to **take no action.**

The Council voted to take no action on this proposal and to defer to the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Regional Advisory Council, the home region.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

WP26-01: Move authority delegated through letters to unit specific

Motion made by Member Wilson, seconded by Member Hill, to **support the OSM modification**.

The Council supported WP26-01 as modified by OSM as a housekeeping measure that simplifies and clarifies delegation of authority and places clear direction in regulations. Members noted this would reduce administrative burdens and public confusion without affecting hunting access, permits, or reporting, while maintaining opportunities for public notice and input. The Council did not make any region-specific modifications to WP26-01D.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote.

Annual Report

Federal Subsistence Board (Board) FY2024 Annual Report Reply Summary

Gisela Chapa, Council Coordinator, provided an overview of the Board's replies to the Council's FY-2024 Annual Report topics.

Identify Issues for FY2025 Annual Report

The Council identified the following issues to include in their FY2025 annual report.

- **Tribal Consultation:** Supportive of Board efforts but noted summer timing limits participation; recommends adjusting timing for better engagement.
- **Outreach:** Need for continued outreach to tribes, villages, and rural residents; recommends more resources to inform communities about participation.

- **Small/Remote Communities:** Voices from communities like Manokotak, New Stuyahok, and Koliganek are underrepresented; Council emphasizes supporting these areas.

- **OSM/PMB Support:** Supports OSM relocation; stresses need for adequate staffing and resources to fulfill ANILCA mandates**.**

- **Public Board Members:** Adequate staff support is critical for effective participation and representation.

- **Chinook Salmon:** Concern over declining populations; encourages continued monitoring and management to sustain subsistence harvests.

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed their Winter 2026 meeting dates and location: March 9 – 10, 2026, in Naknek.
The Council confirmed their Fall 2026 meeting dates and location: October 28 – 28, 2026, in Dillingham.

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program and Partner for Fisheries Monitoring Program

Jarred Stone gave a brief update on the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program, outlining its purpose, current process, and the Council's role in identifying regional research priorities. He also asked the Council for comments on proposals submitted for the 2026 funding opportunity.

The Council emphasized the importance of the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program in providing data needed to understand changing environmental conditions, support sustainable resource management, and ensure continued subsistence opportunities for Bristol Bay communities.

Brief overview and update on the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program was provided, highlighting the new Partners awards beginning in 2026, which included the Bristol Bay Native Association.

Other Business:

805c Report

Ms. Chapa provided a summary of the 805(c) Report outlining Board action on proposals and closure reviews impacting residents of the Bristol Bay Region.

Reports:

- *OSM Update* – presented Robbin LaVine.

The meeting was adjourned on January 12, 2026.

Signature on file

Leigh Honig, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Department of Interior, Office of Subsistence Management

Signature on file

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Nanci Morris Lyon, Chair
Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were considered and approved by the Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its October 28 - 29, 2026, meeting in Dillingham.

For a more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcripts, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Leigh Honig, Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9053, email leigh_honig@ios.doi.gov.