

**SEWARD PENINSULA**  
**SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL**  
**Meeting Minutes**

Old St. Josephs Hall  
Nome  
March 22 – 23, 2023

**Invocation:**

Elmer Seetot Jr. provided an invocation.

**Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:**

The meeting was called to order Wednesday, March 2, 2023, at 9:20 am. Council Chair Louis Green Jr., and Council members Tom Gray, Raymond Hunt, and Elmer Seetot, Jr. were present in-person. Robert Moses, Sr. and Ronald Kirk were present via teleconference. Deahl Katchatag was not present and was excused. The Council has one vacant seat. With six out of nine seated Council members present, quorum was established. Mary Freytag and Martin Aukongak were excused in the morning of the first day but joined the meeting in-person in the afternoon and remained present for the remainder of the meeting. This raised the attendance to eight of nine members.

**Attendees:**

\* Denotes telephonic participation

- Department of the Interior: Bryan Newland\*, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs
- Bureau of Indian Affairs: Glenn Chen
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Anchorage Field Office – Bruce Seppi; Regional Office – Chris McKee, Walker Gusse
- National Park Service (NPS): Regional Office – Elizabeth Bella, Kim Jochum, Eva Patton\*, Dillon Patterson\*; Bering Sea Land Bridge Preserve (BELA) – Jeanette Koelsch, Nichole Braem
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS): Regional Office – Joel Garlich-Miller\*, Jill Klein\*
- U.S. Forest Service: Greg Risdahl\*
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Scott Ayers, Brian Ubelaker, Hannah Voorhees, Nissa Pilcher, Jared Stone\*, Katya Wessels\*, Robbin La Vine\*
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Wildlife Conservation – Sara Germain, Alicia Carson, Mark Burch\*, Marine Mammal Program – Lori Quakenbush
- National Ocean and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA): National Weather Service (NWS) – Marybeth Schrek, Ryan Metzger, Kitty Sopow
- Other Organizations: The U.S. Public Lands and Rivers Conservation for Pew Charitable Trusts (Pew Trusts) – Suzanne Little; Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation (NSEDG) – Renae Ivanoff; Nome Nugget – Megan Gannon

- North Pacific Fishery Management Council: Dr. Diana Stram\*
- University of Alaska Fairbanks, Northern Campus: Professor Gay Sheffield
- NOAA – NWS: Dr. Brian Brettschneider\*
- NOAA – Polar Ecosystems Program: Michael Cameron
- Public: Charlie Lean

### **Review and Adopt Agenda:**

- Motion by Member Gray, seconded by Member Seetot, to adopt the agenda as read with the following changes:
  - Department of the Interior Update on Office of Subsistence Management
  - Discussion of WSA22-05

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Election of Officers:**

Mr. Louis Green Jr. was re-elected the Council's Chair.

Mr. Tom Gray was re-elected the Council's Vice-Chair.

Mr. Elmer Seetot was re-elected the Council's Secretary.

The election of officers occurred on the second day of the meeting, as not all members were present in the morning of the first day.

### **Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:**

- Motion by Member Gray, seconded by Member Kirk, to approve the Fall 2022 meeting minutes as presented.

The motion passed unanimously.

### **Council Member and Chair Reports:**

Ronald Kirk of Stebbins reported that climate change is really affecting the people and animals in the region, and the reindeer [caribou] are having a difficult time getting to their food when it rains and then freezes in the winter. He was hopeful that soon the ocean ice will be right to go *oogruk* [seal] hunting. Mr. Kirk reported that the snow in Stebbins is gone already, that people did well during the moose season, and that there has been an increase in bear activity and sightings near Stebbins. Member Kirk also reported that he took part in a virtual meeting with Congresswoman Peltola the following week and he relayed to her the concern of salmon and marine mammal bycatch in the pollock fishery in Western Alaska.

Robert Moses Sr. of Golovin reported that this winter has been rather stormy, and that while a few people in Golovin have been able to harvest caribou, the animals have been scarce. He also reported that the fall

moose hunt went okay, and the winter moose hunt quota had been lowered due to the fall storm [Typhoon Merbok]. Member Moses relayed that some people were able to get out to go subsistence crabbing, but the tom cod [Saffron Cod] showed up late and was smaller than normal. Other fishers were able to harvest smelt and some trout [Dolly Varden].

