

KODIAK/ALEUTIANS SUBSISTENCE REGIONAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

Meeting Minutes

Audio Teleconference
Anchorage, Alaska
March 19, 2020

Invocation

Della Trumble gave an invocation.

Call to Order, Roll Call and Quorum Establishment

The meeting was called to order Thursday, March 19, 2020 at 8:36 am. Council members Sam Rohrer, Christopher Price, Coral Chernoff, Rebecca Skinner, Natasha Hayden, Pat Holmes, and Della Trumble were present in person. Melissa Berns was not present and was excused. The Council has two vacant seat(s). A quorum was established with seven of eight seated Council members participating by phone.

Donald Mike, Council Coordinator and Designated Federal Officer, facilitated the Kodiak/Aleutians Subsistence RAC public meeting via teleconference.

Attendees:

Via teleconference

- *Office of Subsistence Management (OSM), Anchorage:* Donald Mike, Scott Ayers, Thomas Doolittle, Orville Lind, Robbin La Vine
- *Kodiak National Wildlife Refuge (NWR), Kodiak:* Bill Pyle, Tevis Underwood, Joy Erlenbach, Kevin Van Hatten
- *Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADF&G), Anchorage:* Jackie Keating, Mark Burch
Kodiak: Tyler Lawson, Cassie Whiteside, Mark Witteveen
- *Izembek NWR, Cold Bay:* Pat Fitzmorris

Review and Adopt Agenda

Motion by Ms. Skinner, seconded by Mr. Rohrer, to adopt the agenda as read with the following changes:

- Add Sea Otter Working Group status under agenda item number 8.
- Add agency reports for Izembek NWR, Migratory Bird Management, and Marine Mammals under agenda item number 11.
- Delay election of Officers until all Council members are present on teleconference.

The motion passed unanimously.

Election of Officers

Ms. Della Trumble was elected Council Chair.

Ms. Rebecca Skinner was elected Council Vice Chair.

Ms. Melissa Berns was elected Council Secretary.

Review and Approve Previous Meeting Minutes

Motion by Mr. Pat Holmes, seconded by Mr. Christopher Price, to approve the winter 2019 meeting minutes with the following modifications: include data from presentation by Ms. Ellen Yasumiishi on ocean temperature in relation to fish survival; comments made Mr. Peter Devine on the unusual changes to kelp in the Sand Point area; Unimak Island Caribou bag limit data into the meeting summary; Buskin River Sockeye Salmon report and outlook; and under Council member report, correct the statement “Emperor Geese are off limits at least 50 feet.” The correct distance is “at least 500 feet” off the road system.

The motion passed unanimously.

Council Member and Chair Reports

Pat Holmes of Kodiak reported concerns regarding the weak run of salmon throughout the region. This, together with limited cod harvest by some residents, and the decrease in the size of Halibut, may be indicators that ocean temperatures may be affecting the fishery from Afognak Island to McLees River. Mr. Holmes shared that in April 2019, he requested the status update on the inclusion of the Kodiak area in the endangered western section of sea otters from the USFWS Marine Mammals Management Division. Mr. Holmes expressed a concern regarding vacant seats on the Council and stated that it is important to have long experienced members.

Sam Rohrer of Kodiak reported residents’ concerns regarding the deer population’s survival rate due to the last cold winter and high snowfall. Local observations and reports will indicate how the deer population survived the harsh winter condition.

Coral Chernoff of Kodiak reported that deer are reported to be dying from the recent harsh winter conditions. Ms. Chernoff attended the Southeast Sea Otter Stakeholder meeting in November held in Juneau. Approximately one hundred participants attended and breakout sessions were conducted to address sea otter issues and develop recommendations. The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) staff will compile recommendations and questions into a report and distribute to the participants. High levels of paralytic shellfish poisoning (PSP) were reported this winter and monitoring of PSP levels is continuing. Local residents have reported the hare population is declining in the area. The Alaska Migratory Bird Co-management Council (AMBCC) at its recent meeting heard reports that the ptarmigan population was down and will investigate and study the ptarmigan population.

Rebecca Skinner of Kodiak reported winter deer mortality due to higher snow levels in the Kodiak area and along the beaches. The community of Kodiak is preparing for COVID-19 safety measures and all meetings have been moved to teleconference. The commercial fish industry is also taking measures and planning for the fishing season. The COVID-19 will have a large impact on economy and fish markets. The North Pacific Fisheries Management Council cancelled its April 2020 meeting due to COVID-19 and will determine later if the June 2020 meeting will be face-to-face or via video/teleconference.

