

DENALI SUBSISTENCE RESOURCE COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES

CERTIFIED BY CHAIR CHARLIE WRIGHT ON 9/10/2025

Wednesday, August 27, 2025

10 am to 5 pm or until Business is Completed

Totem Inn Conference Room

Mile 248.7 George Parks Highway, Healy

Teleconference Call-In Number: 866-810-1272

Participant Code: 5366629

The Superintendent of Denali National Park and Preserve and the Chairperson of the Denali Subsistence Resource Commission announce a forthcoming meeting of the Subsistence Resource Commission for Denali National Park and Preserve. The following agenda items will be discussed:

Wednesday, August 27, 2025 10:00 am -until business is completed

1. Call to Order – Chair Charlie Wright
2. Roll Call and Confirmation of Quorum – Amy Craver
3. Introductions – Charlie Wright
4. Additions and Corrections to Draft Agenda – Amy Craver
5. Superintendent’s Welcome – Brooke Merrell
6. Approval of Minutes from Last Commission Meetings- Charlie Wright
7. Commissioners’ Updates on Subsistence Issues/ Activities – Charlie Wright
8. Executive Session with SRC members – Charlie Wright
9. Discussion between SRC members and Superintendent – Charlie Wright
10. Public and Other Agency Comments
11. Old Business
12. New Business
 - a. Regional Office Update – Eva Patton
 - b. Status of SRC Vacancies – Amy Craver
 - c. Update on SAC funded Project – Amy Craver
13. Reports and Updates
 - a. Ranger Division Update – David Olson
 - b. Resources Update – Dave Schirokauer
 - c. Cultural Resources Update – Susannah Lemke
 - d. Fish and Wildlife Updates – Pat Owen
13. Public and Other Agency Comments
14. Set Time and Place for next Denali SRC Meeting
15. Adjournment

Date Wednesday, August 27, 2025 **Time** 10 am until Business is Completed

For Further Information Contact Amy Craver, Subsistence Coordinator
907-342-2877; amy_craver@nps.gov

1. Call to Order – Chair Charlie Wright
2. Roll Call and Confirmation of Quorum – Amy Craver
 - Amy Craver, Subsistence Resource Coordinator for DENA
 - Brooke Merrell, DENA Superintendent
 - Eva Patton, NPS Subsistence Program in Alaska
 - Dave Schiro, NPS Resources Team Lead
 - Pat Owens, Wildlife Resources
 - Penny G., local resident in lake Minchumina
 - Miki Collins, lake Minchumina resident
 - Charlie Wright, Tanana and Nenana resident
 - Andrew Johnson, Local resident in Cantwell
 - Coke Wallace Local resident in Healy
 - Victor
 - Kim Yokum at regional office
 - Karen Linnell, AITRC
 - Brooke McDavid, Council Coordinator for Subsistence (Eastern Interior &Yukon-Kuskokwim Region)
 - Nissa Pilcher, Council Coordinator for Subsistence (South Central Region)

3. Introductions – Charlie Wright

4. Additions and Corrections to Draft Agenda – Amy Craver
None

5. Superintendent's Welcome – Brooke Merrell

It is hard to believe that it is the fall SRC meeting already; summer has flown by. Brooke welcomes the opportunity to hear the big issues the SRC brings forward today and aims to get the issues in front of the DOI Deputy Secretary.

The biggest pressure on the park this year has been staffing levels related to the federal workforce reduction. Currently DENA is missing about 1/3 of their normal staff due to the Deferred Resignation Program, Voluntary Early Retirement, and the hiring freeze. We are currently optimistic that once the hiring freeze lifts in October, the park will be able to fill key positions. Cody is moving onto his next journey at Petrified Forest NP at the end of August.

This coming year (2026) everyone is looking forward to getting out to the West End of the park. The bridge touched down on the West side of the slide earlier this week! The park aims to have administrative access to the West End in July 2026, but there is a lot of work to be done to get the West ready for reopening in 2027.

Currently we are facilitating/processing a lot of right-of-ways, in the front country transportation corridor of the park for ALKNG, GEVA, the Alaska Railroad and a

multi-use pathway along the highway from Carlo Creek to Stampede with local partners.

