

NORTH SLOPE SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via Teleconference Due to Covid-19
February 22-23, 2021

*These minutes are an abbreviated record of the business conducted at this meeting.
For full details, transcripts of this three day meeting are available at:
<https://www.doi.gov/subsistence/library/transcripts/10-north-slope>*

Invocation

Gordon Brower provided an invocation prior to the meeting.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order on Monday, February 22, 2021 at 9:18 a.m. Council members Gordon Brower, William Hopson, Wanda Kippi, Steve Oomittuk, and Peter Earl Williams were on teleconference. A quorum was established with 5 out of 5 seated Council members participating by phone. (At the time of the meeting Council had five vacant seats due to pending Secretarial appointments).

Attendees:

Via teleconference

- *Office of Subsistence Management, Anchorage:* Eva Patton, Karen Hyer, Hannah Voorhees, Brent Vickers, Steve Fadden
- *National Park Service, Anchorage:* Joshua Ream, Kim Jochum, Victoria Florey
- *Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve:* Marcy Okada, Kyle Joly, Will Deacy
- *US Fish and Wildlife Service, Fairbanks:* Vince Mathews
- *US Fish and Wildlife Service Utqiagvik Field Office:* Ernest Nagiak
- *Arctic National Wildlife Refuge, Fairbanks:* Steve Berendzen, *Kaktovik:* Will Wiese
- *Bureau of Land Management, Fairbanks:* Shelly Jones, Debbie Nigro, Ted Inman, Heather Savage, Michelle Ethun; *Anchorage:* Chris McKee
- *Bureau of Indian Affairs, Anchorage:* Pat Petrivelli
- *Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Palmer:* Mark Burch, Rick Merizon; *Utqiagvik:* Carmen Daggett
- *North Slope Borough Wildlife Department, Utqiagvik:* Tom Lohman
- *North Slope Borough Planning Department, Utqiagvik:* Mabel Kaleak, Mary Patkotak

- *Native Village of Point Hope*: Jack Schaefer
- Jack Reakoff, Wiseman, public
- Edward Rexford, Kaktovik, public
- Martha Itta, Nuiqsut, public

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Mr. Williams, to adopt the agenda as read with the following additions/changes: move NPS Individual Customary and Traditional Determination Permit Update to old business, and schedule Alaska Department of Fish and Game (Carmen Daggett) wildlife updates for morning of February 23 after her return from muskox surveys. Add discussion on Wildlife Special Action WSA21-01, submitted by the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council and Alaska Board of Game proposals after Call for Federal Wildlife proposals. Add report from BLM on the Central Yukon Resource Management Plan/EIS.

The motion passed unanimously.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Mr. Hopson, to approve the November 4-5, 2020 meeting minutes. There were no edits. The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Officers

Gordon Brower was reelected Chair by unanimous vote

Wanda Kippi was elected as Vice Chair by unanimous vote

Steve Oomittuk was elected as Secretary by unanimous vote

Council Member and Chair Reports

Gordon Brower of Utqiagvik reported that overall this was a pretty good year for most with successful hunting and fishing. Caribou were abundant around Utqiagvik and most had good fishing along the coast and on the rivers. Gordon and his sons and nephews got caribou and put up a lot of fish and seal meat and seal oil. This year the community had to change how they distribute whale and other subsistence foods due to COVID-19 precautions so they have been delivering food to people's homes rather than hosting large gatherings. Gordon stressed that the sharing of subsistence foods is very important part of their traditional cultural practices and taking care of the many people that cannot fish and hunt for themselves. He also noted that he cleaned out his ice cellar and opened it up to get cool this winter while the weather was finally cold in an effort to preserve the integrity of this critical food storage for the community.

Steve Oomittuk of Point Hope reported that caribou hunting was good this year with more caribou coming around the community in winter like they used to even though they were late in the fall. It is a cold winter and the ice cellars are staying frozen this year, which is important for storing whale and other subsistence foods. Point Hope had a very successful whaling season this year and the ice cellar is essential for preserving the meat, *muktuk*, and the whales tail, which is fermented for the birth of the ice celebrations. The sea ice has still been thin and some open water year round now. Steve reported seeing thousands of ducks on this open water and a lot of polar bear coming in around Point Hope. He is concerned about the tom cods – they usually catch a lot of them under the sea ice this time of year in January and February but are hardly seeing any. The community pays very close attention to the weather and migration of animals – this is very important for subsistence and in recent years the fall freeze up is later and migration timing different for many animals. The river fish have been plentiful though and they were catching a lot of nice big Grayling, Char, and trout. They catch a lot of fish to share with the whole community for Christmas feast.

