

GATES OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL PARK SUBSISTENCE RESOURCE COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes

Via Teams and Audio-conference
April 16, 2025

1. Call to Order, Roll Call, and Quorum Establishment:

The meeting was called to order on Wednesday, April 16, 2025 a little after 9am. Council members Taqulik Hepa, Jack Reakoff, Tristen Pattee, Gary Hanchett, and Raymond Woods were present via Teams and Pollock Simon Sr. was present via audio-conference. Esther Hugo, Susan Mekiana Morry, and Tim Fickus were not present and were excused. With 5 out of 9 seated Commission members present, quorum was established.

Attendees:

Participated via Teams

Mark Dowdle, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Fairbanks, Alaska
Ellen Lyons , Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Fairbanks, Alaska
Kyle Joly, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Denver, Colorado
Marcy Okada, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Fairbanks, Alaska
Matthew Cameron, Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve, Fairbanks, Alaska
Eva Patton, National Park Service Alaska Regional Office, Anchorage, Alaska
Kim Jochum, National Park Service Alaska Regional Office, Anchorage, Alaska
Dillon Patterson, National Park Service Alaska Regional Office, Anchorage, Alaska
Victoria Florey, National Park Service Alaska Regional Office, Anchorage, Alaska

Nissa Pilcher, Office of Subsistence Management, Fairbanks, Alaska
Erin Julianus, Bureau of Land Management, Fairbanks, Alaska
Alex Johnson, National Park Conservation Association, Anchorage, Alaska
Craig Jones, Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority, Fairbanks, Alaska

2. Moment of Silence: Chairperson Taqulik Hepa called for a moment of silence.

3. Review and Adopt Agenda:

Motion by Member Reakoff, seconded by Member Woods, to adopt the agenda as read. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

4. Review and Approve the Previous Meeting Minutes:

Motion by Member Reakoff, seconded by Member Hanchett, to approve the November 2025 meeting minutes as presented. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Member Hepa asked whether the meeting minutes could be posted on the Alaska National Park Service (NPS) website. Gates of the Arctic staff member, Marcy Okada shared that the NPS Alaska Regional

website has the most recent SRC meeting minutes available on-line. Member Reakoff asked whether there's a Gates of the Arctic Facebook page and suggested that it would be convenient to post SRC information on there. Gates of the Arctic staff will look into it.

5. Status of SRC Membership:

Pollock Simon Sr. – Western Interior RAC appointment, term expires 3/20/2028

Tristen Pattee – Northwest Arctic RAC appointment, term expires 10/17/2026

Esther Hugo – North Slope RAC appointment, term expires 4/5/2027

Jack Reakoff and Raymond Woods, Secretarial appointments that both expire 6/22/2025

Gary Hanchett, Secretarial appointment, term expires February 6, 2026

Tim Fickus and Taqulik Hepa, Governor of Alaska appointments that both expire 12/1/2024

Susan Mekiana Morry, Governor of Alaska appointment, term expires June 21, 2027

6. Set Time and Location for Next SRC Meeting:

The Commission confirmed their winter meeting dates and location: Primary – November 4-5, 2025 in Fairbanks with an alternate of December 2-3, 2025 in Fairbanks.

7. Council Member and Chair Reports:

Gary Hanchett of Fairbanks shared that he had nothing to report from Bettles.

Raymond Woods of Shungnak reported that they had a good harvest last fall on fish, moose, and it was very low on caribou. The caribou are in a different type of routine migration – they're showing up in late November/December in the Upper Kobuk. There's a beaver problem which is affecting the whitefish spawning areas and the growing wolf population is impacting the young caribou and moose calves.

Jack Reakoff of Wiseman reported that he attended the Western Interior Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Council meeting as Chair in February in Fairbanks and mainly fisheries issues were discussed. He also attended the Koyukuk River Advisory Committee meeting in April in Hughes and heard Alaska Department of Fish and Game moose, sheep, and Yukon River fisheries updates.. The South Slope of the Brooks Range had an enormous amount of snowfall, much of which came in January. Caribou showed up in mid-November and they're afraid of crossing the Dalton Highway. It wasn't the best year for sheep due to snow slides. The snowshoe hare population is starting to build back up and the wolf population is fairly healthy. There's also a lot of grouse and ptarmigan in the area.

