

SOUTHCENTRAL SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via tele-video conference

October 7 – 8, 2020

Invocation

Gloria Stickwan gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Wednesday, October 7, 2020, at approximately 9:00 a.m. Council members Ed Holsten, Richard (Greg) Encelewski, Diane Selanoff, Gloria Stickwan, Dennis Zadra, Michael Opheim, Andrew McLaughlin, Aaron Bloomquist, and John Whissel were present. The Council has four vacant seats. A quorum was established with nine of nine seated Council members participating by phone/video.

Attendees:

By Teleconference or Videoconference

- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM), Anchorage: ***Jarred Stone, Tom Kron, Robbin La Vine, Lisa Maas, Karen Hyer, Hannah Vorhees***
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS), Juneau: ***David Schmid, Wayne Owen, DeAnna Perry, Jessica Warmbrodt***; Anchorage: ***Deyna Kuntzsch, Bret Christensen***; Cordova: ***Milo Burcham, Daniel Donnelly***; Seward: ***Jordan Rymer***
- Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AITRC): ***Karen Linnell, Odin Miller***
- Native Village of Eyak (NVE): ***Matte Piche***
- Ninilchik Traditional Council: ***Darrell Williams***
- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA), Anchorage: ***Pat Petrivelli***
- US Fish & Wildlife Service (USFWS), Anchorage: ***Carol Damberg***
- Kenai National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): ***Ken Gates, Todd Eskelin***
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM), Anchorage: ***Paul (Chris) McKee***; Glennallen: ***Valerie Lenhartzen, Brian Ubelaker***
- National Park Service (NPS), Anchorage: ***Joshua Ream***
- Wrangell-St. Elias National Park and Preserve (NPP), NPS: ***Judy Putera, Barbara Cellarius, David Sarafin***
- Denali National Park, NPS, Anchorage: ***Amy Craver***
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Anchorage: ***Mark Burch, Jackie Keating, Jason Dye, Jeremy Boats***

- Members of the Public: **Judy Caminer, Christine Brummer, Tom Carpenter, Willow Hetrick, Rachel Fischer, Jeff Estes, Jesse Carter, Mike Butler, Chelsea Kovalcsik, Heath Kocan, Sara Miller, Faye Ewan, and Mercedes Knighten.**

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Whissel, seconded by Mr. Opheim, to adopt the agenda as read with no changes. The motion passed unanimously.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Whissel, seconded by Mr. Opheim, to approve the winter 2020 meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Edward Holsten of Cooper Landing reported that there was a good first run of sockeye at the Russian River falls, but that the run was a week or two late. Some Pink Salmon were observed in the upper river. Hard impacts have been felt by the community for the last two years: The current COVID-19 pandemic caused Princess Lodge, a major employer in the area, to shut down which left many locals without a job, and overall there were less bookings for guiding businesses and bed and breakfast lodging. Last year, the community was shut down because of the wildfire. Cooper Landing bypass (a 5 year project) is now under construction.

Diane Selanoff of Valdez reported that the salmon season was a bit slow this year and that numbers did not show normal abundance. People subsistence fished and gathered more because of COVID-19 travel restrictions and the decrease in salmon numbers was noticeable.

Gloria Stickwan of Tazlina reported that her community observed low fish runs, and so there were few Sockeyes or Chinook harvested. The water levels were high in the area for most of the summer and this could have contributed to the low fish run. The summer was not as hot as last year. A hard year [for subsisting] is expected because few people harvested a moose.

Dennis Zadra of Cordova reported that there was also a weak salmon run in his area on the Copper River and that the runs in Prince William Sound were also relatively weak. The Sockeyes coming back to Main Bay Hatchery were small and returned in fewer numbers. Esther Hatchery saw Chum Salmon but struggled to get their cost recovery and brood stocks. Commercial fleet had only five 12-hour fishing periods the entire early season. The minimum escapement goal at Mile Lake may not have been reached, and if so, the cause needs to be addressed. It was a fantastic berry season. There was an increase in black bears in the area. The local subsistence moose hunt went well.

