

NORTH SLOPE SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via teleconference

March 8-9, 2022

Invocation

Gordon Brower gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Tuesday, March 8 at 9:10 a.m. Wednesday, November 3 at 9:20 a.m. Chair Gordon Brower, and Council members, Brower Frantz, Esther Hugo, Martha Itta, Wanda Kippi, Steve Oomittuk, Edward Rexford, Sr., and Peter (Earl) Williams were present via teleconference. Council Member Billy B. Patkotak, Jr. of Wainwright was not present. The Council has one vacant seat. A quorum was established with eight of nine seated Council members participating by phone.

Attendees:

Via teleconference

Tribal Organizations: Inupiat Community of the Arctic Slope, Doreen Leavitt; Utqiagvik

North Slope Borough: Wildlife Department; Leondra de Sousa, Utqiagvik

US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS):

- Arctic National Wildlife Refuge; Nathan Hawkaluk, Fairbanks
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM); Eva Patton, Kendra Holman, Dr. Brent Vickers, Jarred Stone, Tom Plank, Orville Lind, and Lisa Grediagin, Anchorage
- Ernest Nagaek, Utqiagvik
- Conservation Genetics Lab: Penny Crane, Anchorage

University of Alaska

- Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP), Evangeline Dooc, Student (USFWS), Anchorage

National Park Service (NPS):

- Kim Jochum, Anchorage; Will Deacy, Fairbanks
- Western Arctic National Parklands, Raime Fronstin, Kotzebue
- Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Jeff Rasic, Fairbanks

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA): Pat Petrivelli, Anchorage

Bureau of Land Management (BLM):

Chris McKee, Anchorage; Ted Enman, Beth Mikow, Heather Savage, and Katie Drew, Fairbanks

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G):

- Division of Wildlife Conservation, Mark Burch, Palmer; Alex Hansen, Kotzebue; Carmen Daggett, Utqiagvik
- Division of Sport Fisheries, Brendan Scanlon, Fairbanks

- Division of Subsistence, Helen Cold and Morgan Urquia, Fairbanks
- Division of Commercial Fisheries, Alex Ting, Dillingham

Western Interior Regional Advisory Council (WIRAC): Jack Reakoff

Public:

- Charleen Ostbloom, Ambler Road Access Project, Fairbanks
- Martin Robards, Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS)

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Williams, seconded by Mr. Oomittuk to adopt the agenda as read with the following changes:

- After Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes add:
7A. Report and review on the Council's charter changes signed and approved by the Secretary of Interior
- Old Business add:
10C. Wildlife Special Action Request WSA22-01b: Unit 22 and 23 Federal muskox permit system
10D. Wildlife Special Action Request WSA22-02: Closure to Dall Sheep in Units 23A and 26B
- Agency Reports add:
ANSEP student presentation to 1:30 pm.

The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote with one member absent.

Election of Officers

Mr. Gordon Brower was elected the Council's Chair
Ms. Ester Hugo was elected the Council's Vice Chair
Mr. Steve Oomittuk was elected the Council's Secretary

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Ms. Hugo, to approve the meeting minutes as presented. The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote with one member absent.

Review of New Council Charter

Eva Patton provided the Council with updates to the Council's Charter renewal that was reviewed by the Council last year and then reviewed and approved by the Secretary of Interior. Several Council members provided comments and concerns were voiced that there was not any representation from all communities within the region. Ms. Patton addressed several questions from Council members.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Wanda Kippi of Atqasuk (representing subsistence interests) reported that a small herd of caribou was present around the community in August, and by September, there were several thousand seen around

camping grounds that have not been seen like that in many, many years. Freeze up was slow in September and slushy in October. Recently, about two weeks ago, she noticed signs of thawing with water on top of the ice along the river's edge by town. Geese hunting was great and sightings of wolf and wolverine around the area, and some sightings of bear. Fishing was good once it froze up and was ice fishing time. After freeze-up, people put out their nets and were catching some fish, but not as much as they normally do. Berries were good picking. Ms. Kippi noted a location error cited in the previous Council's meeting minute summary report in the second paragraph of her community report to the Council where was stated, "caribou stayed across the river from Nuiqsut a few days"; she said it was supposed to say Atqasuk not Nuiqsuit. Mr. Franz asked if she had any reports of muskox over the last year as she had previously reported, and Ms. Kippi responded that she had only heard of one sighting during the summer seen a way from town.

