EASTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
Meeting Minutes

Pike's Waterfront Lodge
Fairbanks, Alaska
March 3-5, 2026

Invocation

Council member Linda Evans provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Tuesday, March 3, 2026, at 9:25 am. Council members Andy Bassich, Sue Entsminger, Dorothy Shockley, Linda Evans, Gerald Alexander, Eva Burk, and Chair Robert "Charlie" Wright were present in-person. Donald Woodruff and Galen Gilbert were absent and excused. With seven out of nine seated Council members present, a quorum was established. At the time of the meeting there was one vacant seat on the Council. Although present the first day, Dorothy Shockley was absent and excused on Days 2 and 3.

Attendees

* *Denotes attended virtually*

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Brooke McDavid, Justin Koller, Cory Graham, Liz Williams, Tom Plank, Nissa Pilcher, Lisa Grediagin*, Brent Vickers*, Robbin La Vine*, Crystal Leonetti*, Hannah Voorhees*, Katya Wessels*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Keith Herron, Clayton Merrill, George Yaska*
- National Park Service (NPS): Marcy Okada, Eva Patton*, Amber Cohen*
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Angela Yemma, Claire Montgomerie, Dana Miller, Caroline Ketron*, Donna Bach*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Brooke Fisher, Jeffrey Gross, Aaron Poetter*
- Tribal and Native Organizations: Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AITRC) – Deanna Kosbruk*, Taliylah Patrick*; Tanana Chiefs Conference (TCC) – Kimberly Nicholas, Libby Musolino; Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission (YRITFC) – Craig Chythlook*, Janessa Newman; Healy Lake Village Council – Alissa Perez; Doyon Lands Department – Andrew Tunnell; Native Village of Venetie Tribal Government – Kayleen Ward Peter
- Public: Leonardo Wassillie*; Gale Vick, Chaya Gordon-Bland, Jim Simon, Charlie Jagow*, Susan Hayden*; Christopher Sherry, Leonardo Wassilie*
- Western Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Western Interior Council): Chair Jack Reakoff*

Special Recognition of Member Woodruff

Council members and staff shared memories of long-term Council Member Donald Woodruff and thanked him for his contributions to the Federal Subsistence Management Program during his 21 years on

the Council. Sadly, Member Woodruff passed away shortly after the meeting.

Election of Officers

- Charlie Wright was re-elected as Chair
- Eva Burk was re-elected as Vice Chair
- Linda Evans was elected as Secretary

Review and Adopt Agenda

- Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Evans, to adopt the agenda with addition of two new topics: Statewide Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) proposals and Southcentral Alaska Board of Game (BOG) proposals. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

- Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Alexander, to approve the Fall 2025 Council meeting minutes. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

Council Member and Chair Reports

Andy Bassich of Eagle reported that the past winter in the Eagle area was particularly harsh with extreme cold, heavy snowfall, and persistent winds. He expressed disappointment that caribou did not arrive in the Eagle area this season, leaving the community with only two moose harvested between Eagle and Eagle Village. Early in the winter, he briefly observed three caribou near his mushing trails, but those animals were later lost, likely due to a wolf pack that passes through every couple of weeks. He noted continued concerns regarding declines in songbirds and waterfowl and expressed interest in hearing updates on peregrine falcon populations. Songbirds are beginning to return after a multiyear lull, and local rabbit populations are high, though furbearer sign—particularly marten—appears low. Member Bassich reiterated that salmon remain the most important long-term cultural and nutritional resource for his community, emphasizing the need for continued work toward sustainable recovery. He described the Yukon River Panel's recent meeting in Old Crow, highlighting extremely low Canadian-bound fall Chum Salmon numbers and the ongoing effort to develop a drainage-wide salmon rebuilding plan. Member Bassich is part of a working group that meets monthly to provide recommendations for salmon rebuilding. He reported that the Panel is hoping to expand outreach efforts in recognition that salmon recovery depends not only on technical data but also on social, cultural, and economic realities. He expressed hope that coalition-building and traditional knowledge integration will support long-term success of the rebuilding plan.

Gerald Alexander of Fort Yukon shared that normal subsistence activity in Fort Yukon has been limited due to the ongoing salmon fishery closures. Trapping has increased in response to a rise in the local wolf population. He reported that rabbit numbers are up, but he has not observed many lynx around town. Member Alexander noted personal challenges that have kept him from traveling on the land, including several years without a snowmachine. He described this winter as difficult, with temperatures swinging

between warm and bitter cold along with significant snowfall; however, he emphasized that such hardship is simply part of life in the region.