Elmer Seetot, Jr. of Brevig Mission reported that the spring ice last year was early and impacted Brevig Mission's ability to harvest marine mammals. He relayed that the reds [Sockeye Salmon] run was dismal last fall, people kept waiting for them to show up, but they never did. Member Seetot reported that the snow conditions were good this winter, but then recently there has been wet weather and it has felt more like April than March. Member Seetot noted that tom cod and smelt fishing was poor due to a south wind that pushed the fish from Grantly Harbor to Imuruk Basin where the community is not able to harvest them as easily, and that currently the ice in Port Clarence is three to four feet deep. Member Seetot reported that some community members had harvested wolves recently in the American River area and that some hunters were currently heading there to look for caribou.

Tom Gray of Nome reported that not a lot has changed since his last report. He noted that there was a lot of wind and snow this winter in Nome. Mr. Gray reported that everyone got what they wanted last year with *oogruk* and beluga hunting. He also informed the Council that belugas were caught all the way up to Brevig Mission and Shismaref, which is new. Member Gray reported that the salmon runs for multiple species were so horrible that he had to buy reds [Sockeye Salmon] from the fish plant in the fall. Mr. Gray expressed that the ongoing poor salmon runs in Western Alaska need to be addressed as these poor returns are not going to fix themselves. He stated that moose hunting in this area should be a Tier II hunt – the season is sometimes only three or four days, and that it is a rat race to get out there, harvest an animal, and get home again. Member Gray reported that he is not seeing caribou like he has in the past, and this situation is similar to the salmon in that it is going to take some attention to fix. Member Gray also reported that there has been a lot of talk in the region about bears. He reported that he had four cabins that were torn up by bears last year, and the last time this happened was 25 years ago. He is unsure if there are actually more bears on the landscape but lack of food for them may be a factor as there is no salmon and few berries last year.

Raymond Hunt of Shaktoolik reported that all the snow that had fallen this winter has all blown away in Shaktoolik, and everything is brown. He also commented that while the humpies [Pink Salmon] came in normal numbers, the Silver and Chum salmon numbers were low. Member Hunt reported that *oogruk* and beluga were in good numbers, and everyone was able to get what they needed. He relayed that moose season has been good for the last few years, which may be due to some wildfires in the Interior that pushed moose north. He reported that ten years ago Shaktoolik was lucky to harvest a moose, now there are a lot more available, which is good for the community. Member Hunt commented that the numbers of muskoxen near Shaktoolik have increased as well, which is concerning because of the incident in Nome this winter. He noted that muskoxen also tear up salmonberry patches, which no one likes either.

Mary Freytag of Unalakleet reported that the moose quota was met in her portion of Unit 22, but there was concern of outsiders coming in with planes to take the large bulls. She relayed that local hunters are having to travel far to get caribou, and that while sometimes caribou come close to town, it has been many years since that happened. Member Freytag stated that some people were able to harvest some muskox as they have been moving closer to Unalakleet. Member Freytag also reported that there are still a few trappers in Unalakleet, and they had a good season this year. She noted that king [Chinook Salmon] fishing was marginal last year, but most were able to put a few in the freezer, which was better than nothing. Trout, [Arctic] Grayling, and tom cod were abundant, and the herring egg harvest was phenomenal, and she enjoyed the community coming together and sharing this resource. Member Freytag finalized her report by stating that Typhoon Merbok created a storm surge that went into the mouth of the Unalakleet River and flooded the flats where the community goes to pick salmon berries, so they were scarce this year although some were able to harvest berries in Nome and bring home.

Martin Aukongak of Golovin reported that he was unable to attend the Fall 2022 meeting because he helped with the extensive clean up in Golovin after Typhoon Merbok. He reported that after the storm the community received moose from White Mountain and Unalakleet to replace the food lost as a result of the storm. Mr. Aukongak noted that a few people were able to harvest moose during the winter season as well and that people had even been able to harvest some caribou. He noted that people had been harvesting tom cod, trout, and trapping has been good this winter. Member Aukongak finalized his report by noting that he was happy to be able to attend this meeting.