Edward Rexford, Sr. of Kaktovik (representing subsistence interests) reported that they are having another successful year. There has been caribou nearby, and folks have been able to get caribou. Those who go up to the mountains do bring back sheep. Edward said that the yearly moose season and quota is delegated to the Refuge manager, and hopefully would be hearing from the manager on that soon. He hopes his community would be able to harvest a moose this year. He said none were harvested last year. There have been a few polar bear problems in the community, breaking down garages and stuff like that. Other than that, it's been quiet, everyone is doing okay.

Steve Oomittuk of Point Hope (representing subsistence interests) reported it's been a good year. The *tuttu* (caribou) have been around practically all year and there's a lot of young hunters catching their first ones. The first animal they catch is given away to someone in need or to the elderly. There have not been too many predators and people are catching as much *tuttu* as previous years. There have been a lot of *nanuqs* (polar bears). They had a very cold winter and the ice stuck around longer. A lot of *nanuqs* were caught coming into the community, so they had to increase polar bear patrol to 24 hours. The abundance of polar bears this year is the most he has seen or heard about in years, especially on the outskirts of Point Hope, in the old village, and around Point Hope itself. They have seen a lot of tracks where polar bears are circling around the community that causes the community concern especially during the dark and cold months.

The weather has been cold, since October until the later part of February and they finally got above zero in March. They have had a lot of ice on the north side, and an abundance of seals. People are catching a lot of seals. Usually they get tomcods in January, but there were none this year. He said you have to look for them as they can sometimes be found in different areas. Winter duck population has gone down. He has noticed this last December and January a lot of them flying around and said that a lot of them freeze because they need open water to survive and this last winter was very cold with little open water. Mr. Oomittuk said it has been a good year for their subsistence life with animals that they depend on, especially caribou, in abundance. He said he feels the community is fortunate especially after seeing the report of the population of the Western Arctic Caribou Herd at 180,000, about half of what it normally is. He expressed concern that the reports from wildlife people are late, and communities must deal with sport hunters and nonresidents hunters. He added that the Council is concerned about the animals that they

depend on and want to ensure that the people that depend on them year-round have opportunity to harvest. He stated, “We live in the north and we have a very low-income community, and a lot of our food sources are our way of life, the animals that we depend on, and when the population drops, you know, we’re very fortunate that the caribou have been around for a while, all year, they never went away this year.”

Brower Frantz of Utqiagvik (representing subsistence interests) reported that as far as subsistence, caribou have been plentiful. Everyone has been able to have their share of caribou, for which he expressed gratitude. Caribou are close to the community and have been staying around Barrow all year round in high numbers, scattered around. Whaling has also been great this year compared to what it was before. There were no whales a year or two ago to where they were able to get to them, and only harvested one, but this year they were abundant and it was a good season in which everyone was happy with that. Fish have been plentiful in the Inaru. He reported that a couple of guys came home with abundant amount of *aanaakliq* (whitefish) and completely fed the community throughout the Thanksgiving and Christmas season to where everyone was able to have some and that was very good. Fish coming out of Chipp has been a little slower than usual, but there was plenty of fish to go around. Mr. Frantz also thought there was an influx of salmon; pinks/humpies, last summer that were a little higher than usual. In addition, three muskox were reported spotted in different areas of the Ikpikpuk (River) in span of about 50 miles from Utqiagvik, and also there were reports of multiple muskox sightings from the communities of Wainwright and Nuiqsut. Mr. Frantz would like to see biologists do a count on muskox in the area, and if sufficient try to establish a hunt.

Peter Earl Williams of Anaktuvuk Pass (representing subsistence interests) reported people in his community are doing okay on their huntings this year of caribou, and the caribou that they hunted were healthy. They had some kids ages 12 to 16 that are going out hunting for elders. He said the city and Tribal Councils helped out with fuel and shells that he thought was a good idea and was very helpful to the young hunters. He reported that there weren’t many caribou near village presently, as they had migrated north, but they came through on their migration and there was enough for the community to meet their subsistence needs. Earl also reported that the weather this winter was cold, and they were having snow-plane issues for a while, but the issue was resolved with people working together in which he was grateful.

