

SEWARD PENINSULA SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Aurora Inn

Nome

October 4-5, 2022

Invocation:

Elmer Seetot provided an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order Tuesday, October 4, 2022, at 9:06 am. Council members Louis Green, Jr., Tom Gray, Deahl Katchatag, Ronald Kirk, Leland Oyoumick, and Elmer Seetot, Jr. were present in person. Martin Aukongak, Mary Freytag, and Robert Moses Sr. were not present and were excused. The Council has one vacant seat. Quorum was established with six of nine seated Council members present.

Attendees:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs (BIA): Rosalie Debenham
- Bureau of Land Management (BLM): Tom Sparks; Nome, Bruce Seppi*; Anchorage, Paul (Chris) McKee*, Walker Gussie*
- National Park Service (NPS): Bering Land Bridge National Preserve (BELA), Nome, Letty Hughes, Nicole Braem, Jeanette Koelsch*; Ken Atkinson*; Anchorage, Eva Patton*
- Office of Subsistence Management (OSM): Robbin La Vine, Jarred Stone, Hannah Voorhees, Nissa Pilcher, Brian Ubelaker*, Kevin Foley*, George Pappas*, Orville Lind*
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS): Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge, Boyd Blihovde*, Aaron Moses*; Regional Office, Jill Klein*
- U.S. Forest Service (USFS): DeAnna Perry
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G): Mark Burch*, Brendan Scanlon*, Helen Cold*, Morgan Urquia*, Nathan Cathcart*, Tyler Dann*, Sara Germain*, Alicia Carson*
- Native American Fish and Wildlife Society (NAFWS): Justin Leon*

* Denotes attended telephonically

Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Gray, seconded by Member Seetot, to adopt the agenda with the following changes:

- Move presentation by BELA on an Update on Fisheries Projects from agenda item Agency Reports to 2024 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program.
- Move presentation by NAFWS on Evaluating Sockeye Salmon Production in the Pilgrim River drainage from agenda item Agency Reports to the 2024 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program.

The motion passed unanimously.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Member Kirk seconded by Member Seetot, to approve the winter 2022 meeting minutes as presented.

The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports:

Deahl Katchatag of Unalakleet reported that local fishing was okay, but while there were closures for both commercial and subsistence users, the sport fishing lodge was still fishing. He noted that there was millions of Pink Salmon that went up the Unalakleet River before any commercial openers and expressed concern that these huge numbers of Pink Salmon may be depleting resources for other salmon species. Member Katchatag noted that spring seal hunting and fall moose hunting went well, but bird harvest was minimal. Overall, he stated, people seemed happy with their subsistence harvests, but climate change and water driven erosion is affecting the community.

Elmer Seetot of Brevig Mission reported that the spring marine mammal hunt was faster than typical due to the sea ice melting earlier, and salmon fishing wasn't very good with few Sockeye Salmon, and even limited numbers of Pink Salmon, although he was able to put up Chum Salmon. The frost was late this fall, and people were still berry picking through September although salmonberries were harder to find. Member Seetot noted that during the recent storm, the community's high banks were breached and there was a lot of beach erosion east and west of Brevig, which will impact the villages' ability to gather subsistence foods. Hunters reported some seabird die offs in the spring, but it didn't seem like it continued like other years, that summers have been warmer, and algae is more prevalent now, and maybe that change is another reason the salmon aren't returning. Member Seetot concluded by saying that the Council has traditional and ecological knowledge passed down from elders, the region shouldn't argue about resources, everyone needs to make sure to harvest in such a way that the resources will remain – hunters don't need to pull the trigger every time they see an animal, and that nature should be enjoyed as it is.

Tom Gray of Nome reported that it has been an interesting year, with a lot of snow, lots of wind, with a different sort of wind than the region is accustomed to. He noted that spring *oogruk* (seal) and beluga hunting was very good, water was high when the Niukluk River went out and a lot of trout (Arctic Char) and dollies (Dolly Varden) were available this summer, but the Silver (Coho Salmon) and Red (Sockeye Salmon) runs were very bad. This year he had to put up Pink Salmon and trout for dry fish, although it was good, the weather cooperated since last year it was too wet to be able to make dry fish even though there were more salmon. He reported that moose hunting in Nome goes fast – while the season in the regulation is two weeks, the quota can be harvested in a day or two, and if hunters are not prepared, they won't get a moose. Member Gray noted that due to the storm there was an additional State moose season

in a portion of Unit 18, and while it was a mess, he was glad that Golovin got their subsistence needs met. He reported that there are a lot of wolves in the area, which will mean a lot of dead moose this winter. He noted that he has seen a lot of algae in the rivers, but not every year as it depends on the weather. Last year there was too much rain and rivers were too high, and this fall there were a lot of salmonberries but no blueberries. Member Gray concluded by expressing interest documenting the genetics in localized salmon stocks to assist in limiting or stopping bycatch in the commercial groundfish trawling fishery.

