

SEWARD PENINSULA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Via Teleconference

March 3-4, 2022

Invocation

Elmer Seetot gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Thursday, March 3 at 9:05 am. Council members Mary Freytag, Louis Green Jr., Leland Oyoumick, Martin Aukongak, Elmer Seetot, Jr., Robert Moses, Sr., and Ronald Kirk were present. Deahl Katchatag and Tom Gray were not present and were excused. The Council has one vacant seat. A quorum was established with seven of nine seated Council members participating by phone.

Attendees:

Via teleconference

- Katerina Wessels, Lisa Grediagin, Orville Lind, Nissa Pilcher, Jarrod Stone, Tom Plank, and Dr. Brent Vickers; Office of Subsistence Management (OSM), U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
- Jeannette Koelsch, Nikki Braem, Letty Hughes, Ken Adkisson and Victoria Florey; National Park Service (NPS)
- Bruce Seppi, Walker Gussey and Chris McKee; Bureau of Land Management (BLM)
- Jennifer Bell, William (Bill) Dunker, Nicole Edmison and Mark Burch; Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G)
- Dr. Glenn Chen and Rosalie Debenham; Bureau of Indian Affairs

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Mr. Aukongak, seconded by Mr. Seetot, to adopt the agenda with no changes other than the order.

The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Officers

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

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

Mr. Elmer Seetot was elected the Council's Secretary

The Council approved all officers on an interim basis, with plans to hold elections again in the fall 2022 when they can conduct an in-person meeting.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Mr. Seetot, to approve the fall 2021 meeting minutes as presented.

The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Leland Oyoumick of Unalakleet reported that fishing was very poor this year. The silvers (Coho Salmon) never showed up in large numbers – there were more king (Chinook Salmon) than silvers this year. The Chum Salmon didn't show up either. There were a lot of Pink Salmon, and some smelt. The tom cod (Saffron Cod) numbers are down, and they are small or juveniles. Fall moose hunting was good, although he was unsure of how any bear hunters had fared. Mr. Oyoumick also noted the weather had been very inconsistent during the winter months with several warming events, including two separate heavy rainfalls.

Mary Freytag of Unalakleet reported that they received quite a bit of rain in December and January, a family member collected ten gallons of water during that time. Ms. Freytag also noted in response to concerns from other members about difficulties with local users being able to harvest moose that in the AHTNA region, the Tribal corporation was successful in getting a good portion of the moose allocation reserved for just Tribal use.

Ronald Kirk of Stebbins reported that the winter has been weird. The flats are full of ice and air pockets; the community is having to warn the younger hunters to be careful. It is very slippery and dangerous out there. Mr. Kirk noted that many in his community were unable to harvest moose when the season was open.

Robert Moses of Golovin reported that the weather in his community has been warm and cold, with a lot of wind, especially from the South, and some high water. There wasn't a lot of tom cod or smelt this year, and less silver, Pink, and Chum salmon. Some of the silver and Chum salmon didn't look very good and had boils and sores on them. Mr. Moses said that the community has been out moose hunting, and there has been no caribou. Last year people had to travel a long way to get any. He also noted that there has been a big decline in seal over the last four or five years. There used to be so many that the bay was black with them. The seals that are here are losing their fur, and their skin is the wrong color, and they sometimes have a really difficult time breathing. When the hunters run across these seals, they just leave them alone. Maybe it is tied to lack of food in the ocean. Mr. Moses noted that people say there are no tom cod anymore, which may be the primary source of food that brings the seals into this bay. People used to catch 500 to 1000 tom cods and they relied on that for winter subsistence foods, and maybe it was that way with the *oogruk* [bearded seal] population too.

Martin Aukongak of Golovin reported that there wasn't any caribou this year and that he had to travel to Wainwright last week. People have been getting moose in the fall and now during the January season. There were a lot of bears before freeze-up. Trapping has been slower than the previous year, but one trapper in town got a wolverine. Crabbing has been better, but a rain event just took place and that may

slow crabbing down or make people move their pots further out. There are a lot of rabbits (snowshoe hare) and he saw a squirrel two days ago, which is very early. Mr. Aukongak also stated that people are getting trout (Arctic char) at camp.

Elmer Seetot of Brevig Mission reported on some recent caribou movement in his area and noted that there was a good cold spell in December, with very strong winds from the north. There was good sea ice cover, which will be helpful for the birds who had a rough time last year. There were two rain events over the winter, and everything is now starting to melt very fast.