Esther Sunauraq Hugo of Anaktuvuk Pass (representing subsistence interests) reported that she agreed with Mr. Williams, that there was an abundance of caribou. She said the main herd came through about a week before the rutting season, and when she traveled to Nuiqsut last week she saw thousands of caribou heading north. She was curious why they’re traveling north (in March) when they normally travel north in April. She wondered if this earlier migration was due to climate change, believing that animals know the weather and everything. She also noted that flies were hatching early and saw lemmings recently that she said was early. Ms. Hugo was thankful for their young hunters that are being trained to hunt caribou, and to the Tribe and city for providing shells, gas, and snowmachines for hunting. Caribou were healthy, and the cows had a lot of fat on them, and that people were happy that they got all the caribou then needed before the rutting season. People have always been taught to not bother with caribou close to the village, but rather to always go up country to collect and butcher them. In the past there has been

considerable disturbance of the caribou migration caused by fly-ins of private or chartered airplanes bringing in outside hunters; and the Tribe asked the air charter companies to not stop in Anaktuvuk Pass during the migration, which has helped lessen the disturbance she thought.

There were wolves around the village last year and had no sightings of lynx. Berries were abundant last year. But they only grow during a limited time in the area are distance from the village. She said she usually heads to the foothills after the snow melts, before July 4th to see if the berries are budding. It's usually a good sign when you see a little bud of blueberry or blackberry. Ms. Hugo reported that spring is ice fishing time. She said that after a trail is broken, people wanting to fish usually go to Chandler for the month of March and ice fish for Arctic Char and lakera (Lake Trout). She also gave a shout out to Nuiqsut and Mayor Brower for again sending muktuk to the community for Thanksgiving, Christmas, and the New Year's festivals. She said it really helped out people and she also noticed there are a lot of young people that crave muktuk! She said she shared this with others at the feast and was so grateful and happy that that people from out there know that they do live where they can catch these animals. It was so nice of Nuiqsut to send muktuk to her community.

Note: The Council voted to suspend the rules and moved Chairman Brower's report to occur after the ADF&G caribou and other wildlife reports to accommodate the availability of the biologists.

Gordon Brower of Utqiagvik (representing subsistence interests) encouraged all Council members to be always looking out for each of their representative villages and report on what their city or Tribal Council's might say and let them be the voice for the Council. Mr. Brower reported that he had a good opportunity to get to his cabin. He doesn't go traditionally as he isn't fond of big waves and pounding his back. So, he had to find alternative means of getting up there. It was important for him to get ready for fall fishing (whitefish). It could have been fantastic as he knows how to set his net under the newly forming ice, but if the ice shelf breaks off by the wake of a passing skiff, it can disrupt the fish and one's fishing efforts. And he thinks he needs to make time to talk with search and rescue folks or subsistence users on the rivers. It is always important to look at how rivers support communities, not just an individual subsistence user for hundreds and hundreds of years and there's lots of documentation about Ikpikpuk. Mr. Brower said that he has read literature from traditional land use inventory to listening to elders that are living on the Ikpikpuk and how that cycle is, when it starts to freeze up and there's ice laying down. Mr. Brower provided a story about his fall fishing experience laced with Traditional Ecological Knowledge (TEK) about the importance of understanding fall ice formation on the river and that people in boats need to learn to take care of the ice in relationship to fishing. Although his fishing was disturbed on the Ikpikpuk, he managed to find fish in a tributary, where he fished with two nets and made 25 stacks that he shared with communities of Atqasuk and Point Lay and distributed to the local churches that he saw as a good blessing.

He reported that Utqiagvik had overall a good subsistence season. He said the community had fat, healthy caribou, and blessed his son was able to get him one. He said he listens to others whenever they're hunting and it seems to me it was a pretty good season, even the lake fishing

was pretty good. He recalled stories from his dad about when seismic tests using dynamite were conducted in the Lake that at the time killed billions of fish. Mr. Brower concluded “that would be my Chair's report and I think it’s – I was right to just start off with a little traditional knowledge along with it.”

