

NORTH SLOPE SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Inupiat Heritage Center, Utqiagvik, Alaska
October 13–14, 2022

Invocation

Mr. Peter Williams gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

Chair Gordon Brower called the meeting to order on Thursday, October 13 at 9:02 a.m. Chair Gordon Brower and Council members Brower Frantz, Peter Williams, Esther Hugo, and Martha Itta were present in person on Thursday and Steve Oomittuk was present via telephone. On Friday, Chair Gordon Brower and Council members Brower Frantz, Peter Williams, and Esther Hugo were present in person and Eddie Rexford was present via telephone. Council member Billy Patkotak, Jr. and Wanda Kippi were absent both days. With five of nine seated Council members present (Council has one vacant seat) quorum was established.

Attendees participating:

Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): *Leigh Honig, Cory Graham**, *Katerina Wessels, Karen Hyer, Brent Vickers, Hannah Voorhees, Kendra Holman*

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): *Nathan Hawkaluk*

U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service: *Jill Klein**

Bureau of Land Management (BLM): *Katie Drew**, *Beth Mikow*

Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA): *Glenn Chen*

U.S. Geological Survey (USGS): *Vanessa Von Biela**

National Park Service (NPS), Anchorage: *Eva Patton**, *Kim Jochum**, *Casey Aldrich**

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, NPS: *Marcy Okada**, *Mark Dowdle**, *Kyle Joly**

Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): *Alex Hansen**, *Helen Cold**, *Mark Burch**, *Carmen Daggett, Brendan Scanlon, Lisa Stuby*, Brandy Baker**

The Wilderness Society: *Andrew Tooyak**

University of Montana: *Tom Glass**

*Indicates participation via teleconference.

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Member Itta, seconded by Member Hugo, to adopt the agenda. The motion passed unanimously.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Member Itta, seconded by Member Oomittuk, to approve the winter 2022 meeting minutes as presented. Member Itta noted that her Council report was missing; however, after reviewing the transcripts it was determined that Member Itta did not provide a report at the winter 2022 meeting. Member Frantz motioned to approve the winter minutes as written and Member Hugo seconded. The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member Reports

Steve Oomittuk of Point Hope reported that the community has had a good year for caribou, and they have been around all year. Muskox with porcupine quills came into town but they were chased out. It was a good year for seals and whale. The weather has been unpredictable, winds have not been normal. Changing winds bring different species like ducks and geese, very little north winds were seen this year. Unfortunately, there have been many deaths in the community. Everything has been a month late except ice, which left early.

Brower Frantz of Utqiagvik reported that subsistence hunts were good this year, with a lot of normal-sized whitefish. Beluga have been plentiful, and whaling has been good, with whales being caught close to town and shared, despite being less than 30 feet in length. Caribou has been plentiful around Barrow, some with a few issues, but mostly healthy and fatty, despite declining population sizes. Gray whales have seemed closer to town. It was a good year for walrus and bearded seal hunts. Moose has been increasing in numbers in and around Barrow. Muskox have been abundant along the Ikpikpuk River with a stable population. Abundant foxes and owl populations in and around Barrow could indicate a good lemming year. During walrus and seal hunts, he has been seeing more porpoises around. He did not do any waterfowl hunting but overall, it was a good hunting season despite the late thaw. He noted later the abundance of shorebirds has been declining.

Peter Williams of Anaktuvuk Pass reported that the community has been struggling for Native foods. He reported a few people got sheep. People have not been able to get muskox, which is hard when there are no caribou. An elder told him about caribou changing their migration routes every few years and staying in the mountains where there is snow and not icy. Caribou can also sense weather so maybe they knew the typhoon was going to happen. Due to climate change, a lot of animals are popping up in the Anaktuvuk Pass area such as lynx and wolves. He hasn't hunted for geese but is interested. He noted that it is important to get young folks out hunting and sharing the harvest with elders.

Ms. Carmen Daggett asked about the current conditions of the Colville River because radio collars on the Teshekpuk herd show they are lined up along the river. Member Williams noted that the river is running and not yet frozen and the lake is frozen, but with very thin ice. Ms. Daggett noted she would be interested understanding the drivers behind fall migration.

