



**Seward Peninsula Subsistence
Regional Advisory Council**

Louis Green Jr. Chair
c/o Office of Subsistence Management
1011 E. Tudor Rd. MS121, Anchorage, AK 99503-6199



MAY 05 2020

RAC SP 20017.KD

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

Dear Chairman Christianson:

The Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council (Council) submits this FY2019 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 in Nome on March 11-12, 2020, the Council identified concerns and recommendations for this report. The Council wishes to share information and raise a number of concerns dealing with implementation of Title VIII of ANILCA and the continuation of subsistence uses in the Seward Peninsula Region.

The fact that there are large areas of the Region that are not Federal public lands within the Board's jurisdiction highlights the necessity for close cooperation between the Board, Council, Federal land managers, Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), and other landowners for implementation of management practices that protect the use of subsistence resources. The Council looks forward to the Board's continued engagement, consideration, guidance, and support on the topics listed below.

1. Climate Induced Impacts to Subsistence Resources

The Council continues to be concerned about the effects of climate change on the Seward Peninsula. The large fish and bird die-offs of last summer, continued permafrost loss, and extreme algae growth are all threatening subsistence resources. Water temperatures both at sea and inland have spiked considerably, with negative impacts to fish and marine mammals, including mortality and parasite infestation. Algae growths over the past two years have been extraordinary, with areas so overgrown that sighting water from the air or identifying sandbars for landing aircraft is proving increasingly difficult. The algae in the water is dust-like, producing cloudy water, and the algae on the banks is like grass. The Seward Peninsula Region has also seen extreme weather systems that are jamming ice, creating erosion and producing high winds. All of these events negatively influence subsistence by threatening the life cycles of fish and wildlife and posing hunter safety and access challenges. Although this past winter was

closer to normal conditions, the previous two years created extremely difficult conditions for subsistence users. Overall, climate-induced changes have worsened over the past two decades.

Recommendations: The Council has asked for baseline data for water temperatures to either 1) continue in areas or 2) be initiated in others, so that current and future changes can be quantified. While climate change is an extremely broad issue, it is important that Federal, State, and Tribal organizations/corporations work together to ensure that data are consistently collected, changes are accurately recorded, and mitigation occur wherever possible to ensure food security.

2. Food Contaminants

The Council engaged in lengthy discussions regarding contaminants in local food, largely originating in the ocean, though some members also refer to military activities on land as the source. Council members from Unalakleet and Stebbins are concerned with impacts to fish and marine mammals from the nuclear accident in Japan and radiation from Russian military activities. Council members say there has been an increase in cancers in local residents and that these contaminants may be the source. Radiation can be stored in kelp and other ocean plants. When the ocean warms up, these toxins can be released and affect fish, herring eggs, and other resources that locals depend on for subsistence. Permafrost melt may also be releasing toxins that have otherwise been buried for decades or longer. These toxins could be ingested by humans through terrestrial foods such as berries or moose. One Council member stated that toxins such as polychlorinated biphenyls (PCBs) were found close to shore near Unalakleet when researchers were testing water quality.

Recommendation: The Council is requesting that researchers collect data on toxins in the environment in the Seward Peninsula Region and alert locals of any dangerous chemicals found in their food sources.

3. Norton Sound Red King Crab Fishery

At its winter 2020 meeting, the Council heard from Charlie Lean, Chair of the Norton Sound Fish and Game Advisory Committee and ADF&G staff regarding the plummeting Red King Crab population in Norton Sound. Many subsistence crab harvesters reported a complete absence of Red King Crab this season, and were unable to meet their subsistence needs.

Although ADF&G expected a lower catch this season, they were alarmed when only 80 thousand of the 150 thousand quota were met. Commercial crab fishermen and researchers are observing very few large male crabs. The number of fertilized eggs on female crabs was nearly half of the expected norm. Biologists believe this will negatively impact recruitment and is likely caused by the absence of large male crabs.

The Council was encouraged to hear that the Red King Crab fishery was closed by the Alaska Board of Fisheries, effective at the end of April 2020 and through the remainder of the year. Overall, the Red King Crab population, however, is not expected to recover until 2023. Subsistence hunters are frustrated with having to compete with commercial crab fisheries and

believe the Red King Crab commercial season should be completely shut down until the population recovers, subsistence needs are met, and a sustainable commercial fishery is in place. The Council implores Federal and State agencies to manage for the long term. Some Council members suggest that the Red King Crab fishery be Federally-managed to ensure subsistence needs are met. Norton Sound residents have fished for crab for thousands of years in this region and are greatly disturbed by this threat to a traditional subsistence resource.

Recommendation:

The Council has no recommendations to the Board on this topic. The purpose of including the Council's concerns in the Annual Report is to alert the Board that the Council intends to send a letter to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council regarding Red King Crab populations in Norton Sound and the inability of local subsistence users in the region to meet their subsistence needs from this critical resource in the 2019/2020 season.

The Seward Peninsula 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 of the Seward Peninsula Region. Should you have any questions about this report, please contact me through Karen Deatherage, Subsistence Council Coordinator with the Office of Subsistence Management at 1-800-478-1456 or (907) 474-2270 or karen_deatherage@fws.gov.

Sincerely,



Louis H. Green, Jr.
Chair

cc: Federal Subsistence Board
Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council
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