

## Meeting Minutes of KOVA SRC meeting held October 9-10, 2024

*Approved by Kobuk Valley SRC on 2/26/2025*

Disclaimer: These minutes of the meeting of the Subsistence Resource Commission are NOT an official transcript of the KOVA Commission proceedings. Rather, the minutes serve as a summary of the topics discussed and actions taken by the Commission and as an index to the audio recording of the meeting. The official record of the Commission proceedings is the audio recording. Minutes drafted on 10/28/24 by Emily Creek.

**Audio Recording File name:** *KOVA\_SRC\_Oct\_2024\_Day1, KOVA\_SRC\_Oct\_2024\_Day1\_2, KOVA\_SRC\_Oct\_2024\_Day2*

### 1. Call to Order

Chair, Tristen Pattee, called the meeting into session at 1:07pm on October 9. Quorum confirmed.

### 2. Invocation - Moment of Silence

### 3. Confirm Quorum- Emily Creek

Five members of the six filled seats. Quorum achieved.

### 4. Welcome and Introductions – Emily Creek

#### a. KOVA SRC members in person

- Merle Custer
- Tristen Pattee
- Nellie Griest
- Benny Westlake
- Gordon Newlin

**Absent:** Rosa Horner, excused for school board meeting in Kobuk

#### b. Agency Staff (NPS, Fish and Wildlife Service, ADFG, etc)

##### NPS Staff (WEAR)

- Emily Creek
- Brendan Doucet
- Raime Fronstin
- Matha Fronsin
- Scott Sample (phone)
- Kyle Joly (phone)

##### NPS Staff (Other)

- Eva Patton
- Zakary Delisle (phone)

##### OSM

- Lisa Hutchinson (phone)

#### ADFG Staff

- Alex Hansen
- Helen Cold (phone)
- Brennen Watson

#### Other

- Sebastian Zavoico (phone) UAF
- Taylor Stinchcomb (Phone) WCS

### **5. Approval of Minutes from past meetings.**

Minutes from October 2024 meetings approved by the Commission.

Motion: Merle Custer

Second: Benny Westlake

5/5 vote

### **6. Park's Welcome and Review of the Charter and Commission Purpose – Scott Sample**

### **7. Review and Adoption of Agenda**

Approved

Motion: Merle Custer

Second: Gordon Newlin

5/5 vote

### **8. Commission Membership Status and Elections if Needed -Emily Creek**

Emily gave update on SOI re-appointment and appointments. Vacancies discussed.

Decision to speak with Rosa as she has been inactive for a while and upper Kobuk AC is inactive, and to ask NWARAC to appoint Elmer Armstrong from Noorvik.

### **9. SRC Chair and Members' Reports**

Tristen Pattee: Caribou is the biggest one. On Kobuk River near Ambler, not very much. Some people got at Hunt River. I was just in Kivalina, a bunch north of there. And heard from friends in Noatak saw some crossing and heading south. Not a lot of people are seeing them yet in Ambler. There was quite a bit of people who got moose in Ambler, so that was good to have that resource available to people. Water level was very high for most of the summer so fishing was difficult for a lot of people. When the water dropped people set net and starting seining. Sii fish were good. That's all.

Gordon Newlin: We hardly have any interesting hunting in our area (Noorvik) this summer. Beside the fish is very very low. So much high water and all the dirt and stuff. Didn't get anything off the river this year. Hardly anyone got the fish they want. All the other animals like moose are not visible at all by our area. We could think of further areas to hunt, scheduling fuel and stuff its harder especially for most people.

Benny Westlake: Kiana, due to high water the salmon channel changed this year and nobody was able to get salmon at the sandbar in front of town like every other year for about a whole month. Beavers are

becoming a real big problem. Did air patrol and going up river with trespass program going up Squirrel towards Omar, I counted 5 big beaver houses within 15-20 foot radiance walls blocking from one lake to the river—6 or 7 foot drop from dam to water level of the river. So about 15-20 of those and be at least 3-5 in one lake. I think that—fish are going into the dams but not going out. The moose, lot of people heading up Squirrel getting moose. Black bear and a wolf running around together around town together, I am not the only one who's seen it. And then, few miles up Squirrel you can get your binoculars and see a gray dot and little blonde dot. So bears and wolves are still running around together. No caribou yet, one of my friends saw few hundred to a few thousand leave Noatak area coming south. So any day now. Berries were good, lot bigger.