Michael Opheim of Seldovia reported that there have been bear issues all summer in the community. Salmon returns were not good and it was a bad berry year. One bear was euthanized because of getting

into garbage. One moose and six bears have been harvested in the area. Their fish weir was blown out before the expected big run. Early, very few tourists came to the area due to COVID-19, and a normal return of people to the community was not observed until August. He is involved with a clam project locally and is working with the Alutiiq Tribe shellfish hatchery and hopes that the clams planted in the area will continue to grow and replenish the bay. There seems to be an increase in the snowshoe hare population but less spruce hens this year.

Andrew McLaughlin of Chenega Bay reported that the Coho Salmon showed up late. In local streams, Pink Salmon (including some hatchery strays) were washed out of streams. It was an incredible year for blueberries and salmonberries; however, it was observed that the berries weren't as plentiful below 500 feet elevation, suggesting that it may have been a pollinator issue. A decreased number of Sockeye were observed going through nets due to their small size. There is no clamming in the area due to paralytic shellfish poisoning in other communities that are fed by the same waters as those in Chenega Bay, and people may try to clam in the safer winter months, depending on water temperature. The village closed its borders due to COVID-19, so there was very little seine boat activity. Bear populations increased as have deer populations, but are still lower than average. Snow has not yet pushed goats to lower elevations where they can be accessible and hunted.

Aaron Bloomquist of Palmer/Copper Center reported quite a few bears in his area, and so his guide business did a relatively normal amount of business despite COVID-19. There were fewer snowshoe hares, but large numbers of furbearers evident during the spring. Sockeyes were harder to get with fish wheels than from dipnetting. There was a low run of King Salmon in Gulkana, but not exceptionally low, compared with some previous years and other drainages in the valley had good King Salmon fishing. The weather was not good for the moose season. The sheep had a bad winter throughout the Interior and seemed to be worse in the north. Not many caribou have been observed on the Richardson Highway. Grouse numbers seem to be down. There is disappointment from local families unable to hunt due to the new wildlife special actions in place.

John Whissel of Cordova reported that deer populations are good and continue to increase according to deer survey data. It was a good year for berries, and they are still able to harvest blueberries right now. Although recent storms resulted in house and property damage, it is beneficial to churn up layers of water and reduce sea surface temperatures. The salmon run this year was terrible. Escapement was met, but timing was different than normal. It is hoped that this means that good stock is coming back to the Gulkana hatchery. Sportfishing pressure has been reduced due to COVID-19. Moose population continues to thrive despite increased harvest pressure. There was successful shrimp, halibut, and rockfish harvests.

Greg Encelewski of Ninilchik reported that the Ninilchik clinic performed a lot of testing for COVID-19 on residents as well as people from Soldotna and Homer. The community has grown with the addition of a general store, a mobile clinic, health club, and emergency services that have, or will be added soon. Traffic has increased on the Kenai Peninsula despite a lot of local events being cancelled. Moose hunting wasn't as prolific this year but many people (including himself) were still able to get a moose. The local

clam beach is still closed and people going across the inlet to get clams have observed decreased numbers in that area too. Commercial fishermen had a terrible year. There were few Sockeyes observed, but the river was flooded with Pink Salmon in early August. The Ninilchik Tribal Council's subsistence net on the Kenai was successful this year, and all Federal permits for the community were filled. Conversely, the educational net on the Kasilof did not produce. There is an abundance of spruce hens in the area. This was not a good berry year which may have contributed to bear issues in the community.

Old Business

805(c) Report: This report, which outlines the actions taken by the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) on issues for the Southcentral Region, was printed in the meeting books. Council took no further action.

New Business

The Council received a Federal Subsistence Fisheries Update for the Southcentral Region as well as a report on the food security special action request (FSA20-04) for a dip net fishery on the lower Copper River which was rejected by the Board earlier this year.

Fisheries Proposals and Closure Reviews

Regional:

FP21-09: Revise Kenai River regulations to remove terms

Motion by Mr. McLaughlin, seconded by Mr. Holsten, to support FP21-09.

The Council supported this proposal based on the information provided by OSM because it was 'administrative action' and it did not shorten nor lengthen any season and did not change Harvest. This proposal would simply clarify regulations for the user.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

FP21-10: Create new dip net fishery for Sockeye Salmon in the lower Copper River

Motion by Mr. Whissel, seconded by Mr. Opheim, to support FP21-10 as modified by OSM (to include the 48 hour take reporting requirement to area managers).