Leland Oyoumick of Unalakleet reported that the fishing season wasn't very good, but people did get enough to taste this year, which is more opportunity than other subsistence users on the Yukon River got this season. He noted that he fishes with a rod and reel, because he can't physically pull a net anymore or afford one as nets are very expensive. Member Oyoumick stated that it is hard to compete with nets, and that it was sad that it all comes down to money. It is similar to what is happening in the oceans with commercial fishing right now; the people of this region, who are not politicians, are stuck in the middle. and the subsistence users just have to hope that there is some left over for them afterwards. Member Oyoumick heard that *oogruk* hunting was ok, and spring egg hunters were able to gather some eggs, but not a lot. He reported that the weather has been very changeable, elders told him that 'when the east wind blows, sleep some more' in the winter because it is hard to get things done when it is that windy, but now it is windy all the time. Member Oyoumick noted that moose season was good, quite a few young bulls were harvested, which are better eating than the bigger bulls, and that there may have been some successful bear hunters although most bear hunts are guided. He continued to say this guided hunting is fine since the bears compete with residents for moose, and no one in the community eats brown bear, although some people eat black bear, although they are not targeted for food. Member Oyoumick concluded by relaying that members of his community have expressed concern to him that the fish weir in the North River could be impacting salmon migration.

Ronald Kirk of Stebbins reported that the spring *oogruk* hunt was good, but not enough ice to go after walrus, and that fishing, including whitefish fishing, was good this fall, and spring bird hunting was also good. He also noted that the recent storm flooded the village and did some damage to some homes, which will be fixed, and eight homes will be relocated to higher ground. He reported that there are a lot of moose in the area and there is now also a larger wolf population and more bears, which has resulted in moose coming into the village and that reindeer (caribou) that were moving into the area keep moving by the village. He concluded that Stebbins is continuing to work on recovering from the storm.

Louis Green Jr. of Nome, the Council Chair, reported that he was unable to get out to do a spring hunt this year and the Red (Sockeye Salmon) run was very bad, but there were a lot of Pink Salmon. He ended up getting his salmon by dip netting on the Kenai River this summer. Chair Green stated that it is unfortunate that there is commercial fishing happening in the Seward Peninsula region at all, and that the high sea trawler fleet is impacting this region – hopefully the North Pacific Fishery Management Council will come to the next Council meeting to have a discussion on this. He reported that moose season went well for him, but only because he was prepared – moose season goes very fast, and it is expensive especially if the hunter isn't successful. He commented that a moose moratorium may need to be discussed for Nome, which would be a tough thing to do especially with poor salmon runs and the high

cost of commercial meat. Chair Green noted that the belugas are in the sound right now and it is difficult to sit in a meeting when the beluga nets could be out – hopefully others will be successful and get some meat up for the winter. He reported that the weather is still really wet, even heading into late fall, and that the berries were good this year especially the salmonberries. He concluded by saying that people are getting whitefish on the Kuzitrin River right now, and spring and fall bear hunts have been happening although he was not sure if the number is average compared with other years, and that bear hunting is good to help reduce their numbers to help with their competition for moose.

Service Awards:

Ms. Robbin La Vine presented Chair Green with a 10-year Length of Service Award, and Council Members Ronald Kirk, Leland Oyoumick, and Deahl Katchatag with 5-year Length of Service Awards.

Old Business:

The Council received presentations on the following topics:

- Federal Subsistence Board (Board) 805(c) Report summary
- Board FY2021 Annual Report Replies summary
- Special Actions update

New Business:

Fisheries Proposals and Closure Reviews:

Regional:

There were no regional fisheries proposals or closure reviews for this Council.

Crossover:

FP23-02: Revise customary and traditional use determination for Yukon River Salmon

The Council supported this proposal because they consider it important to provide subsistence opportunity, especially during a potential closure to non-Federally qualified subsistence users.

Motion by Member Gray, seconded by Member Kirk, to support fisheries proposal FP23-02.

The motion passed unanimously.

Statewide:

The Council did not take up any statewide fisheries proposal.