Merle Custer: Shungnak, Like Benny said we got beaver problems. Wolves and bears, plus nobody got much fish this summer. People who went up their camps got sii fish good for the winter. Blueberries were abundant, I picked 8-9 gallons, more like marbles up there! Quite a few salmon berries. Fishing was bad, too much high water. People on the beach and we said watch out wolves on airport road and bears getting close to town. Everybody been watching out. People getting moose, they were happy. Like to get another, just in case we don't get caribou Got to have something to eat this winter besides beaver. Thank you.

Nellie Griest: We started raining July 5. Because we were playing Fourth of July games. Nonstop rain July and August. We didn't fish much. Have beaver problem in our camps down river and up river, so we never do seining. People that way way up river and were seining and got fish and could dry fish—sii fish and white fish. Didn't get salmon, nothing. Salmons didn't come. We live in the tundra so we had lots of berries—wolves and grizzly bear near the village. Hang out down the beach trying to find fish but there's no fish hanging. We don't see black bears no more, too many grizzlies. And beaver dams. The hot spring, no more hot spring. No more hot water. Big igloo, two story high. No soaking place—only little puddle is hot. We see beavers but they're so smart and we open water day time next morning always rebuilt it while we are sleeping. No more hot spring.

Tristen Pattee: Just to add to the bear thing. Heard about break-ins in Noatak, got into their siglauq. They're pretty hungry and taking some risks. One friend saw 17 of them going down. Springtime, caribou hung around Shungnak which is good for people to get caribou—but observation is they were taking a lot of cows. Which won't be good for our numbers. Hard to see. Hoping we can drive that point.

## **10. Park Report and Superintendent hiring update: Scott Sample**

Tristen Pattee: How does the Hunter Support Program work?

Emily Creek: Every year Maniilaq asks how many elders are in the community and then the price of fuel. And they have an algorithm and allocate money to each tribe, four times per year to cover different subsistence seasons. Money goes from Maniilaq to the tribe and the tribe does the reporting back to Maniilaq.

Tristen Pattee: Like Ambler, our tribe is going through our issues right now so we don't hear of anything going on. Is there a way to get more information and to find out if that money is being distributed?

Emily Creek: That's a good question and I can follow up with Cyrus and ask how they've been handling that with Ambler.

Nellie Griest: We just received ours in Shungnak.

Tristen Pattee: Oh cool. And did you already have culture camps or is this for future?

Emily Creek: This money will be for next summer and the one after that if there is more left. Will go to each community and will be for fuel.

Tristen Pattee: I think Aqqaluk Trust is doing camps.

Nellie Griest: Yeah.

Tristen Pattee: Have you talked to them?

Emily Creek: Nope not yet. So I am meeting with Charlie and Maniilaq to talk about how this distribution will be advertised and go, so its good to know Aqqaluk Trust is involved.

Nellie Griest: Aqqaluk used to send to the IRA. Our kids go when?

Merle Custer: Middle part of August.

Emily Creek: Awesome. Yeah so Charlie will be in charge of that and however each community does its culture camp is how we will distribute the funds.

Tristen Pattee: Maybe I can connect you with Lucy.

Emily Creek: At Aqqaluk?

Tristen Pattee: Yeah.

Emily Creek: Okay good. That's helpful information I will pass that on.

## **11. New Business**

### **A. Caribou:** Alex Hansen, ADFG. Kyle Joly, NPS.

Benny Westlake: I think one of the main problems besides hunting cows, is bears and wolves. For the past several years I have been watching them hunt together. The bears wait below the tree line, while the caribou are coming down the mountain, they hit the tundra and the wolves herd them towards the bears and ambush. A hunter once told a story where he took a bear and the caribou started crossing. So I think that's why they are staying north.

Tristen Pattee: Has there been a recent count?

Alex Hansen: [Shares that ADFG tried hard and did not get a count]

Tristen Pattee: Another question. Back in the 70s there was a low count, was there a strategy to help them?

Alex Hansen: We can recognize the 1976s regulations enacted at Board of Game. They reduced the total take on paper, regulation was 3,000-4,000 bulls for the herd which was drastic. Our recommendation now is 7,300 caribou. We don't feel like we got into this decline because of harvest. But we are at a position

now that we could make it worse by continued sustained harvest. The biggest component is cows is 0-700. If we shoot any, its not doing us any favors. Harvest of animals at a 0% rate, we are still declining.

Tristen Pattee: With the new regulation, is the enforcement going to be done more often?