Linda Evans of Rampart/North Pole reported that the Rampart area is experiencing the same challenges seen across the region: no salmon and dwindling resources. She noted last fall she observed songbirds returning to her feeders, which she found heartening. Member Evans expressed strong concern about how communities can work together to rebuild depleted stocks, care for the land, and maintain traditional lifeways for future generations. She reflected on the overwhelming pace of environmental change and uncertainty about whether the Council's efforts are making meaningful progress. She remains committed to listening, contributing, and helping chart a path forward.

Dorothy Shockley of Manley Hot Springs/Fairbanks emphasized that her reports have remained largely unchanged for the past several years and may be worsening. She described deep discouragement stemming from ever increasing food scarcity and the diminishing ability for people to feed themselves with subsistence foods. She criticized both State and Federal administrations for failing to support rural communities effectively. Member Shockley shared reflections on her family history, recalling her mother's childhood experiences of language suppression and the extraordinary cultural, economic, and technological changes that occurred within a single lifetime. She linked those generational upheavals to the anxiety and uncertainty people feel today as regulations and administrative actions continue to shift rapidly. She reiterated that many villages remain in dire circumstances, often unable to meet basic subsistence needs, and concluded that while progress sometimes feels elusive, hope and perseverance remain essential.

Eva Burk of Nenana/Fairbanks shared that she is optimistic due to recent State and Federal actions intended to support salmon recovery at the Area M BOF meeting and the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) meetings. She cautioned that social media is filled with misinformation, making it hard for many people to understand what positive work is actually being accomplished. Member Burk acknowledged the emotional testimony heard at these regulatory meetings regarding Chum Salmon and the clear gaps in scientific understanding, including hatchery impacts. She argued that effective management requires integrating science with traditional knowledge and encouraged public involvement in resource management working groups and advisory committees. Member Burk discussed long-term ecological cycles across species, including salmon, which may operate on roughly 30-year abundance patterns. She noted the limited historical data, which only dates back a few decades. She cautioned against policies such as statewide antlerless reauthorization under current ecologically stressed conditions and advocated for holistic, ecosystem-based management that spans fish, wildlife, migratory birds, and habitat health. She believes Indigenous elders have long warned of times like this, and she hopes governments and management bodies will break down jurisdictional barriers to collaborate more effectively. Member Burk expressed encouragement at the growing participation of young, educated leaders and voiced hope that shifting ocean conditions might support a new cycle of abundance, noting that both scientific work and prayer have a place in this effort.

Sue Entsminger of Mentasta Pass echoed earlier reflections on whether progress is being made and emphasized that working together remains the essential key to the future. She noted that while many individuals and organizations are committed to collaboration, efforts often stall due to funding limitations or inconsistent follow-through, as seen in attempts to advance hunter ethics and education initiatives. She reflected on Alaska's regulatory history, recalling that "subsistence" entered State policy discussions in the late 1970s, and observed that prior to that era, people across communities generally worked together with greater mutual respect. She referenced a recent podcast featuring State management leaders who agreed on the importance of finding common ground. Member Entsminger also shared local observations: Mentasta Village recently hosted a successful cultural camp with area schools; a young golden eagle overwintered near her home; wolf numbers are high and aerial gunning efforts have been successful; and extreme cold has persisted. Notably, the Little Tok River has overflowed to an exceptional extent this winter, and some cabins are halfway deep in ice. Member Entsminger expressed gratitude for Council members' dedication and hopes that younger people will continue this important work.

Chief Galen Gilbert of Arctic Village was absent but prepared a voice memo report to share with the Council. Member Gilbert began by apologizing for his absence, explaining that he had just returned from a week-long work trip to Washington, D.C., and was preparing for the upcoming Tanana Chiefs Conference convention and caring for his grandparents. He noted that no caribou were present all winter until about a month ago, when tracks began appearing and healthy animals finally returned to the area, now gathering around the village. Because of his demanding schedule, he has had little time to hunt or even haul wood. He reported a very cold winter with temperatures hovering around –45°F but dipping down as low as –63°F. He expressed how mentally draining the winter had been for the community. Still, he emphasized that Arctic Village is doing well overall, staying warm, and looking forward enthusiastically to the coming spring. He shared excitement about celebrating the spring carnival after such a hard season and reiterated his regret for missing the meeting, expressing that he looks forward to joining the Council again at the next opportunity.