Natasha Hayden of Kodiak reported that the Native Village of Afognak hired a Tribal Administrator and the Tribe is planning its summer camp for kids in the area depending on the situation with COVID-19. Ms. Hayden listened in on the Southeast Sea Otter stakeholder meeting. She reported that it was very productive with a good cross section of interested parties. The Tribe has been dealing with blood quantum issues affecting local Tribal members and the Alutiiq people in general. Approximately only 40-50 percent of the people living in the Native Village of Afognak are eligible to harvest marine mammals. Ms. Hayden said that the eligibility rate is decreasing in her region. The Tribe is working on identifying ways to develop co-management (related to sea otters) with the tribes and USFWS for eligibility to harvest. The Tribe and local Native corporation attended a mariculture workshop related to kelp farming and have submitted a kelp farming application to the State of Alaska. The permitting process will take at least two years to complete. The fifth annual fundraiser and auction was held for the “Dig Afognak” and it was a success, raising nearly \$30,000.

Christopher Price of Unalaska is grateful that the State of Alaska has funding to do some monitoring and assessment work at McLees Lake.

Della Trumble of King Cove reported that the winter has been harsh with more snow than normal. Residents have been hunting caribou, but she has not received harvest data for the Unimak Caribou Herd. The commercial cod fishery had limited or little success. Forecast for the Pink Salmon harvest does not look promising and, with the recent COVID-19 infections, it will be a challenge for rural communities. Peter Pan Seafood is on the market for sale. Weather has been bad affecting the mail delivery on the Alaska Peninsula.

Chair’s Report: Chair Trumble reported on the recent April 2020 Federal Subsistence Board public meeting. The meeting initially was planned to take place in Gakona, but the in-person meeting was cancelled due to COVID-19. The meeting was rescheduled to be conducted via teleconference April 21-24, and 27.

Coordinator’s Report: Donald Mike, Council Coordinator, provided a briefing on the Kodiak/Aleutians Council sea otter working group. The working group is continuing its effort to meet via teleconference. Scheduling a meeting has been a challenge due to work schedules. Ms. Hayden expressed her willingness to serve on the sea otter working group. Current members of the working group are Chris Price, Rebecca Skinner, and Coral Chernoff.

Old Business

No old business in the meeting agenda.

New Business

Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program Update

Scott Ayers presented the Council with the Fisheries Resource Monitoring Program (FRMP) update. The FRMP program is seeking Council volunteers to identify knowledge gaps and information needs for management of subsistence fisheries in the region. Pat Holmes, Della Trumble, Christopher Price, and Rebecca Skinner volunteered to help develop priority information needs for their region. In addition to the Kodiak/Aleutians Council volunteer group, volunteers from the Bristol Bay Council will also be participating.

Call for Federal Fish and Shellfish Proposals

Scott Ayers informed the Council that the Board is accepting proposals through April 20, 2020 to change Federal regulations for the subsistence harvest of fish and shellfish on Federal public lands and waters for the 2021-2023 regulatory years. 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 and Federal Fishery closure reviews.

Review and approve FY2019 annual report

The Council reviewed and added an additional topic regarding the Federal Subsistence Board nominations process, and clarified the topic on agency reports for the Council's reference.

Agency Reports:

- Bill Pyle with Kodiak NWR presented the Refuge report. The Refuge conducted brown bear surveys and reported a significant decrease in the brown bear population in the Sturgeon River area. The decline in the population is likely due to a decline in seasonal food such as salmon.

During winter 2020, the deer population experienced high mortality due to heavy snowfall and cold temperatures. The Refuge is expecting higher mortality rates based on previous results of the deer population monitoring.

Cooperative projects and monitoring surveys will continue with the ADF&G on Roosevelt Elk, deer, bears, and goats.

The USFWS Marine Mammals Management office provided the Refuge with harvest data on Northern Sea Otter to include in the report from 1989 to 2019. Harvest of sea otters has not changed compared to other years. Also covered in the report were the nearshore marine bird surveys, fisheries update on the Buskin River, and ongoing assessment projects. The refuge

received funding for 2020 for invasive plant management to address canary grass in the Buskin River watershed and orange hawk weed in the Karluk Lake area.

- Kelly Krueger with Sun'aq Tribe of Kodiak presented concerns regarding the Northern Edge training activities occurring in the region. The Tribe is particularly concerned about impacts the training has on the marine and avian subsistence resources. The Tribe is also concerned about the Aerospace Corporation and its plans to expand their presence in the Narrow Cape area, which might impact subsistence resources. The Tribe also reported they have responded to Grey Whale strandings in the Kodiak Archipelago. The Tribe removed crayfish from the Buskin watershed area through grants from the USFWS and will seek funds to continue the removal of crayfish.
- Chandra Poe with Qawalangin Tribe announced the Tribe will be hosting a Coastal Communities Forum in Unalaska September 2-4, 2020 funded through the Bureau of Indian Affairs Tribal Resilience Grant. This forum was inspired by the 2016 Aleutian Life Forum. The Coastal Communities forum plans to bring together community members, partners, and research agencies to share knowledge and build networks. This forum is hoping to have broad participation from Southeast Alaska, Kodiak, Aleutians and Pribilof Islands, and Bering Sea communities.

