

**SOUTHCENTRAL ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL
EASTERN INTERIOR ALASKA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL**

Joint Meeting Minutes

Via Teleconference
March 16, 2022

Invocation

Sue Entsminger gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Wednesday, March 16, 2022, at approximately 9:00 a.m. Southcentral Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Southcentral Council) members Donna Claus, Greg Encelewski, Ed Holsten, Heath Kocan, Michael Rego, Hope Roberts, Diane Selanoff, Gloria Stickwan, Angela Totemoff, Donna Wilson, and Dennis Zadra were present via teleconference. Andrew McLaughlin and Michael Opheim were not present and were excused. Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Eastern Interior Council) members Andy Bassich, Sue Entsminger, William Glanz, Charles Jagow, Will Koehler, Jody Potts-Joseph, and Donald Woodruff were present via teleconference. Linda Evans, Nicholas Henry, Robert Wright, Sr., were not present and some were excused. A quorum for Southcentral Council was established with 11 of 13 seated Council members participating by phone. A quorum of Eastern Interior Council was established with 7 of 10 seated Council members participating by phone.

Attendees:

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): *Sue Detwiler, Ameer Howard, Robbin La Vine, Katerina Wessels, Brooke McDavid, Tom Kron, Dr. Jonathan (Brent) Vickers, Dr. Jason Roberts, Scott Ayers, Justin Koller, Jarred Stone, George Pappas, and Karen Hyer*
- National Park Service (NPS), Anchorage: *Sarah Creachbaum, Kim Jochum, Barbara Cellarius, Mark Miller, Dave Sarafin, Victoria Florey, and Dillon Patterson*
- USDA - Forest Service (USFS): *David Schmid, DeAnna Perry, Greg Risdahl, Bret Christensen, Steve Namitz, Ruth D'Amico, Milo Burcham, Stormy Haught, Heather Thamm, and Andrew Morse*
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA): *Glenn Chen and Pat Petrivelli*
- U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: *Jill Klein*
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): *Paul (Chris) McKee*
- Members of the Public: *no members of the public identified themselves on the record*

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Ms. Diane Selanoff, seconded by Mr. Don Woodruff, to adopt the agenda as written. The motion passed unanimously.

Welcome and Introductions

Sarah Creachbaum, Regional Director, National Park Service, introduced herself and thanked all Council members for meeting on this issue. Dave Schmid, Regional Forester, USDA-Forest Service, also introduced himself and reminded the Councils of the Federal Subsistence Board's (Board) action on Fisheries Proposal FP21-10: the Board hoped the Councils would have a robust discussion to see if there were any opportunities to either modify FP21-10 or propose any other change that might improve the proposal. He noted that it was also acceptable if the joint Councils could not come to an agreement/consensus/compromise. He thanked all Council members for their service and recognized the extra work required of Council members to attend this meeting in addition to their individual respective Council meetings this winter.

Old Business – Fisheries Proposal FP21-10

Deferral and Charge from Federal Subsistence Board

DeAnna Perry, designated Federal official for the meeting, USFS, reminded everyone that Fisheries Proposal FP21-10 requested implementation of a salmon subsistence fishery in the lower Copper River adjacent to the Copper River Highway with a harvest limit of 15 salmon other than Pink Salmon for the first two members of a household and 10 salmon for additional household members, with not more than five Chinook Salmon per household, using dip net, rod and reel, spear, or gaff only. Ms. Perry then provided an overview of the history of this proposal since its submission, outlining the actions taken by the Councils and the Board throughout the regulatory process. During this overview, there were a few questions regarding biology and historic use of dipnets that were fielded by staff. There was an additional question regarding access in the lower Copper River and also a comment that the Board should not be telling the Councils to come to a consensus when the Councils had already provided recommendations to the Board. Ms. Perry reiterated Board member Dave Schmid's earlier comment that it was acceptable if the Councils could not come to a compromise on this proposal.

Review of analysis and updated information

Stormy Haught, fish biologist for Chugach National Forest, USFS, presented the analysis for FP21-10 and shared data from recent years, which was in addition to the information provided when this proposal was first discussed by the Councils in the fall of 2020. Council members asked about the number of people expected would use this fishery, the location of bridges in the area, the expectations of meeting harvest and escapement goals in the future, reasons public comments were not included in the analysis, and what the process for increasing escapement goals on the Copper River for Chinook Salmon to mitigate for the

loss of fecundity due to smaller fish returning at a younger age. Numerous Federal and State staff addressed these questions.