Wanda Kippi of Atqasuk reported that it was a late start to fishing in the fall due to slow freeze up. Her son was out fishing and doing really well with catching fish now with under ice nets and got a good amount of *Titaaliq* (Burbot) that he shared and he also got a sucker and a couple pike. Wanda spent much of the fall at her cabin, and there was a musk-ox nearby and an aggressive brown bear. She submitted the paperwork to the Alaska Department of Fish and Game to harvest both the musk-ox and the brown bear. Wanda noted that she is not seeing as many fox around this year.

Peter Earl Williams of Anaktuvuk Pass reported that they did not have many caribou around last fall but were able to go to Nuiqsut to hunt. He is very grateful to the Village of Nuiqsut for that opportunity to hunt caribou there. Earl stressed that Anaktuvuk Pass is continuing to oppose sport hunters in the area. He also noted that it had been a very cold winter and Anaktuvuk Pass had some challenges with power outages but the community got through it together.

William Hopson of Utqiagvik reported that there was really good fishing this summer on the coast and in the lagoon north of Utqiagvik. There were more big Saffron Cod than he has ever seen before and lots of smelt and flounder but fewer salmon this year. There was good caribou hunting around Barrow this year too. William expressed great concern about the changing climate and environment and impacts to subsistence foods. He has been a part of whaling since he was nine years old and when cutting whale for the community this year, he noticed soft mushy spots on the blubber that were like paste. William stressed he has never seen anything like this before in his life and is very concerned what could be causing this change to the whales. William noted that he has dedicated his life to advocating for subsistence but that this meeting would be his last as he needed to take time to take care of family.

The Council thanked William Hopson for his service.

Public Comment

Martha Itta of Nuiqsut reported that it had been a cold winter and right now everyone was out ice fishing. She highlighted that the fishing had been really good and everyone was happy catching a lot of *Titaaliq* (Burbot) with only a few reports of sick fish. Martha reported that the caribou hunting was pretty good this year with a good number of caribou around Nuiqsut. However, she is concerned about reports of some sick caribou and all the industrial development and traffic on the ice roads around Nuiqsut that is impacting the caribou and restricting where they can hunt. Trespass on private lands and camp areas also remains a problem.

Edward (Eddie) Rexford, Sr. of Kaktovik reported that they were having a successful hunting season with thousands of caribou around all the way up to the mountains. This past summer they had a lot of salmon coming around Kaktovik. Eddie noted the community has been working with Arctic National Wildlife Refuge on ATV access for subsistence hunting. He also noted that Native Village of Kaktovik had received a letter from the Secretary of the Interior regarding polar bear viewing and would send the letter via email to share it with the Council.

Old Business

Kim Jochum, National Park Service Subsistence (NPS) Program presented a brief update on the NPS Individual Customary and Traditional Determination Permit.

New Business

Call for Federal Wildlife Proposals

Hannah Voorhees, OSM, read the Call for Federal Wildlife Proposals. All wildlife reports were provided prior to deliberation on wildlife proposals. The Council voted to submit the following federal wildlife proposals:

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Ms. Kippi, to submit a proposal for Unit 26A musk ox: Establish a hunt for musk ox within a portion of Unit 26A as follows: Open a hunt in that portion of Unit 26A west of the Alaktak River following W155 south to the Unit 26A border with season dates of August 1 – March 15 and a bag limit of one musk ox. Motion passed unanimously.

Justification: The Council fully supports this opportunity to hunt musk ox in Unit 26A now that the musk ox population has grown to a sustainable level. North Slope communities in this area are seeing more musk ox nearby and some even coming close to subsistence hunting cabins. Musk ox are good eating and would be an important additional source of subsistence food and

fur. It is known through local and traditional knowledge that caribou will avoid musk ox and may be deflected from areas based on just the smell. This can shift the migration route of caribou, potentially impacting communities' access to caribou, which are a critically important subsistence resource. The opportunity to hunt musk ox will support the ability to help prevent deflection of caribou on their migration route near North Slope communities and provide additional source of meat at the same time.