Mr. Price reported the Tribe received funding from the Partners for Fisheries Monitoring program (Partners). The Partners program will work on fish enumerations and surveys in McLees Lake and anadromous streams around Unalaska. The Tribe extended its invitation to the Council to participate in the Coastal Communities Forum in Unalaska.

- Patrick Fitzmorris, Wildlife Biologist with Izembek NWR, provided biological updates on refuge brown bears, and Southern Peninsula and Unimak Island caribou herds. Mr. Fitzmorris presented the Migratory Bird Division update on the Emperor Goose survey and Stellar's Eider banding project. Swan surveys were also conducted and the refuge has continued monitoring eelgrass productivity. Mr. Fitzmorris reported that the wolf population in the area is healthy and currently there is a liberal harvest season.
- Steve Delehanty, Refuge Manager with Maritime NWR, reported that the refuge conducted surveys for caribou on Adak and Kagalaska Islands. Approximately 1200 caribou were counted on Adak Island. Caribou have recently migrated to Kagalaska Island, where 17 caribou were counted; numbers are expected to increase. The island is small so the habitat is not expected to sustain a growing herd. Mr. Delehanty also briefed the Council on the Arctic fox that were inadvertently introduced to Amaknak Island, where they are not native. Multiple agencies believe that the Arctic fox on Amaknak Island should be removed to protect the native red fox population from potential disease transmission.
- Julian Fischer with the USFWS Migratory Birds Division gave a summary report covering aerial survey methods, management plans for migratory birds, and a summary of hunts and population

surveys. Tamara Zeller presented her report on the Migratory Birds Division outreach and education efforts.

- The USFWS Marine Mammals Management Division provided a summary report to the Council. They reported on the results and activities of the Southeast Sea Otter stakeholder meeting. Information on the stakeholder meeting can be found on seaottersstakeholders.com. The Council stated on record that it would like to continue to support the Sea Otter stakeholders group.

Motion by Ms. Skinner, seconded by Mr. Holmes, to send a correspondence from the Council to the Marine Mammals Management Division requesting information on the Western sea otter population and why the Kodiak area is included with the Western population. The motion included an information request on how and who determines the threshold of the sea otter population and if it is a part of the management plan. The motion also included a request for the five years of surveys conducted by the Marine Mammals Management Division to be distributed to the Council. The motion passed.

- Jackie Keating with the ADF&G Division of Subsistence presented her report on funding received through the FRMP program to investigate changing regulations, changing environment, and changing fish harvest practices in Unalaska. The FRMP funding was also used to look at subsistence salmon and non-salmon fish harvest trends, focusing on Olga and Akalura Lakes on the south end of Kodiak Island. Lastly, the FRMP project funding went toward investigating subsistence harvest trends of salmon and non-salmon fish along the Kodiak road system.
- Mark Witteveen with ADF&G (Department) summarized the Department's assessment projects for Sockeye Salmon for the year and presented a summary of subsistence salmon harvest. Mr. Witteveen reported that the Department hired interns from Kodiak High School and is currently working to recruit summer interns for the upcoming 2020 season.
- Tyler Lawson with ADF&G reported that they received FRMP funding to continue work on the McLees Lake weir. The Department is currently working on the job description and plan to hire two technicians to manage the weir. Mr. Lawson also reported on the McLees Lake subsistence salmon harvest for 2018.
- Chris McKee, Wildlife Division Chief with OSM, presented the OSM report. The summary included an update on the Regional Advisory Council charters and the 2019 nominations. A total of 63 applications were received for this cycle. Sue Detwiler was hired as the OSM Assistant Regional Director.
- Orville Lind, Native Liaison for OSM, briefed the Council on Tribal engagement efforts. Tribal engagement sessions have been completed for all 10 subsistence regions. The primary purpose of the sessions was to provide an update on the Tribal Consultation process.

Future Meeting Dates:

Fall meeting: Unalaska, September 2-4, 2020

Winter meeting: Kodiak, March 9-10, 2021

Meeting Adjourned.

Donald Mike, Designated Federal Officer
USFWS Office of Subsistence Management

Della Trumble, Chair
Kodiak/Aleutians Subsistence Regional Advisory Council

These minutes will be formally considered by the Kodiak/Aleutians Subsistence Regional Advisory Council at its fall 2020 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 Donald Mike at 1-800-478-1456 or 907-786-3629, email donald_mike@fws.gov.