Comparison Table of Lower Copper River Fishery Proposals

Ms. Perry explained that this document was prepared as a tool for the Council members to use for discussions on this proposal. The table included the details of a previous fishery proposal, a previous special action, and the current proposal, all of which were similar in that they proposed a fishery in the Copper River area. The table was organized with categories such as “harvest areas, seasons, reporting periods,” etc., so that the Council members could compare these categories within each item at a glance. Staff thought this would be useful should the Councils wish to discuss and compare any one category across all three actions.

Gloria Stickwan, Southcentral Council member informed everyone that the Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve Subsistence Resource Commission met recently and unanimously opposed FP21-10 as written. She also referred to a chart created by Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission regarding amounts necessary for subsistence under the State fisheries management, which had been shared with Council members just prior to this meeting.

Joint Council Deliberations on Deferred FP21-10

Each Council member who participated in the meeting was given an opportunity to provide comments on FP21-10, starting with Eastern Interior Council members. Some members read a prepared statement into the record. Two Southcentral Council members who could not be present at the meeting, previously provided written comments to the Chair to be read into the record.

Council members were reminded that each Council would have to take separate actions, even in the event of a compromise, because each Council is its own Federal Advisory Committee Act committee. As such, (1) each Council could provide an additional comment to their previous recommendation, (2) Southcentral Council could offer an additional recommendation, and/or (3) Eastern Interior Council could offer an additional comment. It was explained that because the Councils already voted on the proposal during the initial regulatory process and those recommendations and comments have already been forwarded to and considered by the Board, that today’s action would not be a ‘re-vote,’ but instead, would be an opportunity to provide additional recommendations/comments to the Board for supplemental consideration.

Eastern Interior Council Action: Motion by Mr. Andy Bassich, seconded by Ms. Jody Potts-Joseph, to support the OSM conclusions on FP21-10 with OSM modification. The motion failed 0-6, (4 absent – one Council member left the meeting prior to voting due to technical difficulties with his audio connection)

Eastern Interior Council Comments in Opposition:

- There are major conservation concerns for Copper River salmon and a new fishery should not be created when run sizes are declining and there is difficulty meeting escapement goals

- Alaska Department of Fish and Game lowered the escapement goal so that it looks like Copper River runs are doing okay, but management strategies are not working if escapement goals had to be lowered
- It is irresponsible to create a new fishery given all the changes in the marine environment where salmon rear. Cautious management is paramount due to the unknown impacts of climate change on Copper River salmon stocks.
- Fish are getting smaller in the Copper River. Because smaller females have less eggs, more fish need to reach the spawning grounds to ensure the viability of these runs into the future.
- Creating more opportunity in the lower river will put upper river subsistence fishers at a further disadvantage. Fishers in the Cordova region have tremendous opportunity to harvest multiple high quality salmon and other species, while fishing opportunity in the upper river is very limited.
- Food insecurity is a concern in the Interior region and additional harvest downriver could exacerbate this
- Dipnetting on the Copper River is not a customary and traditional fishery for Cordovans
- Not having a boat is not a reason to start a new fishery. The Eastern Interior Council members are concerned that this sets a precedent and new fisheries will be established every time someone says their subsistence needs aren't being met.
- The Eastern Interior Council members are concerned that some people in Cordova might be abusing subsistence opportunities and selling some subsistence caught salmon
- There has been a decline in the ability of residents of who live throughout the Copper River area to meet their subsistence needs in recent years
- Managers need to learn from the salmon declines on the Yukon River and the severe impacts that has had on Yukon River subsistence users. It would be sad to see the same thing happen on the Copper River.
- The Copper River is already experiencing increased numbers of users and that increase is already stressing the resource

There were no comments in support by the Eastern Interior Council.

Southcentral Council: Motion by Ms. Donna Claus to support the OSM conclusions on FP21-10 with OSM modification, seconded by Ms. Diane Selanoff, to support the OSM conclusions on FP21-10 with OSM modification. The motion failed 5-6, (2 absent)

Southcentral Council Comments in Opposition:

- There is already ample opportunity for subsistence salmon fishing in the Cordova area. Upper river residents only have the Copper River to fish on for salmon.
- The pandemic has passed and the same concerns for social distancing don't apply as when this proposal was introduced. If someone doesn't have a boat, they can once again go out with someone who does.
- People take care of each other. If someone doesn't have a boat to get the fish they need, someone will share salmon with them or allow them to fish with them.
- Salmon gets shared widely and passed out in Cordova. Native Village of Eyak is a great example of proxy subsistence community fishing under state rules.