Louis Green of Nome reported he had similar weather events and experiences as others. The salmon runs were very poor, and he heard reports that the tom cod were late or just never came. The moose season in Unit 22D was a little longer than it has been. While his family got a moose there were many that didn't. A moratorium on the moose may be necessary to bring the population back up again like they did in Unalakleet; people need food, but it is very competitive out there for the moose. People can spend thousands of dollars to get out there and get out far enough and don't end up with a moose. He noted that he has not heard of any real considerable hunting of caribou out of Nome other than those hunters that travel a far distance. Beluga hunting seemed to be successful in the fall; he was unable to go out but heard good reports from those that were. There are a few subsistence crabbers out. There wasn't a commercial crabbing season this year or last due to lack of a buyer. He also reported that he was unsure of bear hunting in the area, but he didn't see any or any sign when he was out. Mr. Green thanked everyone for their reports, that these reports are important to have this information documented; it tells the tale, and it lets the managers know that the eyes on the ground are paying attention and that we are passing along information to them.

Old Business

WSA21-01a: Requesting closure of Federal public lands in Units 23 and 26A to caribou hunting by non-Federally qualified users from August 1 to September 30, 2022

Ms. Nichole Edminson, ADF&G, presented information on the Western Arctic Caribou Herd (WACH). The NPS was unable to give their report as their WACH biologist was currently conducting field work on this herd

Mr. Tom Plank presented on WSA21-01. The Council had questions on what was driving the population decline – predation/food/climate, as well as what the herd being in 'preservative management' means. The Council also expressed concern over the lack of predator surveys and the lack of any proposed regulation changes made by the Western Arctic Caribou Herd Working Group to State or Federal hunts

- Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Mr. Aukongak, to support deferred special action request WSA21-01a as written. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.
- Justification is to support the Northwest Arctic Council's recommendations. The Council said that their region's users live off the same herd and the Council is backing its neighbors.

Review Joint Yukon Kuskokwim Delta, Western Interior, Eastern Interior, and Seward Peninsula Regional Advisory Councils letter to the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council (NPFMC) on bycatch for review and adoption.

Ms. Katerina Wessels presented the Joint Councils' letter to the Council. The Council discussion focused around the origin of and percentage of hatchery raised salmon that are in the Bering Sea, actions of other Councils on this letter, past regional requests on Chinook and Chum salmon bycatch caps, what entity has jurisdiction on the Yukon River for fisheries management, concern over the high levels of bycatch occurring and how those fish are disposed of, and the desire to request a zero bycatch allocation for the trawl fishermen or call for a moratorium on trawl fishing for a period of time.

- Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Ms. Freytag, to support the letter with the following amendments passed on a unanimous vote;
 - Reduce the Chinook Salmon bycatch to 10,000 fish,
 - Reduce the Chum Salmon bycatch to 150,000 fish,
 - Require that the two Tribal/subsistence seats on the NPFMC have no affiliation with a Community Development Quota fishery, and
 - Require that cameras be onboard ships 24/7 to serve as fisheries observers.

2021 Council Charter changes overview

Council had no discussion or questions after being given the overview

New Business

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Update

Mr. Jarred Stone presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program update. The priority information needs that the Council developed during the last cycle for the Seward Peninsula area are Chinook, Chum and Coho salmon abundance estimates for Boston, Fish, Paragon and Wagonwheel Rivers, Summer and fall Chum Salmon abundance estimates for the Agiapuk River drainage including American River and Igloo Creek, Chinook Salmon abundance estimates for the Unalakleet River, Chinook, Chum and Coho salmon abundance estimates for the Pikmiktalik River, and changes in Arctic Grayling, Dolly Varden, and Sheefish populations related to climate change.

Council questioned if any of these priority information needs will have a follow up. Mr. Stone provided information about the process and noted that none of these Seward Peninsula specific topics would be researched during the 2022 field season. Mr. Kirk and Council Chair Green both volunteered to view previous priority information needs from past cycles and discuss research concerns or local concerns with Mr. Stone during the summer 2022.

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Proposals

Mr. Stone informed the Council that the Federal Subsistence Board (Board) will be accepting proposals to change Federal regulations for the subsistence harvest of fish and shellfish on Federal public lands and waters for the 2023-2025 regulatory years for a period of at least 30 days upon the publication of the proposed rule in the Federal Register. The Board will consider proposals to change Federal subsistence

fish and shellfish seasons, harvest limits, methods, and means related to taking of fish for subsistence uses, as well as customary and traditional use determinations. The Council did not have any fish or shellfish proposals to submit currently.