Member Williams noted later that it would be good if there was a way to use Facebook to track the caribou herd, especially coming into Anaktuvuk Pass. Chairman Brower noted it could be an issue with

management. He questioned if there are videos about the migration patterns for the different herds. Ms. Daggett shared similar concerns about putting the herd migration on public forums like Facebook.

Martha Itta of Nuiqsut reported that the community has been having an abundance of caribou and they have been helping Anaktuvuk Pass with their caribou. She noted the caribou are not following their normal migration routes, instead coming from the south to the east. Some harvesters have been seeing sick caribou and turned them in to the Fish and Wildlife to get tested. There haven't been as many fish in the rivers as normal, and sheefish have been slow. Upriver, the fishing has been better, but it is far to travel. Some fish are missing livers and other organs and have been sent to the USFWS for testing. Walrus and seal hunting has been good. More hunters have been getting moose. There were a few geese caught that seemed sick, but she was unsure if someone sent them in for testing. More muskoxen have been coming into the village than normal, and younger hunters have been taking some, which is new for that generation. Squirrels have not been seen in the village for a few years, but she saw one this year and is concerned that lack of squirrels are due to seismic work being done in and around the village. She has not been seeing berries in the same places as usual and has to travel up and downriver to find them and believes that the seismic work that damaged the tundra is the reason. Grizzly bears have been coming into town and causing issues in town. The bears get scared off but keep coming back. The weather has changed a lot and has been a factor in subsistence issues. The weather has been unpredictable. She expressed concerns over the Willow Project and the community consultation process.

Ms. Daggett noted that samples of sick fish and wildlife can be sent to the ADF&G veterinarian as well and she can share that information with the North Slope Borough Wildlife Department. Ms. Daggett noted that there will be Tier II hunt application available at the career fair in Nuiqsut and she will be available to help. Ms. Daggett informed the Council about shooting bears in Defense of Life and Property and a permit option from Public Safety. If a bear without cubs is killed, it is legal to keep the bear because there is a year-round hunting season in Unit 26A, but if the bear does have cubs, it can only be shot legally under defense of life and property regulations, but the bear cannot be kept.

Esther Hugo of Anaktuvuk Pass reported that the community is still waiting for caribou, and she is hoping they come around in December. There have been a lot of bears in town, and one had to be put down because it kept coming around. She missed blueberry picking this year but heard they were good. Weasels and snowshoe hares have been around town and look hungry. She shared concerns about the caribou harvest; only 21 caribou were harvested, which was not enough to share with the community of 98 households. Some households didn't even get caribou. There have been many sightings of wolves lately. Some people have recently harvested sheep and moose, but they are not substitutes for caribou. Caribou decline has been discussed for many years and nothing has been resolved – caribou is a way of life and it hurts to not have them around. She has tried to submit proposals to the Alaska Board of Game, and they do not listen to the concerns.

Member Frantz asked if there had been studies on migration patterns and sport hunter locations, especially along the haul road. Chair Brower echoes concerns about State management conflicting with local Borough and Federal laws. Member Itta noted various entities studying caribou and suggested a way

to work through one contractor to try and resolve issues and conflicts. Ms. Daggett noted that research proposals are being submitted for ADF&G currently and she will work with the Council to submit a research proposal.

Eddie Rexford of Kaktovik reported on the second day of the meeting. He reported that the community of Kaktovik has had success in harvesting caribou and whales this season and is hopeful for an upcoming moose quota. He noted the Kaktovik Inupiat Corporation and the Native Village of Kaktovik were continuing to meet with the USFWS on an environmental impacts statement as cooperating agencies.

Gordon Brower of Utqiagvik thanked Council members for their reports. He reported that his son got caribou for him in Utqiagvik and is glad to see other younger folks doing harvesting activities. Muskox were seen by the Chip River and noted the only hunt right now is 155 West.

Ms. Daggett confirmed that hunt and noted there will be another State hunt opening on the eastern side (east of 153 longitude). The state Tier II hunt will be opening soon, and the application period starts November 1. The hunt will be east of 156 boundary.