The Council majority supports this proposal based on the information provided by OSM, showing that there would be a minimal impact on the salmon run. The Council acknowledged that some users stated their subsistence needs were not being met for both upper river and lower river, and there is a need to provide additional harvest opportunities. ANILCA's provision for rural subsistence priority supports creating this fishery (as Federal food resource should take precedence over any State use) and it is important for those underserved Federally-qualified subsistence users who do not own boats. The Council recognized that this was an issue that polarizes the community; however, they felt that the request and modification was reasonable, and that allowing this fishery would provide easier and safer access to

harvest this important resource. Subsistence users should be provided the opportunity to obtain their fish and any restrictions to address a conservation concern should first come from other user groups.

Three Council members voted in opposition to this proposal due to: conservation concerns, lack of timely post-season reports, and limited law enforcement available. There was also concern that this fish resource is managed as a single stock instead of separate fisheries.

The motion as amended (to include OSM modification) passed with 6 votes in favor to 3 against.

Crossover:

FP21-11: Require recording daily harvest and report to the agency

Motion by Mr. Holsten, seconded by Mr. Opheim, to support FP21-11.

The Council majority supported this regulation that would provide timely in-season, in-river data to aid in fisheries management, and although the Council does not support more requirements for the Federally qualified subsistence user, they do not feel this requirement was overly burdensome (as many other hunts/fisheries have similar reporting requirements in place to benefit management of the resource.) The Council voiced their hope that the State would follow suit and require the same reporting under State regulations to gather this important information as the Federal harvest is only 8 – 10% of the harvest on the Copper River.

Two Council members voted in opposition to this proposal for these reasons: There is a concern that this will create an extra burden and opportunities for citations, in vain - that the information gathered will not be used. Reporting should be optional as it would be a burden for Ahtna people to report.

The motion passed with 7 votes in favor to 2 against.

FP21-12: Limiting use of monofilament or multifilament mesh dip nets

Motion by Mr. Holsten, seconded by Mr. Bloomquist, to support FP21-12.

The Council majority does not want to recommend a regulation that would be convoluted and create an additional requirement on Federally qualified subsistence users only. The Council stated that the damage and mortality of fish was due more to the mesh size and the amount of time the fish is out of the water than the material of the net. Though there should be a move to the conservation of the species, this proposal would not result in the desired outcome. If fish are not available for harvest, then other users should be eliminated and the harvest preference needs to go to the subsistence fishermen. The Council also voiced concern that this regulation would be challenging for law officers to enforce but that this is the easiest and most efficient way to catch a fish if dipnetting.

Three Council members supported the proposal for these reasons: The Council heard testimony that fish are being damaged and the proponent has seen a lot of damage in his many years of being a guide; damaged fish may be too weak to reach spawning grounds and something needs to be done to get more fish to the spawning grounds; putting undue burdens on Federal subsistence users are necessary in order

to conserve those King Salmon. These members voiced their hope that the State would go first (in changing this type of regulations).

The motion failed with 3 votes in favor to 6 against.

FP21-13: Prohibit fishing with dip nets from boats or craft floating in the river; only allow dip net use from banks, upper Copper River

Motion by Ms. Stickwan, seconded by Mr. Whissel, to support FP21-13.

The Council majority agreed with the rationale provided by OSM in its analysis and felt that this proposal would be an unnecessary restriction on Federally qualified subsistence users. This would limit how those users could harvest their fish and ‘drifting’ could make harvesting more efficient and less time-consuming. Further, this proposal would affect only a small number of Federal subsistence users as this is not a method used by many fishermen. The restrictions would be contrary to the intent of ANILCA. It is concerning that the many people who are observed boat dipnetting are State subsistence users with a commercial operator. This burden would be too much on the small group of Federal subsistence users.

One Council member supported this proposal because fishing from a boat is gaining in popularity and more fish may be targeted and overharvested – there could be an unknown over abundance of harvest taking place. There is an enforcement concern. Fishing from a boat is creating more of an impact on the fisheries and there is a conservation concern that is important to all people upriver.