Louis Green Jr. of Nome reported that the fall moose season around Nome suffers from an overabundance of hunters and an underabundance of moose, with plenty of wolves and bears taking moose as well. Chair Green reported that the beluga crews did well, and that younger hunters are starting to get involved, which is very welcome. He stated that it worries him to hear the reports of small tom cod and changes to their movements as this is what belugas eat in the fall, and that these fish are the base of food chains; changes to their size, abundance, and movement are worrisome. Chair Green is also concerned that people from Nome are having to travel far to find caribou, and many who do are unsuccessful. He relayed that the spring ice looks good, and he expressed the hope that everyone would have a good *oogruk* and walrus hunt this year. Chair Green reported that since the salmon runs were so poor, he traveled to Kenai to dip net salmon, so he was able to get his fish there. Chair Green finalized his report by stating that co-management seems to just be a buzzword, and that he has been involved in advisory councils, panels, and committees for 25 years on both the state and federal side and has seen little change, with many things getting worse. He expressed that all the involved agencies need to come to the table and there needs to be real co-management. He stated that when subsistence fishers must sit on the beach and not fish, everyone else should be sitting on the beach with them.

Member Freytag and Member Aukongak gave their reports in the afternoon of the first day, as they were absent in the morning.

### **Public and Tribal Comment on Non-Agenda Items:**

- Ms. Suzanne Little, representing the Pew Trusts, gave comments on an ongoing Environmental Impact Statement process that involves the Seward Peninsula BLM lands.

The Council expressed concern over this process and would like to be kept informed as this progresses.

- Mr. Charlie Lean, representing the Southern Norton Sound Fish and Game Advisory Committee, gave an update on the Arctic/Yukon/Kuskokwim and the Alaska Peninsula / Aleutian Island / Chignik Finfish State of Alaska Board of Fisheries Meetings.

### **Old Business:**

- Dr. Hannah Voorhees, OSM Cultural Anthropologist, presented follow up information on the May 2023 North American Caribou Workshop and Arctic Ungulate Conference.
- Ms. Renee Ivanoff (NSEDG), with assistance from Mr. Lean, who represented NSEDG at this time, presented follow up information on Salmon Lake fertilization and South River Chinook Enhancement projects.

### **New Business:**

#### ***Regional Wildlife Management Reports:***

- Mr. Lean, who represents the community of Nome on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group (WACH WG), presented information on the WACH WG's December 2022 meeting including information on wildlife regulatory proposals the working group voted to submit to the Federal Subsistence Board and the State of Alaska Board of Game.
- Ms. Sara Germain and Ms. Alicia Carson (ADF&G) provided an update on the moose composition and population data, as well as an update on muskox population data and ongoing research in Unit 22.

#### ***Wildlife Closure Reviews:***

Mr. Brian Ubelaker, OSM Wildlife Biologist, provided an overview of the closure review process and presented an analysis for the six regional wildlife closure reviews. The six regional closure reviews were WCR24-10 (Unit 22B closed to muskoxen hunting by non-Federally qualified users), WCR24-15 (Unit 22D, remainder, closed to moose hunting by non-Federally qualified users), WCR24-28 (Unit 22D, west of the Tisuk River drainage and Canyon Creek, closed to muskoxen hunting except by residents of Nome and Teller), WCR24-29 (Unit 22D, remainder closed to muskoxen hunting except by residents of Elim, White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission), WCR24-30 (Unit 22E closed to muskoxen hunting by non-Federally qualified users), and WCR24-44 (Unit 22D, Kuzitrin River drainage closed to muskoxen hunting except by residents of Council, Golovin, White Mountain, Nome, Teller, and Brevig Mission).

***Call for Federal Subsistence Board Wildlife Proposals:***

Mr. Ubelaker introduced the call for Federal Wildlife Proposals to the Council. The Council had no proposals to submit at this time.

***Call for Alaska Board of Game Wildlife Proposals:***

Ms. Nissa Pilcher, OSM Council Coordinator, introduced the call for the Alaska Board of Game proposals for the Arctic/Western Region. The Council had no proposals to submit at this time.