Doyan Limited has been approaching the park for a few years as they would like the transfer of lands, Geese House, from the park to them. This area has cultural significance to their people. Geese House is a granite rock formation that is associated with an origin story and a story related to a group defending themselves from a raiding group. Brooke has worked with Doyan Limited on the pieces within her control including a joint land management aspect. Doyon Limited is currently working on a legislative piece in Congress to have this selection of land returned to them. For general awareness, if the lands remain as NPS lands, we will work to designate it as a sacred site.

Dave S.- A new trailhead, Tsenesdghaas Na' Trailhead was designated on the Parks Highway at Mile 231, earlier this summer. Tsenesdghaas Na' translates to "Rough Rock Creek" from Western Ahtna. New trails are being developed in this area.

6. Approval of Minutes from Last Commission Meetings- Charlie Wright

Everyone approves the notes. Amy will clean up the notes from the last mission due to lots of errors.

7. Commissioners' Updates on Subsistence Issues/ Activities – Charlie Wright

Overall Takeway: Adaption and flexibility is needed as we move through different and challenging times. Things are getting tougher, and it will get worse before it gets better. In working together, we can work to preserve cultures, traditions, and lifestyles.

Charlie: The current salmon numbers are exceptionally low and not only are people feeling it, but the overall ecosystem is suffering. Many villages don't have the necessary food stores, and the people are struggling. With a bad salmon run, people are not out on the river which has trickle down effects. If there isn't an improvement, people will have to find a new way of living. There are overall ecosystem changes that are occurring. Due to low salmon numbers, bears are struggling to find food and are becoming more aggressive in their search for food. Moose and caribou are in their low levels in their 100 year cycle, and more of them are being killed due to brushing along the roads by DOT. The State of Alaska is working on placing herds of bison, but it will be years before they are able to be hunted. It was a decent year for berries in the Interior.

Coke: Everything thrives when there are fish (salmon) in the streams. In part commercial fishing is creating these low numbers of salmon returning. If we can fix the fishing industry, there will be more salmon returning but there is the understanding that this is unlikely to ever see change.

Penny: This year due to a lack of food resources a bear did destroy a cabin and brought down a cache. This continues to highlight the impact on the ecosystem. It was a very poor berry year around Lake Minchumina.

In the last 2-3 years Lake Minchumina has been having an issue with unprepared individuals moving to the area as a by-product of reality TV shows. People who have watched the shows and are looking to live a subsistence life are moving to the area and unprepared. The community is bearing the burden of this as they are having to educate the newcomers on the way of life, on the dos and don'ts, and the ins and outs of subsistence. The community doesn't have the resources in order to help these people year-round and when it gets difficult it is hard to get Alaska State Troopers to the area. This community is having to step up and provide services that are not their responsibility. An additional issue that is becoming more common is that landowners are renting out their cabins in the area but don't remain on site to manage the renters.

Miki: Has current concerns with guided hunting companies bringing hunters out to Lake Minchumina. So far this year only four hunters were brought in, but what will this look like in the future? Having additional people hunting in these areas puts a strain on the resources and takes away animals that the locals are aiming to hunt. The Big Game Commercial Services Board is trying to limit how many guide areas a company can have in an effort to protect the subsistence users, but otherwise there is very little control over the guides. It is acknowledged that the NPS is stretched thin and that the rangers are always rotating making it hard to get to know the residents in the area.

Victor: Sees an overall decrease of spawning grounds in both NPS and State lands. Even in the wilderness areas of the Park, the number of salmon is decreasing. Due to the lack of food, bears are having to adapt what they are eating and it has been noticed that brown bears are hunting black bears. This is causing trickle-down issues as the black bears are staying further away from the rivers making it hard for them to be hunted. If this continues, there is the possibility that baiting might need to occur in order to ensure people can get their meat.