Chairman Brower reported on changing conditions of the permafrost causing issues for food storage and thawing his catch. There are only certain periods where the river is safe to fish in now. He noted how important sharing is in Inuit culture and encourages all the Federal and State agencies to look at the culture and its sharing network. Sharing is a way to take care of each other.

Service Award

Member Wanda Kippi was not present to receive her five-year service award. Member Oomittuk was recognized for five years of service on the Council.

Old Business

The Council received presentations on the following topics:

The Federal Subsistence Board (Board) 805(c) Report summary from Council Coordinator Leigh Honig

Board FY2021 Annual Report Replies summary from Ms. Honig

Special Actions update from Anthropologist Dr. Hannah Voorhees (WSA21-01) and Wildlife Biologist Ms. Kendra Holman (WSA22-01 and WSA22-02)

New Business

Fisheries Proposals and Closure Reviews

The Council received all relevant fisheries updates from regional Federal biologists prior to taking action on proposals and closure reviews.

Crossover:

FP23-01: Rescind the Jim River nonsalmon closure, institute Arctic Grayling harvest limit

Dr. Voorhees presented the analysis. Motion by Member Oomittuk, seconded by Member Frantz, to **support** FP23-01. North Slope communities have a long history of customary and traditional use at these fisheries, particularly residents of Nuiqsut. Rescinding this closure would benefit subsistence users, especially those of Nuiqsut who are close to the fisheries.

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

FCR23-02: Reviews closure to subsistence harvest of all fish in the Kanuti River

Dr. Voorhees presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Member Frantz, seconded by Ms. Martha Itta, to **rescind** FCR23-02. The Council took up and voted on FCR23-02 and FCR23-03 together. The Council believes rescinding the closure would benefit subsistence uses and provide a Title VIII of ANILCA mandated Federal subsistence priority, as there is already sport fishing in this area.

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

FCR23-03: Reviews closure to subsistence harvest of all fish in the Bonanza Creek

Dr. Voorhees presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Member Frantz, seconded by Member Itta, to **rescind** FCR23-03. The Council took up and voted on FCR23-02 and FCR23-03 together. The Council believes that rescinding the closure would benefit subsistence uses and provide a Title VIII of ANILCA mandated Federal subsistence priority, as there is already sport fishing in this area.

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

FCR23-05: Reviews closure to subsistence harvest of all fish in the Delta River

Dr. Voorhees presented the analysis for this closure review. Motion by Member Itta, seconded by Member Frantz, to **take no action** on FCR23-05. The Council deferred to the Eastern Interior Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, who is most affected by this closure.

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

2024 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Priority Information Needs

Mr. Brendan Scanlon, ADF&G Fisheries Biologist, gave a presentation on a 2018 FRMP project on Colville River grayling. Ms. Vanessa Von Biela, U.S. Geological Survey Fisheries Biologist, and Mr. Tom Glass, University of Montana, presented on winter fish habitat studies. Ms. Karen Hyer, OSM Fisheries Biologist, and Dr. Voorhees presented the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) Priority Information Needs. The Council developed the following Priority Information Needs: 1) Using Traditional Ecological Knowledge and harvest monitoring, document new fish species and changes in

abundance, size, timing, and distribution of existing fish species, as well as impacts of new or expanding species on other fish that are important to subsistence in the North Slope Region; 2) Document and investigate the possible causes of mold, disease, and discoloration on Broad Whitefish in the Colville River in the vicinity of Nuiqsut. Compare environmental conditions in the Colville River—including temperature—with those in the Ikpikpuk River, where whitefish are healthy, and mold has not been observed to date. Investigators are encouraged to draw on both stock status and trends and Traditional Ecological Knowledge research methods; 3) Document the effects of climate change, including late freeze-up, on subsistence fishing access, harvests, and preservation and the impact of these changes on community-wide harvest levels and food security on the North Slope. Research could investigate adaptations for continuing community-wide harvest levels where traditional preservation methods are impacted. Studies including Ikpikpuk River are of particular interest; 4) Baseline fish habitat and water quality monitoring (especially temperature, dissolved oxygen, and silt) on the rivers and tributaries important to subsistence fishing for communities of the North Slope Region. Investigators are encouraged to include overwintering area; 5) Distribution, abundance, and health of stocks of Broad Whitefish on the Sagavanirktok River; 6) Seasonal movement and overwintering habitat of fish on the Colville Delta; 7) Document population structure and health of lake trout in Peters, Schrader, Chandler, and Shainin lakes; 8) Health and abundance of Arctic Grayling populations in Anaktuvuk Pass area.