Fisheries Closure Review Discussion

Mr. Stone presented to the Council the information on the Fisheries Closure Reviews that will come for Council's review and action during the fall 2022 meeting. The Council requested a brief list of the fisheries closures that will be under review for the fall 2022 meeting, which they received. None of the fisheries closures up for review are located in the Seward Peninsula Region, although there are three Yukon River drainage closures up for review in the Western Interior Region, where some Seward Peninsula residents have a customary and traditional use determination. Specifically, closures in Bonanza Creek, Kanuti River, and the Jim River will be reviewed.

Call for Non-rural Determination Proposals

Dr. Brent Vickers informed the Council that the Board will be accepting proposals to change non-rural determinations. The Council did not have any non-rural use proposals to submit currently.

Review and approve FY2021 annual report

Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Mr. Moses, to approve the report as written. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Wildlife Special Action WSA22-01 Federal Muskox Permit System

Ms. Lisa Grediagin presented to the Council the analysis on WSA22-01a. Temporary Wildlife Special Action WSA22-01a, submitted by the BLM and the NPS, requests 1) changing the Federal muskox permit system in Units 22 and 23 from a Federal registration permit to a Federal drawing permit, and 2) standardizing language in the delegation of authority letters.

The Council had a lengthy discussion on this request. The Council asked OSM questions on when the Board will be taking up the request, why it wasn't put in under the regular wildlife cycle, the actual change to the current process if this request was to be adopted. Staff explained that this request will not change any current practice, but instead temporarily modify Federal regulations so that the current practices can be maintained until a regulatory fix can be implemented. The Council also received clarification on the different permitting types and how and where they are dispersed.

Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Mr. Moses, to support WSA22-01. The motion passed on a unanimous vote. Justification was that the Council considered this a housekeeping request and recognized that the overharvest of muskox population is a concern. They felt administering the permit by random drawing to be the most equitable manner for distribution and would help protect the muskox population.

Fisheries temporary special action FSA22-01, -02, -03 and -04 requests for the Yukon River Chinook and Chum Salmon Fisheries

Dr. Vickers presented to the Council a synopsis on FSA22-01, -02, -03, and -04 as they were recently submitted, and a full analysis has not been conducted. The Council received clarification on the actions

of the two other Councils that had met and reviewed this special action requests; the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta Council supported the request with an amendment to exclude the Black River and the Western Interior Council supported the request with an amendment to include Coho Salmon in the request. Motion by Mr. Kirk, seconded by Oyounick, to support FSA22-01, -02, -03, and -04 with modifications requested by the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta and the Western Interior Councils on a unanimous vote (the Eastern Interior Council had not yet met to discuss this request at the time of this meeting). Justification was to support the requestors as well as the other Councils' amendments.

Federal Subsistence Board Annual Report Reply Process Review and Revision Discussion and Council comments and feedback

Ms. Grediagin and Ms. Wessels presented to the Council information on the current report reply process. The Council had no comments to forward on at this time.

Receiving Public Testimony Protocol – Guided Discussion

Ms. Grediagin led the Council through the discussion. The Council had no comments.

Briefing and Council comments on proposed actions to automate Federal subsistence permits

Ms. Grediagin presented to the Council information on the Office of Management and Budget's exploration to automate Federal subsistence permits. The Council noted that not everyone has the luxury of having access to the internet, much less to computers and other equipment that would be necessary to apply and receive permits online but did not take formal action.

Briefing on the Secretarial regulations proposing the inclusion of identified submerged lands in the Tongass National Forest

Ms. Grediagin presented to the Council information on this topic. The Council had no comments.

Agency Reports:

- Bering Land Bridge Preserve Report presented by Letty Hughes, Wildlife Biologist, and Nichole Braem, Cultural Anthropologist, NPS
- Bureau of Land Management Report presented by Tom Sparks, Wildlife Biologist, Anchorage Field Office, BLM
- Office of Subsistence Management Report presented by Lisa Grediagin, Wildlife Division Lead, OSM

Future Meeting Dates:

Fall meeting dates confirmed for October 4-5, 2022, in Nome

Winter meeting dates selected are March 22-23, 2023, in Nome



Nissa Pilcher, Subsistence Council Coordinator for Katerina Wessels, Designated Federal Officer

USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Louis Green Jr.", with a stylized flourish at the end.

Louis Green Jr., Chair
Seward Peninsula Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by Seward Peninsula Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2022 meeting, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

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.