Tristen Pattee of Ambler reported for the Upper Kobuk River communities that residents were catching caribou this spring and the caribou arrived late last fall – late October into November. People are seeing quite a bit of wolves in the area and they think they're the reason for the caribou decline. He's spreading the word that it's important to avoid taking cow caribou out of concern for the population decline. Been seeing moose in the area as well. With high water on the Kobuk River last summer, people weren't getting as much fish as usual. Once the water dropped, then people were catching sheefish and salmon. The grizzly bears that were harvested were really skinny and people think it's due to the lack of fish. With high fuel prices, people are being really strategic on when they go out hunting. Residents of Noatak have been seeing a lot of grizzly bears and a resident of Ambler caught a coyote which was very unusual.

Pollock Simon Sr. of Allakaket reported that it was a cold winter in Allakaket with a lot of snow, but spring may be right around the corner. Caribou continue to not be around and black bears have declined on the Koyukuk River. The wolf population is low and there's no king salmon or dog salmon. No one is allowed to put fish nets out for salmon. The cost of everything is going up and there's not much meat in

the store. Life is going to get tougher yet and moose, caribou, bears, and sheep are all declining. The hare population is coming back after some time and that means they're going to get more lynx. His son has been putting out beaver traps, so they been eating beaver meat.

Taqulik Hepa of Utqiagvik is the Chair of the SRC and she reported that there's a lot of snow on the North Slope. People are actively ice-fishing for qaaktaq (arctic cisco), tittaaliq (burbot), chars, lake trout, both in Anaktuvuk Pass and Nuiqsut and the fish seem to be healthy. She heard from hunters that the winter caribou have been in good condition. A lot of big wolves are being harvested as well as wolverines. The community of Anaktuvuk Pass has reactivated their Caribou Association and she attended a meeting in January. Heard from hunters in another North Slope community that harvested some wolves that there was an indication that the wolves had killed a polar bear. Ptarmigan and hares are also plentiful on the North Slope.

8. Gates of the Arctic SRC Charter

Discussed the most recent Charter signed by the previous Secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland in July 2023. The main discussion point was on the annual operating costs of \$95,000 and whether it's an adequate amount to support this Commission's work. It was agreed that it is enough to cover travel, per diem, and venue costs for the SRC meetings to occur. Additionally, there was discussion on the need for in-person meetings in our resident zone communities to hear public comments under the statutory requirements of Title VIII of the Alaska National Interest Lands Conservation Act (ANILCA). Within ANILCA related to SRCs, the discussion on hunting plan recommendations entails local hearings and the SRC's abilities to meet with the public which is contingent upon traveling to our resident zone communities. SRC meetings are a platform for the public to have a meaningful role in subsistence management.

Also discussed where the SRC records are housed, whether it be in the Fairbanks office for Gates of the Arctic, the National Park Service Regional Office, and the FACA database.

Motion by Member Reakoff, seconded by Member Hanchett, to adopt the Charter as presented with the accompanying discussion. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

9. December 2024 SRC Chairs Workshop Information Share

Chair Taqulik Hepa and Vice-Chair Jack Reakoff participated in the Workshop on behalf of the SRC and provided an update. Chair Hepa shared that there was a presentation on caribou from a southern Park which was really interesting. She really appreciated that there was a closed session where the Chairs from each SRC met and spoke together about collective concerns, improvements, and building strategy. There's similarities and common themes amongst the SRCs. The SRCs are interested in having joint SRC meetings to discuss similar issues of concern/things they could work towards. She mentioned that the atmosphere of the Workshop has really come a long way and she felt a sense of positivity – important things to talk about and important things to partner and work together on.

Vice-Chair Reakoff shared that he's always benefited from the Chairs Workshop – the commonality of various issues and how other SRCs deal with various issues.

10. Agency and Public Comments

There were no public comments.

11. RAC Meeting Updates – North Slope, Western Interior, Northwest Arctic

Marcy Okada gave the update for the Western Interior, North Slope, and Northwest Arctic RAC meetings. For the Western Interior RAC meeting, there was good public and Tribal member comments such as the importance of traditional ecological knowledge - how Elders have been sharing their knowledge and observations over the decades, but they feel like they've been sharing it over and over

with scientists and it doesn't make a difference. The Western Interior RAC also took action on a deferred federal wildlife proposal on the statewide sale of brown bear hides. The RAC voted to support this with the Office of Subsistence Management's modification language of creating the permit and the state will seal the hides. If this becomes a regulation, it will need to be codified for all game management units with a one or two bear bag limit before it's enacted. And then also for the call for wildlife proposals the RAC voted to let the game management unit 24A and 26B sheep hunting closure expire next year in 2026. So no renewal proposal will be submitted at this time. The RAC also took action on Board of Game statewide proposals as well.