The Council recommends establishing this new musk ox hunt boundary to follow the natural landscape feature of the Alaktak River, which is a tributary of the Ikpikpuk River and runs south-north to Admiralty Bay. The Alaktak River is well known by area communities and will provide a good hunt area boundary that is easy to identify. The Ikpikpuk River runs in close parallel to 155 W. longitude. Establishing the hunt area west of the Alaktak River will help local communities and families that hunt and have cabins on the Chipp River to be able to be included within and have access to this musk ox hunt area. While this hunt area boundary will be beneficial to local area subsistence users it should still be sufficiently west / distant from Unit 26B to avoid any risk to that Unit's musk ox population.

The Council also voted to make this same recommendation for the Alaska Board of Game 2021-2022 proposal 193. Establishing a Federal subsistence hunt for musk ox in Unit 26A will provide for a subsistence priority in this area.

Motion by Ms. Kippi, seconded by Mr. Oomittuk, to submit a proposal for Unit 26A Moose: Expand the hunt area for antlerless moose in Unit 26A west of 156 west longitude and excluding the Colville River drainage. The Council requests a modification to expand the current moose hunt area further to the east by one degree longitude as follows: Unit 26A—that portion west of 156°00'W. longitude west of the Alaktak River following 155°00'W. longitude and excluding the Colville River drainage—1 moose; however, you may not take a calf or a cow accompanied by a calf. Jul. 1 - Sept. 14. Motion passed unanimously.

Justification: This Unit 26A moose hunt is a very important subsistence resource for several North Slope region communities to be able to harvest a few moose that migrate into this area. The Council fully supports the continuation of this moose hunt opportunity, which is particularly beneficial to the communities of Atqasuk and Utqiagvik that have the closest access to this hunt area. Council members noted that to reach the hunt area west of 156 west longitude from Utqiagvik they need to travel a very long way by boat up the Ikpikpuk River over 70 miles, which requires a lot of time, gas, and resources. An expanded hunt area allowing moose harvest west of the Alaktak River would be very beneficial to local community hunters that have to travel so far by providing easier access to be successful once reaching the hunt area.

The Council recommends establishing this new moose hunt boundary to follow the natural landscape feature of the Alaktak River, which is a tributary of the Ikpikpuk River and runs south-north to Admiralty Bay. The Alaktak River is well known by local communities and will provide a natural hunt boundary that is easy to identify rather than the current abstract 156 W. longitude line on a map, which is very difficult to locate on the ground. The Ikpikpuk River runs in close parallel to 155 W. longitude. Establishing the hunt area west of the Alaktak River will help local communities and families that hunt and have cabins on the Chipp River to be able to be included within and have access to this moose hunt area. Council members relayed their experiences that encountering a moose in this area is opportunistic and therefore harvest is anticipated to still be low. However, it will provide expanded subsistence opportunity to harvest a moose if one is encountered on the Chipp or Alaktak Rivers, which are more frequently used by local subsistence residents than the current 156W longitude boundary.

Temporary Wildlife Special Action Request WSA21-01

submitted by the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council, requesting closure of Federal public lands in Units 23 and 26A to harvest of caribou and moose by non-federally qualified users from August 1 through September 30, 2021.

The Council discussed at length the concerns expressed by the Northwest Arctic Subsistence Regional Advisory Council and communities in Unit 23 about user conflicts, deflection of the herd at key points in their migration route and food security concerns with many communities not getting the caribou that they need in recent years. The Council also discussed that while a closure in Unit 26A may not be warranted since North Slope communities were able to access caribou this year, there were concerns that a closure in Unit 23 may push more hunters onto federal lands in Unit 26A if both areas were not closed. The Council discussed possible options for more targeted closures that might get at the core of the areas of concern but that it was difficult to know what would be most effective. Ultimately, the Council expressed concern for the low Mulchatna Caribou herd population and need for ongoing conservation management and meet subsistence needs of rural communities in Unit 23 and 26A.

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Mr. Williams, to support WSA21-01 as written. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Alaska Board of Game Proposals:

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Mr. Williams, to support: Reauthorization of brown bear tag fee exemptions in North Slope area Units 23, 24, 25, and 26 (Proposal 190). Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Justification: This brown bear tag fee exemption is a cost savings for subsistence users across multiple Game Units encompassing communities hunt areas in the North Slope region. The Council noted that these tag fee exemptions have been in place for many years and are working well so in Council's words, "if it's not broken there is no need to fix it". The Council fully supports continuing this brown bear tag fee exemption.