Charlie Wright (Chair) of Tanana/Rampart began by expressing deep appreciation for the time, sacrifice, and knowledge contributed by all Council members, emphasizing that their expertise is essential to protecting regional resources. He focused his report on winter conditions, noting that although cold, snowy years are challenging, they are ultimately beneficial for salmon and wildlife. Cold winters suppress insect pests and harmful algae, produce colder river water, and support nutrient-rich ice formation in the Bering Sea that feeds both juvenile and adult salmon. He highlighted the importance of river overflow events—such as those mentioned by Member Entsminger—in maintaining cold Interior creeks, preventing channel straightening, and improving habitat structure. Chair Wright acknowledged that these same conditions can be fatal to moose and caribou calves when warm daytime temperatures wet their coats and severe nighttime cold leads to hypothermia. He noted wildlife cycles of rabbits, lynx, and marten fluctuate together, and that salmon appear to follow long cycles as well. He expressed hope that the region may be at the bottom of a cycle with better returns ahead. Chair Wright encouraged community members to prepare better for harsh winters and observed that strong fur prices, including marten selling for over $100, have provided helpful income during a time of limited wild food availability. He closed by

acknowledging the heavy workload of recent regulatory and Council meetings and expressed appreciation for a somewhat lighter agenda this meeting.

Public Comments on Non-Agenda Items

- Jim Simon expressed hope that recent actions taken on Chum Salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea and fishing time in Area M will help more Yukon River salmon return. He commented on the importance of genetic stock diversity and tributary-level stock monitoring and compounding ecological impacts due to salmon declines.
- Carrie Stevens commented on a variety of law enforcement issues, including the lack of enforcement in Area M commercial fisheries and the criminalization of subsistence users on the Upper Yukon.
- Jack Reakoff commented on the need for increased air taxi oversight, trespassing issues, and the negative impacts that lifting Public Land Orders and transferring BLM lands to the State of Alaska will have on federally qualified subsistence users.

Action Items

Call for 2027-2029 Federal Fisheries Proposals and Notice of Upcoming Fisheries Closure Reviews

Cory Graham, OSM Fisheries Biologist, notified the Council of the open period to submit Federal fisheries proposals. He also provided notice that three Federal Fisheries Closures for the Yukon Management Area in the Western Interior Region will come before the Council at the fall 2026 meeting for review. The Council did not want to submit any proposals, nor did the Western Interior Council when they met previously.

Call for Rural/Non-rural Determination Proposals

Liz Williams, OSM Cultural Anthropologist, notified the Council of the open period to submit proposals for rural/non-rural determination proposals. This opportunity occurs every other fisheries regulatory cycle. The Council did not want to submit any proposals.

Fortymile Caribou Herd Harvest Management Plan

Jeff Gross, ADF&G Tok Area Biologist, and Angela Yemma, BLM Acting Field Office Manager, provided updates on the biological status and recent State and Federal harvests. Council members discussed management of the herd and offered feedback. The Council reviewed recommendations for the management plan drafted by a working group of Federal agency staff and Member Bassich.

Member Bassich was selected by the Council to replace Member Woodruff as the Council representative on the Fortymile Caribou Harvest Management Coalition (HMC). Member Bassich will share the Council's feedback with the HMC the next time they meet.

Revisit Select 2026-2028 Federal Wildlife Proposals

WP26-75 - Unit 25D moose; close to non-federally qualified users in Unit 25D remainder

Tom Plank, OSM Wildlife Biologist, presented a new OSM modification for WP25-75 to the Council. The modification proposed to establish closures along river corridors instead of closing Federal lands across the entire sub-unit non-federally qualified users.

Several public comments were received for the modified proposal. Tyler Selden, the community of Central, and Kayleen Ward-Peter supported the modification. Daniel Hayden and Susan Hayden opposed the proposal in both modified and original forms. Charlie Jagow was also opposed but noted the modification was more acceptable than closing the whole sub-unit.

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Burk to support WP25-75 with the OSM modification. The Council **voted to support WP26-75 as modified by OSM**. *The motion passed on a vote of 6-0.*

The Council felt that closing corridors along rivers instead of the entire sub-unit focuses action in the areas with the greatest, long-standing issues. There is much higher harvest pressure along the rivers than in the remote parts of the sub-unit that are only accessible by aircraft. The corridor modification maintains opportunity for non-federally qualified users to hunt in the more remote parts of the sub-unit, while alleviating pressure and conflict along river corridors where local subsistence users hunt.