Open Discussion:

Carmen Daggett, Area Management Wildlife Biologist for Unit 26 with ADF&G asked for the floor in response to the Council’s reports to ask questions and provide some updated information about ADF&G’s wildlife counting efforts. Ms. Daggett informed the Council that she was scheduled to do a muskox survey that afternoon flying out of Kotzebue, but she plans to cover a good portion of the North Slope. She reminded the Council that there is a muskox proposal on the agenda and that the Alaska Board of Game (BOG) would be considering this proposal in next couple of days to open a muskox hunt in this area; at least in western Unit 26A. Ms. Daggett asked Mr. Frantz if he knew where and when the muskox sightings occurred, and he responded that there were abundant sightings that he thought were in August. Ms. Daggett advised the Council if they wanted the BOG to consider dates for opening a hunt that she would send them a link to submit comments to the BOG for consideration when they meet next week to deliberate on the proposal. Ms. Daggett asked Ms. Hugo if she thought that weather conditions this winter might have contributed toward the earlier migration of caribou. Ms. Hugo responded that if there is less snow in the foothills this allows caribou to dig down and find feed. She said that their foothills now have hardly any snow and that could contribute to why caribou are migrating though early. She added that her in-laws and uncles use to say that muskox can interfere with caribou - that they scare caribou, and old folks say they should be sent back to where they came from, that this is caribou country.

Mr. Williams, when he was young and out hunting near Kanuik, he recalled seeing four muskox but no caribou and someone told him that caribou can smell muskox and will avoid them. Ms. Daggett added that she had read in older management plans from 1976 that had mentioned concerns about interactions between muskox and caribou. She asked if the Council might be interested in that information in the future; documenting interactions between caribou and muskox during their survey work and incorporating TEK in that as well. She said that the BOG will be meeting in Utqiagvik in two years, and she would be willing to work with the people of the North Slope to try to get a proposal into the BOG to allow a muskox hunt on the eastern side of 26A if they are interested.

Public and Tribal Comments on Non-agenda Items (available each morning)

Jack Reakoff: Tuesday. Mr. Reakhoff said that the WIRAC submitted a wildlife special action (WSA) request to close specific units to Dall sheep harvest. He wanted to know if this WSA was on the agenda. Eva responded that it was added to agenda and that she emailed them the request.

Martin Robards: Wednesday, 9:15 am. Wildlife Conservation Society (WCS), a scientific research group. Mr. Robards gave a quick overview of their research focusing on predators has been conducted on the North Slope and Northwest Alaska for about a decade. They have had lots of local support over the years from communities and hunters and are willing to share their results from their research with the Council if desired. He also would like to conduct additional research that combines

current science and TEK on predators in the area with focal groups of hunters from different villages. He was looking for feedback on concerns in the area.

Old Business

The Council received recent reports on caribou from ADF&G prior to their discussion on WSA21-01. Alex Hansen, ADF&G wildlife biologist manager presented a PowerPoint report on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. Alex concluded that the biggest biological concerns is that the herd is close to critical thresholds, that the yearly recruitment of calves being born is average, and greatest concern is about the reduced cow survival. He emphasized it was very important that they continue to get accurate harvest data so that they can understand what the influence of harvest might be on the population and where to go with regulations if regulation changes need to take place.

The Council expressed concern that the herd count is below half what it used to be and concerned for continuing decline. Mr. Franz asked if there was any relationship to availability of caribou and the capacity of ADF&G to make accurate counts over last two years during Covid-19. Mr. Hansen said that they were able to get out and count on schedule despite their limited staff and a lot of time to do the counts and document with photographs; but acknowledged that they missed being able to come to the communities for outreach and in person interactions.

Mr. Oomiituk expressed frustration that the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) had denied recommendations from their Council and the Northwest Arctic Advisory Council that were concerned about the declining herd, to close hunting to nonresidents and sport hunters from hunting on Federal land during the time of migration. “It just doesn’t seem right sometimes, you know, we’re the ones that depend on the food, our way of life, our very low-income communities.”