For the North Slope RAC meeting - both Esther Hugo and Peter Earl Williams of Anaktuvuk Pass were in attendance at this meeting. Member Hugo's report at the RAC meeting was shared with the SRC since she wasn't able to attend the SRC meeting. The RAC took up the different wildlife proposals, the statewide sale of brown bear hides and they voted to support the proposal with the modification of the sale of brown bear hides, should be kept unregulated. Yet there should be an open sale on any number of bear hides, since it's not a protected species. Also, they also took action on some selected Board of Game statewide proposals as well. And Carmen Daggett, the Area Biologist in Utqiagvik shared an update for Unit 26A for the Teshekpuk Herd. It's the second highest population count from their most recent photo census last year. This winter has been milder compared to last year. Last spring, so spring of 2024, there was lots of caribou mortalities which might have been attributed to the cold spring winds. No moose or caribou surveys are going to be done this April since their focus energy will be on muskox surveys.

And for the Northwest Arctic RAC meeting – one of the things this RAC did was they reviewed current wildlife closures and for the Kotzebue region, unit 23, you know, there's a sheep harvest closure in the Baird Mountains for non-federally qualified users and the RAC voted to maintain this closure. And then also there's a closure for caribou hunting to non-federally qualified users around Noatak and they chose to maintain retaining disclosure as well. And for the deferred wildlife proposal, the statewide sale of brown bear hides, they voted to support this with OSM's modification to creating the permit, and the state will seal the hides. If this becomes a regulation, it will need to be codified for all GMUs (game management units) with a one or two bear bag limit before it's enacted. So this RAC voted similarly to the Western Interior RAC.

12. Federal Subsistence Board Update

Eva Patton gave the update starting off with Office of Subsistence Management (OSM) update. OSM has moved under the Assistant Secretary's Office of Policy Management and Budget and Crystal Ciisqu Leonetti is now the Director of OSM. There are now three additional Secretary of Interior appointed public members on the Federal Subsistence Board – Raymond Oney of Alakanuk in the YK Delta Region, Frank Woods from Dillingham, and Benjamin Payenna from Nome.

Eva shared that Alaska NPS Director Sarah Creachbaum retired and Dave Alberg who is the Deputy Director will be filling in as the Acting Director. Also, the Directors of the Bureau of Land Management and the Forest Service have retired.

It's a fisheries regulatory cycle and there were no fisheries proposals of relevance to Gates of the Arctic communities. The Federal Subsistence Board will take action on the Statewide sale of brown bear hides proposal at their summer work session in July.

13. Western Interior RAC Draft Sheep Management Strategy Discussion

Ellen Lyons shared NPS' review points with the SRC with Kyle Joly providing discussion details. Both NPS and the SRC have a shared goal of maintaining natural and healthy populations of Dall's sheep and both consider subsistence harvest of sheep, the priority consumptive use – allowing limited use subsistence harvest when the population can support it. NPS manages sheep at the game management unit

and sub game management unit level or even a finer geographic scale when there's the data to support it. Harvest restrictions would be implemented when the population cannot support it or when there's limited data. Special attention is given to the Itkillik Preserve to better understand the implications of sport hunting and subsistence hunting in the same area. NPS values and conducts remote monitoring of weather when we're analyzing data.

Focused discussion on the following: the distance sampling method, surveys conducted in July using aircraft, ram composition data, use of carrying capacity, and the use of annuli in harvest regulations. Distance sampling is used because it's more effective in collecting data in a huge area like Gates of the Arctic in an affordable way and it's the most statistically defensible way to do that. Distance sampling entails flying random transects chosen in a GIS system while figuring out how many sheep there are and how far off the transect they are. While a minimum count is going to an area and counting every single sheep. Member Reakoff's concerns about using distance sampling in July is that sheep are starting to spread out depending on the temperature – they can be higher or lower in elevation. Is the elevation where these random transects are, capturing where the sheep are during the time of day that the survey flights are occurring? There should be some fine-tuning of the elevation. Sightability could be a problem with distance sampling if it's all looking upslope of your transect and it's important to get composition data off of these transects. Doing surveys in mid-June would allow for collecting more composition data because it's still almost bare ground and rams and ewes are still in aggregation. In mid-June, sheep would stand out against the green mountain slopes and would be easy to survey and collect composition data.

Discussed collecting ram composition data and at which age class scale can the data be collected. Need to pick larger class sizes. Agreed that from the air – half curl, three quarter curl, and full curl data could be collected.

Member Woods shared that the sheep are in the canyons and using hiding places there in the late winter/early spring. He learned this from his dad who used to hunt off of drainages in the Upper Noatak River area.