- There is no history of anyone dipnetting in the Lower Copper River so a new fishery would not be providing for a traditional use
- Not a good idea to open a new fishery and increase opportunity when runs are declining, even if projected harvest would be small. Runs of both Chinook and Sockeye salmon are returning smaller and weaker fish.
- The State lowered escapement goals and still the run sizes have only been at the lower end of management objectives
- Subsistence salmon needs in the upper river are not being met
- This proposal will affect 23 communities who fish upriver from where the proposed fishery would occur
- Pursuant to data provided by the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission, in two of the 15 years from Gakona up to Batzulnetas and in 7 out of 15 years from Tonsina to Gakona, amounts necessary for subsistence have not been met
- Fishing would occur below the sonar before proper assessment of run size could occur
- The part of the river where this fishery is proposed would be difficult for anyone without a boat to access, so this will not increase opportunity for people without boats
- There are concerns that incidental catch will impact the stocks of King (Chinook) Salmon
- Opening new areas to make it easier to fish is not warranted in a declining fishery
- The current fisheries have too much use already

Southcentral Council Comments in Support:

- There is support for this proposal from many local residents and entities
- Adding a new fishing opportunity will not have an impact on escapement or upriver harvests, as harvest will be tiny compared to the other subsistence, personal use, and commercial fisheries take
- Not all community members can participate in the state subsistence fishery. This will give subsistence users who cannot afford a boat, gas, or gillnet a chance to catch some salmon.
- Will help people harvest subsistence salmon for their families and may especially help younger folks and elders
- This fishery isn't taking away from other fisheries or other opportunities for people to fish elsewhere, it just provides another place to harvest under a Federal subsistence fishery
- King (Chinook) Salmon incidentally caught in dip nets can be easily released so this fishery will not impact that species
- Dipnetting in other areas of Southcentral (such as those shared between the communities of Hope, Cooper Landing, and Ninilchik) have been successful without negatively impacting the resource. There was a lot of opposition for the Ninilchik gillnet, fear of decimating the fishery and harming King (Chinook) Salmon; however, this has not had a negative impact and has provided close to 4,000 fish for their community.
- During low runs, managers will be able to reduce or shut down this opportunity just like with other fisheries

- If fishing needs to be limited, personal and commercial use should be limited first. Subsistence users take a ‘small piece of the pie’ and should not have to fight each other over that small piece.
- Would help ensure opportunity is provided for all Federally qualified subsistence users and it is our duty as Council members to provide a priority for all Federally qualified rural subsistence users

Ms. Perry clarified that Councils were not voting on the proposal again and expressed the assumption that the motions made during this meeting were with the intent that the support or opposition expressed by each Council would be forwarded to the Board in the form of additional comments.

After the Eastern Interior Council voted, the Southcentral Council Chair was dropped from the call. While waiting for him to rejoin, the Eastern Interior Council Chair entertained a request for a 30-minute lunch break, and announced that the meeting would start again at 1:45 p.m. Immediately after that announcement, the Southcentral Chair rejoined the meeting and no lunch break was taken. During the Southcentral Council vote, it was found that two Council members were no longer on the call and it was assumed they took lunch and disconnected prior to the Southcentral Council Chair rejoining the call. The vote was left open until both Council members could provide their votes.

Comments in opposition by both Councils will be shared with the Board when it addresses deferred FP21-10. The Board will be given the link to this meeting’s transcript and will be encouraged to read all of the comments made throughout the meeting by members of both Councils to consider in its final deliberations on this proposal.

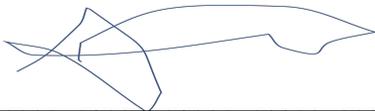
Closing Comments

Eastern Interior Council: No closing comments were given because at the time of closing comments, only the Chair was still present at the meeting. It is assumed that the other Council members took lunch when it was announced and did not call back in.

Southcentral Council: All eleven council members gave a closing comment after the final two Council members voted.

Substantial comments were made throughout the meeting by members of both councils and those comments appear in their entirety in the meeting transcript, which can be found here:

<https://www.doi.gov/sites/doi.gov/files/region-9-2-joint-meeting-16-mar-22.pdf>



Jessica Gill, Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Office of Subsistence Management



Richard G. Encelewski, Chair
Southcentral Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council



Sue Entsminger, Chair
Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Southcentral and Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils at their fall 2022 meetings, 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 Jessica Gill at 907-310-6129 or by jessica_gill@fws.gov.