Carmen Daggett, ADF&G wildlife biologist for Unit 26, gave a brief overview of the Teshekpuk Caribou Herd, and reports on muskox and moose for the Council’s consideration on the upcoming wildlife special action requests. There was a lengthy discussion about small airplanes, presumably with non-local hunters, flying over the communities during the caribou migration that some Council members expressed this interference can disrupt the caribou migration and local hunting efforts. Ms. Daggett responded if people are concerned that their hunts are being disrupted, there are regulations against disturbing hunters, and should be reported to wildlife troopers, but that people should try to get an adequate identification of the aircraft, such as a picture, type of plane, time, date, and location, otherwise the troopers can’t do much. She further provided information about when, how, and where ADF&G conducts their aerial wildlife counts.

Eva Patton introduced the special action requests that the Council needed to address. Wildlife Proposal 22-55, muskox in Unit 26A. Eva reminded the Council that they had deliberated and made recommendations on this proposal at their previous meeting, but now were being asked to review and make recommendations on how the permits are issued for the muskox hunt and changes from a registration permit to a drawing permit system, as was addressed in WSA22-01a and WSA22-01b.

WSA22-01b: (muskox) Unit 22 and 23 federal permit system

Kendra Holman, wildlife biologist with the OSM, presented the background information for the request for temporary wildlife special action WSA22-01b, which pertains to Cape Thompson muskox population in northern Unit 23.

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk and seconded by Ms. Kippi to **support WSA22-01b**. The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote with one member absent.

Justification: The justification was that the random drawing would be more inclusive and fairer than a registration hunt which allows those that have immediate access to go register and get those permits on a first come first serve basis. A registration would favor those living closer to the permitting station.

Ms. Holman and Ms. Grediagan, Wildlife Biologists for the OSM and Raime Fronstin, NPS biologist with Western Arctic region, addressed questions from the Council for clarification on the recommended amendment to the proposal. Ms. Grediagan explained the hunt is only open to Federally qualified subsistence users with positive Customary and Traditional Use (C&T) findings and that the proposal is just formally changing the permitting system to a drawing hunt, which the land managers have been doing for years, unknowingly that it was technically a registration permit hunt. If the proposal as amended does not pass, it will go back to a registration hunt. Mr. Brower suggested that the drawing permits be distributed throughout villages so that each village was entitled to receive several permits, and Mr. Oomittuk supported this suggestion. Ms. Grediagan said that the land manager (Superintendent of the Western Arctic Parklands) would set the harvest number each year, and each application would only be for that year's hunt. Mr. Fronstin added that there isn't a permitting fee and residents can apply every year, although NPS asks recipients not to apply the following year. Ms. Holman explained that the permits were only the Federal Permits and that the proposal is seeking the recommendation for the drawing, changing these regulations temporarily for the 2022-2024 regulatory cycle so that the regulations reflect how they've been issuing the permits as a drawing.

Update and re-review proposal WP22-55: Muskox Unit 26A - Establish a hunt for muskox within the western portion of Unit 26A, as modified by OSM (adding a drawing permit).

Motion by Mr. Frantz and seconded by Ms. Kippi and the Council voted to **support WP22-55** as modified by OSM (adding a drawing permit) (unanimous vote with one member absent).

Justification: The Council previously supported the proposal and welcomed the opportunity to harvest muskox and less muskox might help support the deflection of migrating caribou based on smell of muskox that are known through local and traditional knowledge. The Council also supported modifying the proposal to establish the hunt under a draw permit system instead of a registration permit system believing it was more equitable because it didn't favor those who had easier access to permitting offices. Also, a drawing hunt is warranted for harvesting from the small muskoxen population.

Mr. Franz commented that it's great that they are establishing a hunt. That said, these locations are far from Utquagvik, and he would like to see permits for closer to home. There was then a discussion about moving the hunt boundary further east to 154 degrees west latitude. Mr. Brower said that the most important thing was to first establish the hunt. They could propose to move the boundary in the future.

He also said that a drawing hunt was good for now while the muskoxen population was still small, but they may want to revisit this as the population grows.