However, the Council is very concerned about reports of air taxis/transporters dropping off hunters who may not be prepared for the conditions of a remote hunt or how to properly take care of a moose without resulting in wanton waste. They noted that there needs to be more accountability for air taxis and oversight of drop-off hunters, along with increased hunter education and ethics outreach. Limited law enforcement in the area is another great concern, especially given local reports of aircraft covering their tail numbers. The Council further noted that hunter displacement as a result of the closure corridors will need to be monitored so that any impacts can be assessed.

During the discussion of the modification, the Council re-emphasized the need for closure due to conservation concerns and high harvest pressure. They pointed out that the lack of recent biological data requires a greater reliance on local knowledge for information on how the moose population is doing. This area has always been a low density moose population, and local residents have testified that they are having continued difficulty meeting their subsistence needs due to low moose abundance as well as user conflicts (crowding, interference, and harvest by non-federally qualified users). Some action is needed to increase opportunity for federally qualified subsistence users to meet their needs.

The Council discussed the importance of regular population surveys and partnering with local people in survey efforts. They requested improved outreach so that both local and nonlocal hunters are better aware of proposals and regulation changes.

WP26-77 - Units 12, 20, and 25, wood bison; recognize customary and traditional use

The Council previously voted to defer this proposal to a future meeting in order to allow more time for consultation with Tribes and communities in the region, and to potentially develop a modified version that better reflects the varied perspectives of regional residents. The Council noted that they would prefer to take up the proposal again at their fall 2026 meeting and complete outreach during summer 2026. Chair Wright plans to convey this to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) at the April meeting.

Review and Approve FY2025 Annual Report

The Council reviewed their draft FY2025 Annual Report to the Board and suggested minor edits to the narrative. Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Burk, to approve the FY2025 Annual Report with the changes discussed. *The motion passed unanimously*.

Secretarial Review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program

The Council was notified of the comment period extension and members discussed ideas for additional comments to submit.

Motion by Member Burk, seconded by Member Bassich, to submit additional comments regarding 1) continued failure to meet U.S.-Canada spawning escapement goals on the Yukon River as outlined in the Pacific Salmon Treaty and the need to manage to the upper end of those goals, and 2) international hatchery releases in the North Pacific Ocean. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote*.

Lower Tanana Wood Bison Management Plan – Comments to Federal Subsistence Board

The Council discussed the Lower Tanana Wood Bison reintroductions and management plan. Discussion topics included:

- Concerns regarding process and lack of Tribal consultations; bison released despite local opposition
- Need to establish customary and traditional use determinations for wood bison under both Federal and State regulations and ensure subsistence priority for hunting in the future
- Request for information from the USFWS about the applicability of Endangered Species Act Section 10(e) regarding Alaska Native subsistence use of wood bison
- Need for more outreach and education with local communities and resources for the Bison Guardian Program
- Bison impacts to agricultural and Native corporation lands
- Need to work with local people and Tribes to monitor ecological impacts of wood bison

Public comments were received from Christopher Sherry of Minto and Leonardo Wassillie of Nenana.

Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Alexander, to summarize the discussion and submit it as comments to the Board. *The motion passed unanimously*.

Alaska Board of Game

Southcentral BOG Meeting Proposals Comments

The Council discussed BOG Proposals 256 and 257 seeking to authorize antlerless moose hunts in Unit 20A and 20B.

Motion by Member Burk, seconded by Member Bassich, to **submit comments opposing Proposals 256 and 257**. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote.*

The Council opposed Proposal 256 even though the last population estimate was within the intensive management (IM) population objective range. The Council felt management should target the higher end of the IM population objective. Given the recent heavy snow loads, they felt a conservative approach is needed, and the antlerless hunt should not be reauthorized at this time. The Council also opposed Proposal 257 because the most recent population estimate fell below the IM objective and the population needs to grow. Additionally, they noted that antlerless moose hunts should not be authorized primarily to reduce moose-vehicle collisions in the highway corridor.

Call for Interior Alaska BOG Proposals

Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, notified the Council of the call for BOG proposals.