Alex Hansen: Out trooper has been out trying to talk to people, its challenging as people are not overly accepting of that. We estimate our participation in the permit program to be 10, maybe 15% of hunters. So there is a lot of people out there that if we pushed the law to fullest extent could get in quite a bit of trouble, we are not interested in that. We want people to be successful and we want the harvest information. Enforcement is not what we are recommending right now. We want to educate before we punish.

Tristen Pattee: Throughout the fall time there was a lot of people posting on social media about airplanes, are they in fact disturbing the herd? Or is that just what people think?

Alex Hansen: We think that the non-local harvest is 2-3% of total population and all bulls. Biologically, not emotionally, that means nothing. I understand when people see folks coming back with caribou and antlers and meat having access where they are so far from your community, that it is frustrating. We did see with the federal land closure in unit 23, one of the transporters pulled out in August. Its hard to cross the Brook's Range in the rain—and with the weather they just can't get out. There was one transporter the whole season out of Kotzebue. We get about 100% reporting, and we guess when we get the data it will be ½ of what it used to be, 100-150 animals. Are they redirecting migrations? Kyle worked on a paper years ago that suggested it doesn't. I fly an aircraft and look at caribou all the time and see how they respond, we can change their movement for a moment but I cant disturb it from its path, that juts doesn't happen.

[BREAK, 10 MIN BREAK BACK AT 2:10PM]

## **Kova 2 55MIN**

### **B. Research Update**

#### **i. Beavers: Sebastian Zavoico and Carolyn Brown (for Helen Cold)**

Benny Westlake: Do you see beavers in the mountains away from the river? One year like ten years ago, I took a hike towards the mountains and I found a beaver wall eye level to me, half the size of the NPS here, and in the middle was a beaver dam, 25 foot radius and 10-13 feet high.

Sebastian: That's really high. We see that often around Nome. Also in Noatak at the tops of drainages. And we see beavers travel over the ridge tops.

Tristen Pattee: With the study, seems like beavers are having a big impact on climate change and the permafrost melt. At some point will they use this study to start controlling the impact?

Sebastian: that is beyond the scope of the study. What we want to do is create an impartial view of the impact and then its up to the land managers.

Benny Westlake: I notice how the banks on the river were nice and solid, and within the last 5-10 years we are starting to have bluffs fall in because of beaver dams. I see it going up the Squirrel, up towards Ambler, and down towards Noorvik. Last year I saw 17 beavers in 16-mile stretch.

## **ii. Wolf: Raime Fronstin**

Tristen Pattee: This is exciting.

Benny Westlake: Throughout the 6 years I've been on SRC and been asking, this is really nice. Really good job.

Tristen Pattee: So you'll have a good grasp on the population?

Raime Fronstin: We will have a minimum at least. I do have some other potential partners interested and other funding. And then we can get better estimates.

Tristen Pattee: is it known what is a good balance?

Raime Fronstin: That's one of the hardest things to study. And it depends on populations of caribou and moose.

Benny Westlake: Early this year in January or March, still dark at night. I mistake a black wolf as a bear—every time I don't take my gun we see something—sure enough we go to the dump and we had two spotlights, and we see fiery eyes by the burn box door. I put my spot light on it and its back was here [demonstrates] had at least 7 foot length. I was like, 'Get back in the truck.'

Raime Fronstin: If it is one they are more worried about you. If it's a pack I'd be worried.

[10 MIN BREAK, 3:30PM RETURN]

## **iii: IK Predator Studies: Taylor Stinchcomb**

Tristen Pattee: Do you plan to go to other village like Noatak or Kivalina?

Taylor Stinchcomb: If we are able to get connected, yes. We have capacity limits, as well as capacity and interest of community.

Benny Westlake: About ravens and bears. A few years back I did an investigation with the wildlife trooper. A hunter only took the lower intestines and bladder to sell and one thing I noticed is a pack of 20-30 wolves, they never touched the bear. That's how loyal they hunt together. Even the ravens were on the beach but never touched the bear. Even the next day. Thick trail of wolf tracks and never touched. I think they have a connection.

## **iv. Brown Bear: Zakery Delisle**

Tristen Pattee: Is there an effort to incorporate Indigenous Knowledge?

Emily Creek: I think that's where a project like Taylor's can play a really big role in that gap from these bigger wildlife surveys. And so having good communication about research is important so we can all kind of work together and put it all together.

**v. Giddings Film and Giddings Collection update: Emily Creek**

[22min of watching silent film footage from 1964]

Tristen Pattee: That's amazing.