The motion failed with 1 vote in favor to 8 against.

FP21-14: Prohibit use of onboard device that indicates bathymetry and/or fish locations

Motion by Mr. Whissel, seconded by Ms. Stickwan, to support FP21-14.

The Council majority felt this restriction on the Federally qualified subsistence user could prohibit the user’s ability to quickly and successfully harvest fish. The Council felt that if a conservation concern is determined for this area, then, per ANILCA, any necessary restrictions should be placed on other user groups before restrictions are placed on the Federally qualified subsistence user. The Council also addressed the importance for all users on the river to learn to navigate the waters by ‘reading’ the river and not relying on bathymetry devices.

Three Council minority supported this proposal for these reasons: Most fish finders are not helpful once boats start moving, and only expensive sonars, owned by a limited number of people, can really show fish. These devices are useless for navigating the river. It is unknown how many fish people are catching or whether the harvest reporting is accurate. Brood stock had not reached Gulkana Hatchery and everything should be done to help spawning fish reach the upper Copper River. There is a conservation concern expected next year, and everything possible should be done to protect the fishery. The challenges of enforcement of this regulation were also discussed.

The motion failed with 3 voted in favor to 6 against.

FCR21-06: Closure on Toklat River, Tanana drainage, to subsistence fishing for all fish

Motion by Mr. Whissel, seconded by Mr. McLaughlin, to rescind/remove the closure (FCR21-06). The Council discussed the significance of the resource and the importance to open this area back up for harvest. This closure was carried over from State regulations when Federal regulations were established. Data shows there has been sustainable escapement for some time now and people should be able to use the resource. There are no conservation concerns, and the closure should be rescinded/removed to provide more subsistence harvest opportunity. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

State Board of Fisheries – Board of Game Proposal Review

The Council discussed the need to provide comment on those proposals going before the state that are similar to the Federal Proposals FP21-11 to FP21-14 to the Alaska Board of Fish (BOF).

Motion by Mr. Whissel, seconded by Mr. Holsten, to send a letter in support of BOF Proposals 6, 9, 10, 14, 15 and 16 was withdrawn. Second motion by Mr. Whissel, seconded by Mr. Holsten, to send individual comments in support of BOF #6 was withdrawn. Due to the delay in publication of the BOF proposal book and because the BOF meeting was postponed until next March, the Council decided to revisit this agenda item at its winter meeting in February, 2021. There was no discussion on Board of Game proposals.

2022 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program

Mr. Jarred Stone and Ms. Robbin LaVine with OSM presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) Priority Information Needs (PINs) working group discussion results. From the working group, Mr. Whissel informed the Council that the draft PINs document being considered was a result of the group reviewing priorities in different geographic areas and trying to be as inclusive as possible. Also, Ms. Stickwan shared that the Wrangell-St. Elias Subsistence Resource Commission supported two PINs. The Council offered suggested edits to the working group list and the Council unanimously approved the final list of PINs, as moved by Mr. Whissel and seconded by Ms. Selanoff.

RP19-01 Moose Pass Nonrural Determination Proposal Analysis

Ms. Robbin LaVine with OSM presented the Council with the analysis for the nonrural determination proposal, and the OSM preliminary conclusion to support the proposal with modification to define the community of Moose Pass as encompassing the Moose Pass, Crown Point and Primrose census designated places.

Motion by Mr. Whissel, seconded by Ms. Selanoff, to support RP19-01, as originally written by the proponent (requesting that Moose Pass be designated as a rural community, independent of the greater Seward area, which is designated ‘nonrural;’ and does not include any other communities).