Motion by Member Burk, seconded by Chair Wright, to **submit a proposal to the BOG to eliminate the winter moose hunt in Unit 20F**. The Council noted conservation concerns and illegal harvest as the reasons for wanting to close this hunt. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Alaska Board of Fisheries (BOF) Statewide Meeting

After reviewing the previous comments made during their fall 2025 joint meeting with Western Interior Council, the Council identified additional proposals on which to comment.

Motion by Member Burk, seconded by Member Bassich, to **support Proposals 171 and 180**. *The motion passed on a unanimous vote*.

The Council supported Proposal 171, to amend the Prince William Sound hatchery permits to reduce pink salmon egg take capacity, because high levels of straying of Prince William Sound hatchery pink salmon have been documented and exceed the thresholds levels established in the Prince William Sound/Copper River Comprehensive Salmon Plan. Action is needed to reduce straying to the levels outlined in the plan and to minimize negative impacts on wild stocks.

The Council supported Proposal 180, to establish a statewide annual limit for king salmon of five fish, because it will help conserve king (Chinook) salmon, which are struggling statewide.

Other Correspondence:

- Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Shockley, to send a letter to the Board regarding concerns over the USDA buying surplus pollock and canned pink salmon and requesting elevation to the Secretaries of the Interior and Agriculture and the Alaska Congressional delegation. *The motion passed unanimously.*
- Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Alexander, to send a letter to Federal

agencies, ADF&G, and TCC requesting funding for hunter outreach and ethics education. *The motion passed unanimously.*

- Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Burk, to write a letter to USFWS and ADF&G to request additional funding be prioritized for monitoring and discrete stock analysis for fall Chum Salmon on the Yukon River. *The motion passed unanimously.*
- Motion by Member Bassich, seconded by Member Alexander, to sent a letter to Federal land managers in the Eastern Interior Region regarding concerns over air taxis for hunting and the need for better oversight. *The motion passed unanimously.*

Future Meeting Dates

The Council confirmed their fall 2026 meeting date and location: October 13-25, 2026, in Fort Yukon.
The Council selected their winter 2027 meeting date and location: February 23-25, 2027, in Fairbanks.
The Council selected their fall 2027 meeting date and location: October 12-14, 2027, in Tok.

Fisheries Reports

The Council received the following fisheries updates:

- *Yukon River Salmon Management Update* by Keith Herron, Assistant Fisheries Manager
- *Yukon River Intertribal Fish Commission Update* by Craig Chythlook, Executive Director
- *Copper River Fisheries Report* by Amber Cohen, Cultural Anthropologist at Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve
- *Fisheries Resource Monitoring and Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Programs Update* by Liz Williams and Cory Graham
    - Council Members Bassich and Burk volunteered to help draft Priority Information Needs (PINs) during the summer

During this section of the agenda Council members also took time to discuss:

- NPFMC action on Chum Salmon Bycatch – led by Member Burk
- BOF Area M and Statewide Meetings – led by Gale Vick, Fairbanks Advisory Committee Fisheries Subcommittee Chair and Bristol Bay-Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim Coalition Co-Organizer
- Yukon River Panel Salmon Rebuilding Plan – led by Member Bassich

Other Reports

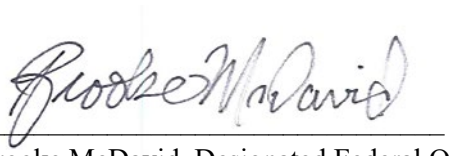
Additional reports received by the Council included:

- *Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission Update* by Deanna Kosbruk, Regulations Specialist
- *Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Update* by Amber Cohen
- *Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve* Update by Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator, and Mat Sorum, Wildlife Biologist
- *Yukon Flats and Arctic National Wildlife Refuges Update* by Clayton Merrill, Subsistence Coordinator
- *BLM Eastern Interior Field Office Update* by Angela Yemma and Kent Slaughter, Acting Fairbanks District Manager

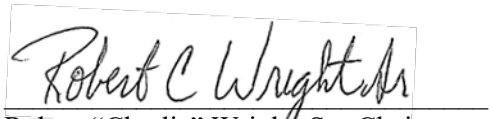
- *Office of Subsistence Management Update* by Justin Koller

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
- The Council requested to send a member to upcoming NPFMC and BOF meetings



Brooke McDavid, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Department of the Interior, Office of Subsistence Management



Robert "Charlie" Wright, Sr., Chair
Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were certified by the Chair for accuracy on May 12, 2026, and were formally considered by the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at their fall 2026 meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcripts, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator, at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9181, or email brooke_mcdavid@ios.doi.gov.