Deferred Wildlife Special Action Requests WSA21-01

Mr. Tom Plank, Wildlife Biologist with OSM, presented an updated analysis of deferred temporary WSA21-01 to the Council that if approved by the Board would close moose and caribou hunting to non-Federally qualified users in Units 23 and 26A. The updated analysis included a summary of additional stakeholder input that was gathered by OSM and new population data for the Western Arctic Caribou Herd. The analysis was split into two parts: (a) caribou, WSA21-01a; and (b) moose, WSA21-01b.

WSA21-01a Caribou

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Mr. Frantz, and the Council voted to **support** WSA21-01a as modified by OSM (unanimous vote with one member absent).

Justification: The modification is to close all of Noatak NP and BLM lands between the Kobuk and Noatak Rivers to Non-Federally Qualified Subsistence Users (NFQSUs). This would be a more directed closure and the Council thought this would help the Northwest Arctic Region without closing North Slope lands where caribou are abundant.

Mr. Oomittuk questioned the accuracy of reported NFQSU hunts. He said those living in Kotzebue see more planes than is being reported. Mr. Brower said that the Council almost always supports the Northwest Alaska Council. But in this case, they are talking about different lands and populations of the herd and North Slope region is not struggling with the availability of caribou like those in Northwest Alaska. They are not under the same conditions. He wants to support his neighbors without undue regulations across the area. He said that the population of 180,000 supports closure with modification that the closure be directed in Unit 23.

WSA21-01b (moose)

Motion by Mr. Frantz and seconded by Ms. Kippi, and the Council voted to **support** WSA21-01b, to close Unit 23 to NFQSU (unanimous vote with one member absent).

Justification: There is a demonstrated moose decline in Unit 23. There are other factors in Unit 26A that don't warrant closing to NFQSU as demonstrated by the analysis.

Mr. Franz said that area he hunts is closer to 154 degrees latitude, and that the "156 is trying to keep us out of our own garden." He supports the request as written. Mr. Brower suggested that they defer on Unit 23. The Unit 26 population is much smaller, and they should be in "preservation mode," or limiting the hunt to FQSU.

WSA 22-02: Dall Sheep

Ms. Holman presented information about the temporary special action request that was recently submitted by the Western Interior Council and requests closing sheep hunting on Federal public lands in Units 24A and 26B west of the Sagavanirktok River to all users for the 2022 through 2024 regulatory cycle. The proponent is very concerned about the decreasing sheep populations along the Dalton Highway, as unusual weather events have resulted in low lamb recruitment, poor lamb production and loss of mature

rams. Wolf predation has also contributed to severe population declines. The Western Interior Council considers Unit 24A and 26B sheep population to be in a dire situation and request the closure as it is critical to their recovery. Public hearings will be scheduled, and the Board will act on this request in a public meeting sometime before August.

Motion by Mr. Frantz and seconded by Mr. Oomittuk and the Council voted to **support** WSA 22-02, to close Unit 23 to NFQSU (unanimous vote with one member absent).

Justification: Conservation measures must be taken to preserve the sheep in this area. Jack Reackoff's testimony was supported by the NPS data on sheep, and we need to act on this issue.

Jack Reackoff, WIRAC Chair, testified. He and others were frustrated with the limited data on Dall sheep populations and with the management system. Mr. Reackoff has observed a decline in the sheep population. He recently counted 11 sheep in an area where he used to count hundreds. Mr. Reackoff wants full closure to protect the few remaining males. He said that this closure only affects areas with heavy hunting pressures, not areas for residents of Anaktuvuk Pass. Will Deacy, NPS, gave update on sheep population. In general, Dall sheep populations in that region crashed in 2014 and have been slowly recovering. He hopes that they will get more data from surveys this summer

New Business

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Information Update

Jarred Stone, Fisheries Biologist at OSM, filling in for Karen Hyer, presented the Council with an overview and update on the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP). He explained that the Priority Information Needs (PINs) is the Council's opportunity to direct the research on the North Slope, that proposals are reviewed by OSM Staff, the Technical Review Committee and then the Council. Mr. Stone read a list of five PINs that the Council finalized during the last funding cycle, although no project proposals were received for North Slope Region. He asked if any Council Members would like to volunteer to help develop PINs for the next call for proposals. Mr. Brower suggested two projects. The first project is a look at the mold that is affecting Broad Whitefish in Coleville River drainage, and then comparing the health of that drainage to others in the area. The second project is to investigate effects of waste and minerals on fish populations. Mr. Brower volunteered to help develop regional PINs.