***Harvest of Wildlife for Sport Purposes in National Preserves:***

Ms. Jeanette Koelsch, Superintendent, and Ms. Nicole Braem (NPS BELA) presented information on the Proposed Rule by NPS on the harvest of wildlife for sport purposes in national preserves. Ms. Koelsch informed the Council that the NPS was currently soliciting comments on the proposed rule.

- Motion by Member Gray, seconded by Member Kirk, to transmit the Council's support of the NPS proposed rule with the justification that the proposed rule does not interfere with current subsistence practices by federally qualified subsistence users.

Motion carries on a unanimous vote.

***WSA22-05:***

Dr. Voorhees presented an overview of WSA22-05, which seeks to reduce the harvest limit of caribou in Unit 23 to four caribou, of which only one may be a cow, per year for the remainder of the current regulatory cycle.

- Motion by Member Gray, seconded by Member Freytag, to support WSA22-05. Council members noted the expected Federal proposal submission from the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group to reduce all harvest of Western Arctic caribou to four caribou per year for the 2024–2026 regulatory cycle. The Council supported the Northwest Arctic Regional Advisory Council's approach to preemptively limit harvest for this coming year to conserve as much of the population as possible.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

***Department of the Interior Update on Office of Subsistence Management:***

Bryan Newland, Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs, presented on the President's proposed FY 2024 budget, which included a proposal to move the Office of Subsistence Management from the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service to the Assistant Secretary for Indian Affairs Office.

***Review and Approve FY2022 Annual Report:***

Motion by Member Gray, seconded by Member Aukongak, to adopt the FY2022 Annual Report with one addition and one modification to the draft report:

- To add the Council's ongoing concerns on fisheries bycatch in the Bering Sea
- To modify language found under the topic regarding resident caribou herd in the Northern Seward Peninsula

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

***North Pacific Fisheries Management Council Update:***

Dr. Diana Stram, Senior Scientist with the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, presented an overview salmon bycatch management measures and impact in the Bering Sea.

***Review Federal Subsistence Board Draft Council Correspondence Policy:***

Mr. Scott Ayers, OSM Supervisory Fisheries Biologist, presented the Board Draft Correspondence Policy to the Council. The Council expressed approval of the updated policy.

***2021 Council Charter Review:***

Ms. Pilcher reviewed the Seward Peninsula Alaska Subsistence Regional Advisory Council Charter. The Council did not request any modification to the current charter.

***2024 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program:***

Dr. Voorhees presented a brief update on the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program.

***Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program:***

Dr. Voorhees presented a brief update on the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program.

***Regulatory Cycle Update:***

Dr. Voorhees updated the Council on the fisheries regulatory cycle.

**Agency Reports:**

- Ecological Areas of Concern in the Norton Sound presented by Professor Gay Sheffield, University of Alaska Fairbanks, Northern Campus
- Sea Ice Research and Communication update presented by Marybeth Schrek, Ryan Metzger, Kitty Sopow, NOAA – NWS
- Spring Climate Outlook for the Seward Peninsula presented by Dr. Brian Brettschneider, NOAA – NWS
- Seal Research in Alaska presented by Michael Cameron, NOAA – Polar Ecosystems Program
- Bering Land Bridge National Preserve Update presented by Jeanette Koelsch and Nichole Braem, NPS BELA
- Walrus Management in a Warming Arctic presented by Joel Garlich-Miller, FWS – Walrus and Sea Otter Program
- Eastern Bering Sea Beluga Status and Management Plan Update presented by Lori Quakenbush, ADF&G – Marine Mammal Program
- Office of Subsistence Management Update presented by Scott Ayers, OSM

**Future Meeting Dates:**

Fall 2023 meeting dates confirmed for November 1-2, 2023, in Nome

Winter 2024 meeting dates requested for the All Council and subsequent Council meeting is March 18-22, 2024, with secondary dates of March 25-29, 2024, in Anchorage

Fall 2024 meeting dates selected are October 24-25, 2024, in a location to be determined.

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Nissa Pilcher, DFO

USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

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Louis Green Jr, Chair

Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its November 1-2, 2024, meeting in Nome, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

For a more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcript and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Nissa Pilcher at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-891-9054, email [nissa\\_batespilcher@fws.gov](mailto:nissa_batespilcher@fws.gov).