Emily Creek: Yeah the museum will do a bit more work to make them go together and then we will go out to communities.

Tristen Pattee: And there is no sound?

Emily Creek: I don't believe so.

Benny Westlake: Don't even need sound, it was peaceful. Was more traditional back then.

Tristen Pattee: First time I saw my great grandpa moving! Its always been photos.

Benny Westlake: Only time I saw Shield that young!

**C. Eileen Devinney award presented to past-SRC Chair Shield Downey Jr**

Tristen Pattee: This is for all Kobuk Valley?

Emily Creek: All three parks, so last year the award was given to folks in Noatak who work on the Noatak Placenames Project in the Preserve.

Tristen Pattee: Oh cool.

ADJOURN FOR EVENING AT 4:30

Motion to close: Merle Custer

Second: Benny

5/5

RESUME AT 9AM OCT 10.

Meeting called to order at 9am, October 10<sup>th</sup>.

**12. Old Business: Emily Creek facilitate**

**i. Park updates**

**a. Cultural Resources: Brendan Doucet**

Tristen Pattee: For the trail to Giddings, has anything else come up with NANA?

Brendan Doucet: We are still working on possible options with NANA, but we are able to do the trail work for sure.

Tristen Pattee: The delay in that is just funding?

Brendan Doucet: Yeah. Will be in 2026.

**b. Subsistence Resources: Emily Creek**

Tristen Pattee: Where is Anigaaq?

Emily Creek: On the coast of Krusenstern, maybe about 30-45 min past Sisualik, 8 miles south of Sealing Point. Three cabins in a row.

Tristen Pattee: Have you found placenames that have been named wrong that will be corrected?

Emily Creek: Yes in some extent. A big goal is to get those names recorded and have spellings verified. The other thing down the line, is once these names are documented there is an opportunity to submit official name changes so maps can be updated.

**c. Natural Resource: Raime Fronstin**

Raime Fronstin: Has anyone seen any sheep on the landscape?

Nellie Griest: They're on the mountains by Kobuk. We always see them in June and July in the mountains when they come out. And someone was telling me there's more up there in the mountains. But people don't hunt them.

Tristen Pattee: Does this just show Kobuk Valley or is there a population in Gates of the Arctic?

Raime Fronstin: Yeah, these counts are just this area, Gates does their own counts. But we do know that other populations are also decreasing. Kyle? How is Gates' population?

Kyle Joly: There's areas we survey every year, those are the eastern portion of Gates and those populations are well down from previous highs in the 80s and 2000s. Stable, but nothing like they were. We try to survey the entire park but that only happens about once every ten years, and it's been about 10 years, so we don't have any updated info along the Noatak. But further east along Wrangells and Canada the populations are down over 50% as well.

Tristen Pattee: Is there a reason why it's only brown bears, not black bears.

Raime Fronstin: Every Inventory and Monitoring network picks vital signs and they selected brown bears during that process rather than both kinds of bears.

Kyle Joly: I would just add that the survey areas that were picked for brown bears were picked because they are open areas and that helps sightability. We don't see that many black bears out in the tundra.

Nellie Griest: We don't see black bears in Shungnak.

Emily Creek: Are there concerns about black bears?

Nellie Griest: Yeah.

Tristen Pattee: We see them by Onion Portage.

Gordon Newlin: In delta area campers have been having bears breaking in cabins. Last three years.

Raime Fronstin: more than usual?

Gordon Newlin: More damage. Looking for food.

Tristen Pattee: I had a question on the moose. What is considered a good ratio?

Raime Fronstin: For calves?

Tristen Pattee: Yeah, is this a good ratio?

Raime Fronstin: Yes, that's quite a good ratio. 17-100 is pretty good. Kyle, do you have any idea of where we draw the line from good ratios? Also depends on location specific trends.

Kyle Joly: 30 is really great. A lot of places survey in the fall, but you do surveys in the spring so you have potential over-winter mortality so you would expect ratios to be lower in spring than fall so 30 in spring is really good.

**ii. Regional Office: Eva Patton**

**iii. Other agency:** none present (ADFG presented day before)

**iv. Public Comment:** one member of public present. No comment.

**13. Close out SRC business**

Emily Creek: Before we close, I made a blank card if commission members would like to sign it for Shield's family.

ADJOURN

Motion: Benny Westlake

Second: Merle Custer

5/5, close meeting at 10:04am.