The Council supported the proposal based on testimony heard at its meetings as well as the public hearing held in Moose Pass in the fall of 2019. The Council toured Moose Pass in October, 2019, and acknowledged it as a rural community. They recognized that the Moose Pass residents live the subsistence lifestyle – utilizing and sharing the resources. The Council discussed the rural characteristics of Moose Pass during this and the fall 2019 meeting (including rural culture, economic indicators, uses of fish and wildlife resources for sustenance, art and firewood; the sparse population of the area, and lack of community services such as schools, airfield, police). The Council felt the discussion on this proposal was adequately stated in the final analysis as well as in transcripts of past meetings since the proposal was submitted.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Identifying Issues for FY2020 Annual Report

The Council identified the following topics for inclusion into the FY-19 Annual Report:

- Council Vacancies – seats not filled during last appointment cycle
- Climate Change
 - unpredictable effects on subsistence resources (migratory patterns, travel conditions)
 - ocean acidification: poor performance of Southcentral region Sockeye
- Postponement of action by the Board on the NPS Individual C&T delegation of authority process
- State prioritizing de facto subsistence priority
- Federal regulations should not be more restrictive than State regulations for resources, per ANILCA

Motion by Ms. Stickwan, seconded by Mr. Whissel, to draft the annual report with the items offered by the Council. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Subsistence Resource Commissions (SRC)

Wrangell-St. Elias SRC: Ms. Barbara Cellarius, NPS – WSTE SRC, presented the Council with information about the SRC and the eligibility criteria for someone to serve on the commission.

Motion by Mr. McLaughlin, seconded by Ms. Selanoff, to reappoint Southcentral Regional Advisory Council Member, Gloria Stickwan, to be the Council's representative on the WSTE SRC.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Denali SRC: Amy Craver, NPS – Denali SRC, presented the Council with information about the SRC and advised that there was no one who met the eligibility criteria to serve on the commission at this time. The Council took no action, but hopes to appoint someone in the near future, if an Advisory Committee member who is seated at its next meeting is eligible to serve on the Denali SRC.

Proposed Review Processes for NPS Individual Customary and Traditional Use Determinations

Ms. Amy Craver with NPS presented the Council with the proposed changes to the NPS individual customary and traditional use determinations review process and requested the Council's opinion on the changes.

Motion by Ms. Stickwan, seconded by Mr. Whissel, to postpone a recommendation to the Board on this matter.

The Council believed there were too many unanswered questions to adequately deliberate and provide a recommendation on this issue. The Council was concerned about establishing a precedent through this process and did not want to rush a decision. The Council was informed that the WSTE SRC has requested additional information and the Council asked that this information be shared with the Council at its next meeting before the Council makes a recommendation.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Motion by Ms. Stickwan, seconded by Mr. Whissel, to send a letter to the Board requesting that it postpone action on this matter until the issue could be vetted by the WSTE SRC.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Agency Reports:

- Darrel Williams presented the Ninilchik Traditional Council Subsistence Fishery report
- Karen Linnell, Executive Director, presented the Ahtna InterTribal Resource Commission report
- Matt Piche, Biologist and Natural Resources Coordinator, presented the Native Village of Eyak report on Copper River Chinook Salmon Monitoring Program (a Partners Program project)
- Willow Hetrick, Executive Director, presented the Chugach Regional Resources Commission – InterTribal Consortium report
- Lisa Maas, Acting Policy Coordinator, presented the OSM program updates and special action request results
- Todd Eskelin, Wildlife Biologist, presented by USFWS – Kenai National Wildlife Refuge report
- Jordan Rymer, Officer, presented the USFS – Law Enforcement report
- Milo Burcham, Chugach NF Subsistence Program Leader, presented the USFS – Chugach National Forest updates
- Judy Putera, Wildlife Biologist; Dave Sarafin, Fisheries Biologist; and Barbara Cellarius, WSTE Subsistence Coordinator, presented NPS updates on fisheries, wildlife, subsistence, anthropology
- Valerie Lenhartzen, Assistant Manager, Glennallen Field Office, presented the BLM report
- Jackie Keating, Lead Researcher for Division of Subsistence for Southcentral Region, presented the ADF&G report

Future Meeting Dates:

Winter 2021 meeting to be held February 24-25, 2021 in Cordova

Fall 2021 meeting to be held October 13-14 in a location to be determined



DeAnna Perry, Designated Federal Officer
USDA Forest Service



Richard (Greg) Encelewski, Chair
Southcentral Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes were reviewed and approved in their current form at the Winter 2021 Meeting of the Southcentral Subsistence Regional Advisory Council.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Office of Subsistence Management at 1-800-478-1456 or Council Coordinator, DeAnna Perry at 907-209-7817 or email deanna.perry@usda.gov.