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Proposals

Jarred Stone informed the Council that the Board will be accepting proposals this winter to change Federal regulations for the subsistence harvest of fish and shellfish on Federal public lands and waters for the 2023-2025 regulatory years. The call for proposals will be open for a period of at least 30 days upon the publication of the proposed rule on the Federal Register. The Board will consider proposals to change Federal subsistence fish and shellfish seasons, harvest limits, methods, and means related to taking of fish for subsistence uses, as well as customary and traditional use determinations. The Council may vote on fishery proposals and submit them to the Council Coordinator. The Council did not have any questions or develop any fishery proposals.

Fisheries Closure Review Discussion

Jarred Stone discussed with the Council that OSM will be conducting reviews of closures in the Federal subsistence fishing regulations. Mr. Stone informed the Council on the 4 Fisheries Closure Reviews that will come before the Council's review and action during the fall 2022 meeting. The OSM closure reviews will include analysis of each closure and will provide a recommended action. Actions the Council may take are retain, modify, rescind, or defer. None of the four closures are in the North Slope region, but are considered crossover proposals, three in the Western Interior region, and one in Eastern Interior. The Council did not have any questions or comments.

Call for Non-Rural Determination Proposals

Dr. Brent Vickers, Supervisory Anthropologist for OSM, provided a brief overview of the current call for proposals for nonrural determinations in Federal regulation. The Federal Subsistence Board will soon be accepting proposals to change community status in Federal regulations from non-rural to rural or from rural to non-rural. The call for proposals will be open for at least 30 days. Non-rural determinations proposals are accepted every other fisheries regulatory cycle (every four years). Dr. Vickers informed the Council that they can obtain more information on the OSM website as to how to submit a proposal to change nonrural determinations. Mr. Brower said he didn't have any proposals in mind to offer in terms of an action item. Dr. Vickers said the proposed rule has not been open yet, so the Council had time to develop a proposal if desired. The Council did not develop any non-rural determination proposals.

Review and approve FY2021 Annual Report

Ms. Patton provided a summary of the draft annual report to the Council and requested feedback from the Council on any changes or addition to the report. Mr. Oomittuk commented about the natural gas leak in Alpine and that Nuiqsut was preparing for evacuation. He is concerned about impacts to the people and environment.

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk and seconded by Mr. Frantz, to adopt the annual report. The motion **passed** on a unanimous vote with two members absent.

Federal Subsistence Board Annual Report Reply Process Review and Revision Discussion and Council comments and feedback

Dr. Vickers notified the Council that the Board is seeking feedback on the annual report reply process. He solicited input from the Council, such as the Council being able to write letters to the Board at separate times from the annual report to get more focus on issues. The Council has been dissatisfied with the Board's responses in the past. There have been items in reports that the Council wanted more attention and focus from the Board. For example, the Council once reported about issues with the local planning commissions in defining villages and areas of influence. The Council would have liked for the Board to get more involved in the process, perhaps meeting with the Council and the commission. However, the Council felt that the Board's response ended the conversation rather than starting a dialogue. The Chair said that the response was inadequate

The Council does not have a mechanism for improving the annual report response process, but the Council is dissatisfied with not getting full attention from the Board on important items.

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk and seconded by Mr. Rexford to provide feedback to the Federal Subsistence Board with the Council's dissatisfaction with their responses in relation to the topics about subsistence and local laws and ordinances etc. The motion passed on a unanimous vote with two members absent.

Receiving Public Testimony Protocol – Guided Discussion

Dr. Vickers led the Council in a guided discussion about their preferences for receiving written and oral public comments on proposals where the Council this fall will be discussing fisheries proposals and closure reviews.