Regarding carrying capacity, NPS feels that determining carrying capacity particularly in the past is not really feasible with the long-term monitoring data that is available and carrying capacity is affected by multiple variables that differ from year to year. Member Reakoff sees the importance of carrying capacity as what the sheep population can actually be, what is the mean point, what can the landscape support? There was a discussion on what would be an appropriate term besides carrying capacity.

Lastly, in relation to the use of annuli in harvest regulations, NPS will defer to the state regulations when they are not in conflict with NPS policies.

Motion by Member Reakoff, seconded by Member Woods, to have NPS staff reply and make edits to the Management Strategy based on our meeting discussion and present it back to the SRC for a final review in order to consider action at the next meeting in November. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

14. NPS Staff Reports

NPS Regional Office Subsistence Program Update

Eva Patton shared Regional staff changes – Regional Director Sarah Creachbaum retired, Grant Hilderbrand, former NPS Resources Regional Director took another position, and Maija Lukin, the NPS Native Relations Tribal Liaison Program Manager left her position. Justin Junge will be acting in Maija's position. Inflation Reduction Act (IRA) funding that NPS received is still in a holding pattern. Motion by Member Reakoff, seconded by Member Hanchett for the SRC to write a letter of appreciation for Sarah Creachbaum, NPS Regional Director. The motion passed on a unanimous vote.

Wildlife/Western Arctic Caribou Herd Update

Kyle Joly shared that the Western Arctic Caribou Herd were near the communities of Ambler, Shungnak, Kobuk, Noorvik, Selawik, Kiana, and not too far from Buckland, as well as Point Lay and Wainwright on the North Slope. Continuing to request that hunters avoid taking cow caribou. From November to March, 13% of the caribou collars were lost, so it's been a tough winter. There's 34 more GPS collars on the herd with a total of about 120 collared females in the herd.

Integrated Resources Update

Ellen Lyons shared the list of field projects that are slated to occur this coming field season, specifically that the Snowshoe Hare project that Donna DiFolco conducted will be taken up by BLM staff. She mentioned the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Sheep Collaring project. There's interest from the SRC to hear future updates about the Rusting Rivers project.

Subsistence Update

Marcy Okada shared that NPS funded an Upper Kobuk Comprehensive Harvest Survey project with the Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence. They're conducting their survey in Ambler this year and surveys in Shungnak and Kobuk next year. Also mentioned the Dall's Sheep Traditional Cultural Landscape project with Dr. Annette Watson who's working with the communities of Allakaket and Alatna. NPS has also funded a Carnivore Traditional Ecological Knowledge project in Anaktuvuk Pass with Dr. Taylor Stinchcomb who's with the Wildlife Conservation Society. Lastly, there's an Anaktuvuk Pass Project Jukebox project with UAF to include oral history interviews with Elders that were conducted by Margaret Blackman, Ed Hall, Joseph Sonnenfeld, and Grant Spearman.

GAAR Subsistence Management Plan

Marcy Okada went through the Subsistence Management Plan for Gates of the Arctic with the SRC for review and comments. This helped to provide an overview of the purpose of the SRC to newer members and the hunting plan recommendations that the SRC had historically submitted. Also pointed out that the original federal subsistence regulations were based off of the state regulations initially and throughout the years the regulations were modified to reflect rural subsistence priority through the wildlife and fishery proposal cycles. Shared information about our other Gates of the Arctic management plans such as our general management plan.

When discussing the subsistence management plan, the SRC felt that the RAC membership list should be kept current and there's no need to keep a running record of the RAC members in the past. Whereas it is important to keep a running record of all previous SRC members as well as current members.

Lastly, the subsistence management plan is supposed to be a living document and we need to find a way to categorize updates as they are added to the plan. Similar to the color-coding format for the paper document binders.


15. Closing Comments

All of the SRC members thought it was a good meeting and look forward to having their next meeting in-person. NPS staff thanked the SRC members for their time and dedication.

16. Adjourn

The meeting was adjourned at around 445pm on April 16, 2025.

Superintendent Mark Dowdle, DFO
Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve



Taqulik
Chair
Arctic

Taqulik Hepa, Chair
Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission

These minutes will be formally considered by the Gates of the Arctic National Park Subsistence Resource Commission at its November 2025 meeting in Fairbanks, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

A more detailed report of this meeting, copies of the transcripts, and meeting handouts are available upon request. Call Subsistence Coordinator, Marcy Okada at 907-455-0639 or email marcy_okada@nps.gov.