Nenana Culture Camp (Victor and Charlie): People have come from all over to attend this Culture Camp and the community would like to continue to host these culture camps while welcoming people to attend to learn more about their culture. This and past culture camps have included sewing, beading, making birch bark baskets, making medicinal salves, hunting, fishing, tufting, teaching of subsistence practices and healing from the land. It has been noted that these culture camps are helping kids reconnect with their communities and it is providing a stable place for some of these kids. Charlie has recently purchased some land and is hoping to use some of it to provide educational opportunities on gardens and animal management. These camps are providing an opportunity for people to connect across the state and to pass down these traditions and culture.

8. Executive Session with SRC members – Charlie Wright
Request of the NPS: Support for Culture Camps

In Culture Camps they would like to see:

Dog Mushing: working to keep this tradition alive. It would be an opportunity to connect with the Denali Kennels and to use the trails put in by the park.

Baisc Trapping (including beaver): an opportunity for a winter Culture Camp. The NPS has allowed one in the past and while they did not manage it, they did provide monetary support.

Hunting: would depend on the season.

AKGeo Bookstore: would welcome the opportunity to sell artwork by local artists and local medical herbs/plants which could potentially help fund the Culture camps.

Educational Opportunities for Visitors: opportunities throughout the year to interact with visitors in the park by preforming traditional dances, showcasing artwork, elder story sharing, music, and various traditional practices (making a fish wheel, cache, sleds, carvings, etc). Seeking to bring authenticity to the park in connections with the local tribes.

Auction off a couple of sheep tags for hunting in the park. The money raised could be used to support the local community.

9. Discussion between SRC members and Superintendent – Charlie Wright
Discussed the Executive Session topics with the NPS.

General Takeaways: The NPS welcomes the opportunity to support Culture Camps and to host artists, dancers, elders, etc. in the park to interact and educate visitors. This is a great opportunity that would benefit everyone.

Inclusion into a community makes a difference. By providing these young children/adults support they being to step up in their community and provide support for others, further creating a sense of community and sense of self-purpose. By allowing these activities in the park, the NPS would be providing the communities not only the opportunities to education staff and visitors on tradition and culture, but it would help strengthen these communities.

10. Public and Other Agency Comments
None

11. Old Business
None

12. New Business

a. Regional Office Update – Eva Patton

Recommends that the DENA SRC updates their letterhead

Amy has been successful in obtaining funding for Culture Camps and is hopeful that more funds can be secured in the future. Grant applications will come out this fall. If there are projects that SRC members are interested in doing, connect with Amy for assistance in the grant application.

The Alaska Regional Office was successful in getting Inflation Reduction Act funding to address food security and co-stewardship in the park communities. This grant funding is currently frozen, but they were working on getting unfrozen.

At the Regional Office, a lot of people left, but the Subsistence staff are still there. Dave Alberg is acting as the Federal Subsistence Member.

Federal Subsistence proposals are coming up next Spring (March/ April 2026). The DENA SRC will be meeting before this meeting and should address these proposals at their next meeting in order to provide recommendations.

b. Status of SRC Vacancies – Amy Craver

Current vacant appointments include: South Central. This appointment needs to be a member of the South Central Regional Advisory Council or a member of the Denali Fish and Game Advisory Committee.

An application has been received for the Tanana Appointment.

c. Update on SAC funded Project – Amy Craver

Funding was approved for an oral history project about sheep and bear hunting. Amy is working with Donald Charlie and the tribe to gather stories. There is the hope to collect these stories in Tanana at some point, but as there are no elders there is no timeframe as to when this might happen.

In 1988 oral histories were collected from Nenana, Tanana, Lake Minchumina and Birch Creek. Amy has hopes to get these oral histories to these communities in the future.

13. Reports and Updates

e. Ranger Division Update – David Olson

Currently two vacant Law Enforcement positions and a pilot position. There is one Law Enforcement ranger leaving in November, with a new ranger onboarding (John Shepard) around the same time. The Alaska Region is currently recruiting law enforcement rangers, so if you know of anyone who may be interested, connect them with David.

Hunting patrols have started, but they are currently limited for flights due to not having a park pilot. Much of the patrols will occur on foot this year.