Call for the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program proposals

Ms. Hyer provided an update on the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program. The call for proposals will come out by November and can fund a biologist, anthropologist, or outreach specialist for an Alaska Native of rural organization for four years. OSM can help prepare proposals for organizations that are unfamiliar with the proposal process.

Identifying Issues for FY2022 Annual Report

The Council identified the following topics for inclusion into the FY-2022 Annual Report:

Food security and preservation methods, particularly the freezing and thawing of ice throughout the season.

Request to improve management and research of sport hunting and effects on caribou migration near Anaktuvuk Pass.

Effects of contaminants on fish health and food safety in Anaktuvuk Pass.

Update on Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission cooperative management agreement with U.S. Department of the Interior.

Fall 2022 Council application/nomination open season

Ms. Honig provided information on the Regional Advisory Council application period, which closes on February 21, 2023. The Council has five seats that will become open for appointment or reappointment.

Joint meeting: North American Caribou Workshop and Arctic Ungulate Conference in May 2023

Ms. Holman presented details about the North American Caribou Workshop and Arctic Ungulate Conference. The conference is open for anyone to attend, though there is a registration fee, and OSM will be able to support travel for one Council member to attend. The Council discussed community centric approaches to harvest management that put village needs first, challenges to food security that have made reliance on ungulates even more important and the issues surrounding sport hunters and enforcement and how caribou migrations have not aligned with needs. The Council suggested extending an invitation to the North Slope Borough Wildlife Department to attend the meeting as well. The Council nominated Member Hugo to attend the conference, with Member Williams as her alternate, and requested that Member Rexford and Chair Brower be granted funding to attend with Member Hugo.

Harvest of Wildlife for Sport Purposes on National Preserves

Ms. Eva Patton, NPS Subsistence Program Manager, updated the Council on the intent of the NPS to enter regulations into the Federal Register on this subject.

Telephonic/internet expenses related to the Council teleconference meetings

Ms. Honig informed the Council on how to get reimbursed for telephonic/internet expenses incurred during previous Council meetings held via teleconference.

Public Testimony (for complete testimony, please review transcripts for October 13-14, 2022)

Andrew Tooyak, the Wilderness Society, asked about corroborating Western Arctic Caribou Herd population trends with residents' observations.

No public members testified during the fisheries proposals and closure reviews.

Agency Reports:

Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group update presented by Mr. Alex Hansen, Wildlife Biologist, Alaska Department of Fish and Game

Arctic National Wildlife Refuge update presented by Mr. Nathan Hawkaluk, Deputy Refuge Manager, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service

Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve update provided by Ms. Marcy Okada, Subsistence Coordinator, Mr. Mark Dowdle, Superintendent, Mr. Kyle Joly, Wildlife Biologist, and Mr. Will Deacy, Wildlife Biologist, National Park Service

Bureau of Land Management update presented by Ms. Beth Mikow, Anthropologist, and Ms. Katie Drew, Fisheries Biologist

Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence update presented by Ms. Helen Cold, Subsistence Resource Specialist

Alaska Department of Fish and Game update Unit 26A caribou, moose, and musk ox presented by Ms. Carmen Daggett, Wildlife Biologist

Office of Subsistence Management update presented by Dr. Brent Vickers, OSM Anthropology
Division Supervisor

Future Meeting Dates:

Winter 2023 meeting to be held February 22-23, 2023, in Kaktovik.

Fall 2023 meeting to be held November 1-2, 2023, in Utqiagvik.

Jessica Gill, Council Coordinator for Leigh Honig Designated Federal Officer
U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service Office of Subsistence Management

Gordon Brower, Chair
North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its winter 2023 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. Contact Jessica Gill at 1-800-478-1456 (toll free) or 907-310-6129, or by email at jessica_gill@fws.gov.