Motion by Ms. Kippi, seconded by Mr. Oomittuk, to support as amended: Reauthorization of antlerless moose hunts in Unit 26A west of 156 west longitude and excluding the Colville River drainage. (Proposal 188). Support modification to extend the current season from Jul. 1-Sept. 14 to Jul. 1- Sept. 25. Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Justification: The Unit 26A antlerless moose hunt allows for a very important subsistence resource for several North Slope region communities that allows them to harvest a few moose that migrate into this area. The Council fully supports the continuation of this moose hunt opportunity, which is particularly beneficial to the communities of Atqasuk and Utqiagvik that have the closest access to this hunt area. The Council also voted to support an amendment to expand the season to September 25. Council members noted that to reach the hunt area west of 156 west longitude from Utqiagvik they need to travel a very long way by boat up the Ikpikpuk River, which requires a lot of time, gas, and resources. With river freeze-up starting later, travel by boat is possible further upriver into late September. An expanded hunt season allowing moose harvest in this area until September 25 would be very beneficial to local community hunters that have to travel so far by providing more time to be successful once reaching the hunt area.

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Mr. Williams, to support with modification: Establish a hunt for musk ox within a portion of Unit 26A as follows: Open a hunt in that portion of Unit 26A west of the Topogoruk River following W156 south to the Unit 26A border with season dates of Aug. 1 – Mar. 15 and a bag limit of one musk ox. (Proposal 193) And support modification to expand the hunt area further east as follows: Open a hunt in that portion of Unit 26A Topogoruk River following W156 west of the Alaktak River following W155 south to the Unit 26A border with season dates of Aug. 1 – Mar. 15 and a bag limit of one musk ox. The motion passed unanimously.

Justification: The Council fully supports this opportunity to hunt musk ox in Unit 26A now that the musk ox population has grown to a sustainable level and same details as provided for the federal proposal.

Council Charter Review

The Council discussed the challenges of the late Secretarial appointments causing many vacancies on the Council and discussed a fix by amending the charter to include language such

as: “Any member of this Advisory Council may serve after the expiration of the Member’s term until a successor is appointed”.

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Mr. Williams, to approve the Council Charter with modification to add a provision to allow for “existing members to continue to serve until reappointment or replacement” in order to avoid vacancies when Secretarial appointments are delayed: Motion passed unanimously.

Finalize FY2020 Annual Report

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Ms. Kippi, to approve and finalize the Council’s fiscal year 2020 Annual Report as written. The motion passed unanimously.

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program

Fisheries Biologist Karen Hyer and Anthropologist Hannah Voorhees provided the Council with an update on grant funding opportunity for subsistence fisheries research through the Office of Subsistence Management Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program.

Agency/Tribal/Organization Reports

- Michelle Ethun presented the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) Central Yukon Resource Management Plan and Environmental Impact Statement (CYRMP/EIS).

Motion by Mr. Williams, seconded by Ms. Kippi, to submit a comment letter to BLM on the CYRMP/EIS that is a blend of alternatives without any recommendation to lift any portions of BLM lands along the utility corridor for conveyance to the State of Alaska and include the Council’s agreement with Jack Reakoff’s comment letter provided on the record. Also request an extension to the public comment period to allow for affected rural subsistence communities to participate more thoroughly in the process. The motion passed unanimously.

- Jack Schaefer presented the Native Village of Point Hope report.
- Carmen Daggett and Mark Burch presented the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Wildlife updates.
- Kyle Jolly presented the National Park Service caribou report.
- Marcy Okada and Will Deacy presented the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve report.
- Heather Savage presented the Bureau of Land Management Arctic Field office and NPR-A report.
- Steve Berendzen presented the Arctic National Wildlife Refuge report.

- Ernest Nagiak presented the US Fish and Wildlife Service Utqiagvik Field Office report.
- Steve Fadden presented the Office of Subsistence Management Report.

Motion by Mr. Oomittuk, seconded by Mr. Williams, to adjourn the meeting at 5:40 p.m. on February 23rd. The motion passed unanimously.

Future Meeting Dates:

The Council confirmed its fall 2021 meeting to be held November 3-4, in Utqiagvik if COVID-19 travel restrictions are lifted.

The Council selected its winter 2022 meeting to be held March 8-9, in community to be determined at fall meeting.

_____/signature on the original/_____
Eva Patton, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

_____/signature on the original/_____
Gordon Brower, Chair
North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were formally considered and approved by the North Slope Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2021 meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Eva Patton at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-786-3358, email eva_patton@fws.gov