In the Cantwell Area many of the Wilderness Boundary markers have been replaced over the last couple of years.

f. Resources Update – Dave Schirokauer

Fire Updates: Denali NPS had a robust fire team this year. Fuel reduction work occurred in the front country and around buildings in order to make it easier for fire fighters to fight the fire and allow for increased access. The work this season gives the park the ability, in the future, to use managed fire to mitigate future fire issues. Communities should consider writing a Community Wildlife Protection Plan which addresses in part fire management. In writing this and then getting it signed off by the state communities can apply for funds for fire/fuel treatments. The park cannot write this but is willing to help with the document.

A new geologist, Haley Williams, was hired. The University of Alaska Fairbanks and the USGS completed the fine scale permafrost mapping project along the road. This project will allow the park to get ahead of the curve and help us prioritize projects along the road.

g. Cultural Resources Update – Liz Gonzales-Negrete

Susannah Lemke was hired as the park Historian and Liz will be departing in the upcoming weeks.

Working to update the Denali Visitor Center exhibits by adding in information to emphasize subsistence and land use. They are also looking at adding an acknowledgment banner and a banner featuring greetings in multiple languages.

In relation to the fuels/fire mitigation projects occurring in the front country, surveys are being done before and after to ensure nothing is disturbed and if it is, to document it.

The Team is working on cultural sensitivity training for park staff and visiting researchers. There has been an increase in the number of reported artifacts found, but people are often leaving them where they are found allowing the park to protect them.

h. Fish and Wildlife Updates – Pat Owen (handout provided)

Amy and Pat issued 23 hunting permits in Cantwell this fall.

Bear Monitoring: To determine the effect of no traffic/traffic on bears, a project has been started to radio collar 18 bears along the park road corridor to study movements and behavior in relation to the absence and presence of traffic on the road. Currently there are 17 females and 1 male

bear collared. Five females currently have a total of 10 cubs of the year. The 2025 Bear Human Incident Management report will be out by early next year. There have been no major incidents this year

Sheep Updates: in collaboration with Alaska Department of Fish and Game, 30 Dall Sheep rams were fitted with GPS collars. A lot of survey work has occurred this work including ground and aerial counts.

Caribou Updates: the fall count will occur in September. Overall numbers are down, but they are starting to level off.

Moose Update: The park received Inflation Reduction Act funds in 2024 to conduct a moose survey as park of a three-park food security project. The current population is lower than before, but the numbers are alarming.

Avian Updates: We completed our first round of golden eagle surveys in the northern foothills of the Alaska Range. 54 incubating pairs were identified with 37 of them being successful at nesting.

13. Public and Other Agency Comments

- Karen Linnell, [AITRC](#)
Has been working on a variety of different research projects including a wolf tracking in Wrangell-St. Elias NPS, bear density in Denali NPS and Wrangell-St. Elias NPS (project not completed due to a lack of staff), sheep health (overall been reported to be on a decline; samples collected and sent out for testing), disease testing on the Copper River Salmon, and more. They also took over the duties of managing a fish weir on Tanada Creek and are assisting with the cultural preservation in Chitina to mitigate traffic over grave sites. A tribal citizen has been hired to work with Wrangell-St. Elias to map the tribal use of the land.
- Brooke McDavid
Fall Regional Advisory Council Meetings will occurring soon. All of these meetings will be available via tele-conference or via a computer. There is the proposal to shift and/or extend the fall moose season to alter in the fall and to increase ground bear harvest limit from 1 to 2 to match the state regulations. The Nelchina Caribou is adding more tools to the managers toolbox to determine if/when the numbers get high enough to allow for hunting.
- Eva Patton
Would like to encourage the DENA SRC to write to the Secretary of the Interior. As granted by ANILCA, these SRC has the right to contact the Secretary of the Interior; this is an avenue to voice their concerns about subsistence and to make them aware of the changes that are occurring. Wrangell-St. Elias SRC has recently done this.

- [The Katie John Ruling was upheld](#): the recent ruling determined that the definition of public lands is understood differently under ANILCA and that Congress ratified the original interpretation, which includes navigable waters traditionally used for salmon fishing.

14. Set Time and Place for next Denali SRC Meeting

February 18, 2025 (Wednesday); Teleconference Meeting

Backup Date: February 25, 2025 (Wednesday)

15. Adjournment