1. In the Council's opinion, what are the best ways to encourage public feedback to the Councils?

Mr. Brower said that the OSM should contact villages that will be affected by proposals, etc. He said OSM can contact the mayor's office and they can post it on their website, etc. Also, OSM can provide information monthly. That way people always know where to look for updates. Mr. Franz said that a community member from each community attends ADF&G meetings. ADF&G staff has outreach coordinators who communicate with community liaisons. Mr. Oomittuk said that people in their communities are shy and don't want to speak in public. The communities often use door prizes to encourage people to attend meetings. Mr. Brower said that there are many examples of successful outreach from other organizations. "If you are going to try to reinvent the wheel, look at one of the wheels that is turning already."

2. Would the Council prefer to receive comments from the public orally or in writing? The Council said either way, both are equally important.

3. Would it be helpful to the Council if OSM requests the written public comments to be submitted to your Council Coordinator prior to the meeting within the certain time period and the coordinator, in turn, will summarize the comments and present them to the Council during the meeting? The Chair commented, "It would be important to do that, like other meeting materials. We try any means to collect comments that may be useful."

4. Is it better for the Councils if received public comments are read verbatim into the record or summarized? Overall, the Council preferred to be able to read written requests as part of meeting materials. They were concerned that summarizing public comments may change the intent of the original comments. But, when comments are summarized, it was requested that staff use "words our elderly people can understand." Also, interpreters could help communicate to elders.

5. Do you have any other suggestions regarding the ways of improving written or oral public testimony procedure during the Council meetings? Brower Franz suggested that OSM try to not schedule meeting times that conflict with other meetings

Briefing and Council comments on proposed actions to automate Federal subsistence permits

Dr. Vickers provided the Council on proposed actions to automate Federal subsistence permits and informed the Council that the Office of Management and Budget is exploring ways to collect information from the public and the use of automated permits within our program. Dr. Vickers provided some examples of potential benefits and issues with an automated permit. The Council had no comments about automating permits.

Briefing on the Secretarial regulations proposing the inclusion of identified submerged lands in the Tongass National Forest

Dr. Vickers provided the Council on a proposed rule proposing the inclusion of identified through agency review submerged lands in the Tongass National Forest. The purpose of this proposed rule is to complete the regulatory proceedings to address submerged public lands within the Tongass National Forest. The lands mostly consist of reefs, rocks and very small islands. Brent told the Council if they wanted to comment on this, they could submit their comment to the Council Coordinator. The Council found it hard to make comments that's affecting a very geographically distant area from the North Slope and that it would be good to see what happened in case a similar situation arises in the North Slope.

Agency Reports:

- *Bureau of Land Management reports* were presented by Katie Drew, Heather Savage, and Beth Mikow.
- *Alaska Department of Fish and Game wildlife reports* were presented by Alex Hansen and Carmen Daggett, ADF&G Division of Wildlife Conservation.
- *Alaska Department of Fish and Game, FRMP Grayling project report*, was presented and Brendan Scanlon ADF&G Division of Sport Fish.
- *University of Alaska, Alaska Native Science and Engineering Program (ANSEP) student Evangeline Duke* gave a report of her work with the Fish and Wildlife Conservation Genetics Laboratory studying *The Genetic Diversity of Arctic Char in the Togiak National Wildlife Refuge*.
- *Fish and Wildlife Service, Arctic National Wildlife Refuge report* was presented by Nathan Huckleluk, FWS.
- *National Park Service, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve report* was presented by Jeff Racik, NPS.
- *Fish and Wildlife Service, Utqiagvik Field Office report* was presented by Ernest Nageak, FWS.
- *Ambler Road Access overview* was presented by Charlene Ostbloom.
- *Office of Subsistence Management report* was presented by Dr. Brent Vickers, OSM.

Future Meeting Dates:

Fall 2022 meeting dates confirmed for October 13-14. Utqiagvik

Winter 2023 meeting dates confirmed for February 23-24. Kaktovik.

Motion by Mr. Frantz to adjourn, seconded by Ms. Hugo, to adjourn and **passed** with unanimous vote.

Lisa Hutchinson-Scarborough, Council Coordinator for Eva Patton, Designated Federal Officer,
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

Gordon Brower, Chair
North Slope Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the North Slope Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2022 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 Lisa Hutchinson at 1-800-478-1456 or 1-907-310-4097, email lisa_hutchinson@fws.gov.