

**GATES OF THE ARCTIC NATIONAL PARK
SUBSISTENCE RESOURCE COMMISSION MEETING**
April 16, 2025
Via Teams and audio-conference

These meeting minutes were approved by the Chair of the GAAR SRC on June 12, 2025

Present:

SRC Members

Taqulik Hepa (Utqiagvik)
Jack Reakoff (Wiseman)
Pollock Simon Sr. (Allakaket by phone)
Gary Hanchett (Fairbanks)
Tristen Pattee (Ambler)
Raymond Woods (Shungnak)

National Park Service

Mark Dowdle - Superintendent
Ellen Lyons – Resources Program Manager
Marcy Okada – Subsistence Coordinator
Kyle Joly – Wildlife Biologist
Matt Cameron – Wildlife Biologist

Office of Subsistence Management

Nissa Pilcher – Western Interior RAC Coord.

Eva Patton – Region Subsistence Program Manager

Kim Jochum – Regional Subsistence Analyst
Dillon Patterson – Regional Subsistence Analyst
Victoria Florey – Regional Subsistence Analyst

Bureau of Land Management

Erin Julianus – Wildlife Biologist

National Park Conservation Association

Alex Johnson

Public Members:

National Park Conservation Association – Alex Johnson
Alaska Industrial Development and Export Authority – Craig Jones, Deputy Program Manager for the Ambler Access Project

1. Call to Order – Chair Taqulik Hepa
2. Moment of Silence
3. Quorum was established for the entirety of the meeting with 5-6 members in attendance.

4. Introductory welcome by Chair Taqulik Hepa and Superintendent Mark Dowdle

Mark Dowdle: Good morning and welcome everyone. I do wish that we were all together in Ambler this morning, but as with many things, flexibility and adaptability are important and I'm glad that we can gather by telephone and Teams as an alternative. This is a very important meeting and I thank you, Commissioners, for your dedication to stewardship of the land, your home, and resources of the place we call Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. Your contributions to ensuring now and for future generations, not only subsistence availability, but subsistence abundance makes a difference. Thank you for sharing your recommendations and your partnership, and I'm thankful for all of the dedicated stewards of the land and animals and fish - people that live on the land and people that dedicate their lives and careers to supporting and contributing to these stewardship efforts. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you for that warm welcome. Again, Taqulik Hepa from Utqiagvik. I'm the chair of the Gates of the Arctic Subsistence Resource Commission. I just want to start off by saying I know that we've transitioned to a new administration. And you know, even like not being able to make it to Ambler. You know, I'm not quite sure the uncertainty of, you know what is going to be, are we going to continue the role of the Commission as it's laid out of the SRCs around the state of Alaska. So I just want to encourage both Commissioners and Park Service staff and agency folks that are on line that communication is going to be really key, keeping us up to speed on any changes that may impact us. To continue to move forward with the priorities of the issues that we've been working on most recently.

I just want to wish everyone a warm welcome and a safe and bountiful spring this year and summer until we meet again. And I too was really looking forward to going to Ambler and you know that another day, another time. So maybe that could be our spring meeting or I don't know about November meetings.

But anyways, I just want to say that, you know communication is key. Understanding what our priorities and issues are that we want to continue to push forward. Any administrative changes that could impact you know our ability to make progress, must be known and we gotta figure out a good way to make that communication. So welcome to everyone.

5. Brief Introduction of Commission members, staff, and guests

Tristen Pattee representing Ambler.

Jack Reakoff and Wiseman, Alaska.

Raymond Woods, Shungnak, representing the Upper Kobuk

Gary Hanchett representing Bettles.

Pollock Simon Sr. from Allakaket.

I'm Ellen Lyons. I am the Resources Program Manager for Gates of the Arctic and Yukon-Charley Rivers National Preserve.

Hi everyone, my name is Alex Johnson, I'm the Arctic and Interior Alaska Campaign Director for the National Parks Conservation Association and I'm based in Anchorage.

Good morning, Madam Chair and Council members. My name is Matt Cameron, Wildlife Biologist for Gates of the Arctic. It's great to be on the call and hear your voices today, and I'm also sorry we're not seeing each other in-person in Ambler.

Good morning, I'm Kim Jochum. I work at the Regional Office Subsistence Program and excited to be here, but sad not to be in-person. Thanks.

Hi everyone, Kyle Joly, Wildlife Biologist for Gates of the Arctic and it's great to hear and see everyone. Yeah, the last time I was in Ambler, I was catching caribou, so I would like to get back there and do that again sometime.

Marcy Okada: Hi everyone. It's good to see you folks and thank you for bearing with me on the technology challenges this morning, but glad we're having our meeting.

Good morning everyone. Dillon Patterson. I'm an anthropologist with the Regional Subsistence Program based in Anchorage. Good to see everyone.

