

Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

c/o Office of Subsistence Management
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MARCH 8, 2023

Anthony Christianson, Chair
Federal Subsistence Board
c/o Office of Subsistence Management
1011 E. Tudor Road, MS 121
Anchorage, Alaska 99503-6199

Dear Chairman Christianson:

The Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) appreciates the opportunity to submit its FY-2022 Annual Report to the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) under the provisions of Section 805(a)(3)(D) of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). At its public meeting held on November 2, 2022, the Council identified concerns and recommendations for this report. The Council approved this Annual Report at its March 8 – 9, 2023, meeting. The Council wishes to share information and raise some of their concerns dealing with implementation of Title VIII of ANILCA, and the continuation of subsistence uses in the Bristol Bay Region.

1. Recommendations that Appointees to the Board Receive Training of ANILCA Mandates

The Council is concerned about Board decisions in situations where agency-specific regulations conflict with ANILCA, Title VIII. For example, ANILCA §811(b) permits the use of snowmobiles for subsistence purposes, which means that multiple existing Federal agency regulations conflict with ANILCA because they prohibit the use of snowmobiles for harvesting of caribou, wolves, and wolverine for subsistence uses. In past years, the Council has requested clarification about how the Board makes decisions on regulatory proposals in these types of situations.

The Council first raised the issue of Board decisions conflicting with ANILCA in its FY-2019 Annual Report. The Board's most recent response to the FY-2021 Annual Report reply stated "Since the FY-2019 Annual Report and Board reply were presented to your Council in 2020, the Federal Subsistence Management Program experienced the turnover of both the Interagency Staff Committee Members and Board members in three of the five Federal agencies: specifically, the BLM, the USFWS, and the NPS. In addition, the Administration has changed. As new staff

and Board members continue to become familiar with this issue, we will rely on Title VIII of ANILCA to direct Board authority and action.”

The Council recommends that Appointees to the Board and agency staff that are responsible for implementing Title VIII of ANILCA continue to receive training so that decisions made by the Board uphold the subsistence priority on Federal public lands, specifically when there is a conflict between ANILCA and agency specific regulations.

2. Bear Predation

The Council continues to draw the Board’s awareness to the issue of growing brown bear populations in the Bristol Bay region. The Council reported to the Board in its FY 2021 Annual Report that bears have become an increasing concern for subsistence users. This concern still exists, especially after a record-breaking year of Sockeye Salmon returns that will only fuel the growth of brown bear populations in the area. The State recently expanded the predator control plan in Unit 17 and will potentially be implementing the plan within in the next year. The Council discussed the potential of submitting a regulatory proposal that would address the selling of bear hides harvested under Federal regulations. Currently, Federal regulations only allow the sale of handicrafts made from the skin, hide, pelt, or fur of a brown bear taken in Unit 17. The Council discussed submitting a proposal that would allow the sale of brown bear hides from Unit 17 to encourage the harvest of brown bears.

3. Need to Fill Vacant Seats on the Council

The Council has ongoing concerns about filling the five vacant seats on the ten-member Council. The Council requests that the Board communicate with the local Subsistence Resource Commissions (SRC) to see if members of the SRCs may be willing to volunteer to serve on the Bristol Bay Council.

4. Chinook and Chum Salmon Abundance and the Need for Data

The Council would like to bring to the Board’s attention that the Alaska Board of Fisheries has designated the Nushagak Chinook Salmon as a stock of management concern. This could have widespread implications for the district and the fisheries as a whole. Nushagak Chinook Salmon have failed to achieve the in-river goal of 95,000 Chinook Salmon in five of the last six years, and commercial harvest was the lowest on record since 1955. The Council is concerned about Chinook Salmon abundance across the Bristol Bay region; other tributaries such as the Alagnak, Togiak, Egegik, Ugashik, and Naknek rivers (including Big Creek) have all experienced a decline in Chinook Salmon. The Council is also concerned about Chum Salmon abundance across the region. The Nushagak River has not met the sustainable escapement goal the past three years for Chum Salmon, and commercial harvest in 2021 was the lowest on record for the second year in a row.

The Council is concerned about a lack of enumeration efforts in other tributaries in the region. Currently, only the Nushagak River is being surveyed by sonar and aerial flights. The Council

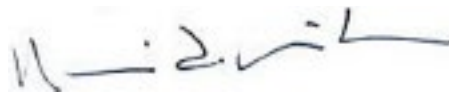
requests that other tributaries be added to enumeration studies and that methods such as aerial surveys and harvest monitoring be employed as well. The Council recognizes that resources are limited and urge State and Federal agencies to combine their efforts and work collaboratively to ensure the fisheries in the Region are being surveyed and that survey data is reaching the affected users.

5. Mulchatna Caribou Herd Concerns

The Council is concerned by the non-recovery of the Mulchatna Caribou Herd (MCH). Recent survey data from June 2022 indicates that the MCH is 12,112 caribou, which is slightly lower than the 12,850 estimate from 2021, and well below the population objective of 30,000-80,000 caribou. State and Federal hunting opportunities have been closed since 2019. The MCH is an important subsistence resource, and the declining population is of great concern to the Council.

The Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council appreciates the Board's attention to these matters and the opportunity to assist the Federal Subsistence Management Program in meeting its charge of protecting subsistence resources and uses of these resources on Federal public lands and waters. The Council looks forward to continuing discussions about the issues and concerns of subsistence users in the Bristol Bay Region. If you have any questions regarding this report, please contact me via Leigh Honig, Council Coordinator, Office of Subsistence Management, at leigh_honig@fws.gov, or 1-800-478-1456 or 1-907-891-9053.

Sincerely,



Nanci Morris Lyon
Chair Regional Advisory Council
Bristol Bay Region

cc: Federal Subsistence Board
Bristol Bay Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
Office of Subsistence Management
Interagency Staff Committee
Benjamin Mulligan, Deputy Commissioner, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Mark Burch, Special Projects Coordinator, Alaska Department of Fish and Game
Administrative Record