2024 Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program:

Ms. Letty Hughes, Mr. Nathan Cathcart, and Mr. Tyler Dann presented an update to the Council on Bering Land Bridge fish inventory and salmon genetics project. The Council clarified where the current

project was occurring, the potential for expansion of the project, as well as salmon migration and spawning behavior, and expressed concern over river wide weirs impacting salmon migration behavior.

Mr. Justin Leon presented information on evaluating Sockeye Salmon production in the Pilgrim River drainage as a new priority information need. The Council inquired about past lake fertilization amounts, historic carrying capacity of the lake, expressed concern with large amounts of algae in the freshwater systems and interest in creating a reliable and stable food source via this system.

Dr. Hannah Voorhees and Mr. Jarred Stone presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Priority Information Needs (PINs).

Motion by Member Gray, seconded by Member Kirk, to adopt the PINs for the Seward Peninsula Region:

- Chinook, Chum and Coho salmon abundance estimates for Boston, Fish, Paragon, and Wagonwheel rivers,
- Summer and Fall Chum salmon abundance estimate for the Agiapuk River drainage, including American River and Igloo Creek,
- Chinook, Chum, and Coho salmon abundance estimates for the Pikmiktalik River, with comparison to historical counts, and
- Changes in Arctic Grayling, Dolly Varden, and Sheefish populations related to climate change.

The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program

Mr. Stone informed the Council of an upcoming competitive funding opportunity through the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring Program.

Identify Issues for FY2022 Annual Report

The Council identified the following topics for inclusion into the FY2022 Annual Report:

- To reiterate to the Board the need for genetic and population data to be gathered on the resident caribou/reindeer population on the Seward Peninsula.
- To inform the Board of the Beluga Management Plan that is currently under development by the Beluga Whale Committee with assistance from local hunters.
- To inform the Board of this Council's concerns of Bering Sea and Aleutian Islands trawl fleet's impact to marine mammals caught as bycatch.

Motion made by Member Kirk, seconded by Member Gray to approve the Annual Report with these topics.

Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Fall 2022 Council application/nomination open season:

Ms. Nissa Pilcher updated the Council on the current application and nomination open season for Council membership.

Joint meeting: North American Caribou Workshop and Arctic Ungulate Conference in May 2023

Dr. Voorhees informed the Council about the Caribou and Ungulate Conference that will take place in May of 2023 in Anchorage. Council members verified that muskox would be a topic of discussion, who would be in attendance, and the intent of the conference. The Council noted they would like this topic to be revisited at the Winter 2023 meeting.

Member Gray made the motion to nominate Chair Green to attend the Conference to represent the Council, seconded by Member Seetot.

Motion passed by unanimous consent.

Council Member reimbursement for telephonic/internet expenses related to Council teleconference meetings

Ms. Pilcher informed the Council on how to get reimbursed for telephonic/internet expenses incurred during previous Council meetings held via teleconference. Council members noted the ineffectiveness of teleconferences and connectivity issues in rural Alaska.

Harvest of Wildlife for Sport Purposes in National Preserves

Ms. Eva Patton updated the Council on the intent of the NPS to enter regulations into the Federal Register on this subject.

State of Alaska Board of Fisheries proposals:

Ms. Pilcher gave an overview of the State of Alaska Board of Fisheries proposal packet. The Council discussed several proposals but did not take formal action on any.

Agency Reports:

- Bureau of Indian Affairs Update presented by Rosalie Debenham, BIA
- Bering Land Bridge National Preserve Update presented by Letty Hughes, NPS
- Bureau of Land Management, Nome Field Station Update presented by Tom Sparks, BLM
- Yukon Delta National Wildlife Refuge Update and Kuskokwim River Post Season Summary presented by Aaron Moses, USFWS
- Review of Arctic Area Subsistence Division Projects presented by Helen Cold, Division of Subsistence, ADF&G
- Office of Subsistence Management Update presented by Robbin La Vine, OSM

Future Meeting Dates:

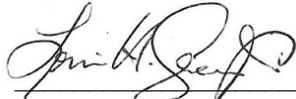
Winter meeting dates confirmed for March 22-23, 2023, in Nome

Fall meeting dates selected are November 1-2, 2023, in Nome



Nissa Pilcher, DFO

Office of Subsistence Management



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 March 22-23, 2023 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 transcripts and meeting handouts are available upon request. Contact Nissa Pilcher at 1-800-478-1456 (toll free) or 907-455-1847, or by email at nissa_batespilcher@fws.gov.