Hi, good morning everyone. Eva Patton with the National Park Service, Regional Subsistence Program in Anchorage.

Good morning, everybody. This is Nissa Pilcher, Council Coordinator for the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council with the Office of Subsistence Management.

Good morning everyone. I am Mark Dowdle with the National Park and I have the honor of serving as the Superintendent of Gate of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. Thank you.

6. Review and Adopt the Agenda (Chair)

Jack Reakoff: I make a motion to adopt the agenda as presented. It's pretty straightforward and I don't see any additions on my part.

Taqulik Hepa: There is a motion by Jack. Do we have a second?

Raymond Woods: I'll second it.

Taqulik Hepa: Seconded by Raymond. Any discussion? Hearing none.

Jack Reakoff: Question.

Taqulik Hepa: All those in favor of approving the agenda as presented say aye.

Everyone says aye.

Taqulik Hepa: All those opposed, so we have an agenda.

7. Review and Approve Meeting Minutes from November 13-14, 2025 Meeting (Chair)

Taqulik Hepa: I did receive mine via email, but I just want to make sure everyone did receive them? And then what is the wish of the Commission on those minutes?

Jack Reakoff: I make a motion to adopt the minutes from our November 13-14 meeting.

Taqulik Hepa: There's a motion by Jack.

Gary Hanchett: I'll second.

Taqulik Hepa: Seconded by Gary. Any discussion on the minutes?

Jack Reakoff: I didn't find any discrepancies.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you. Any other discussion? If not again, I know I've said this. I really like the transcription even though they're long minutes, they really capture the heart of the discussions and it's a great document to go back and reference. You know the discussions and the happenings of the SRC over time. And for the communities, Marcy, "Do we make these available online for people? Or send them out to the villages for outreach and education on what we're doing with the Gates of the Arctic?"

Marcy Okada: With backup from the Regional office, but we have on our Gates of the Arctic website, we reference the Regional Office Subsistence website which has uploaded our last meeting minutes, so November 2024. And so now we have our meeting minutes available on-line. And then we can reach out to our Tribes to let them know.

Taqulik Hepa: That would be wonderful. Thank you. I think I was in Anaktuvuk Pass, not that long ago, and there was some questions or just comments that were brought up about our Commission, and when I go back, I will mention that there will be a notice that meeting minutes have been posted, review them, and reach out to us. So thank you. Any other discussion?

Jack Reakoff: By discussing that aspect is Gates of the Arctic considered having a Facebook page? It's like a lot of refuges and so forth, have those. And then you could post links to our minutes or announcements if you get enough people. Watching that, especially on Anaktuvuk Pass, everybody's on Facebook. Then you could actually, you know, they would be aware of when the meetings are happening. They could even align to this, this meeting that we're having virtually. I think that would be a pretty good thing to do. That's what a lot of people are using.

And so we just had a Koyukuk Advisory Committee meeting. And one of our members, Michelle Quillin, she made a Koyukuk River Advisory Committee Facebook page and then you know we're posting what we were doing there and proposals and so forth. So that's something to think about. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you Jack for that.

Marcy Okada: Thank you, Madam Chair. We do have a Facebook page for Gates of the Arctic and Yukon-Charley. And so with your suggestion, Jack, that could be an avenue for us to be able to post our meeting minutes for the SRC meetings and we have a social media specialist that could help with that.

Jack Reakoff: If those pages don't post hardly ever, then the algorithm doesn't come up and so that's why they have to add something to it once in a while, so it keeps things going. I was unaware of the Facebook site and I haven't seen anything on it for a long time. So it has to be sort of active, also. Like this meeting – you know, pre-cursory kind of stuff. Back in March, you know this is not going to happen and so on, and you know how that all works. Thank you Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Jack and thank you, Marcy, for your response. I have a feeling if we do post a notice or just little snippets that our residents from our member communities would definitely have an interest because when we travel or just interact with people, they want to know what we're up to. So I think it will stimulate that connection that we can make improvements on with the people that live within or adjacent to the park. Thank you, Jack, for that recommendation. Any other discussion on the minutes?

Jack Reakoff: Offer a question.

Taqulik Hepa: Question has been called for all those in favor of approving the November 13-14, 2024 meeting minutes. Please say aye.

Everyone says aye.

Taqulik Hepa: All those opposed. Our meeting minutes have been passed.

8. Status of SRC Membership – Marcy Okada

Marcy Okada: Thank you, Madam Chair. Starting with Pollock Simon Sr., who's appointed by the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council, he was reappointed at the February Western Interior RAC meeting. So behind this roster is the reappointment letter for Pollock Simon Sr. His term is good until March 20th, 2028. Moving down to Tristen Pattee, who's appointed by the Northwest Arctic RAC. Tristen, your term is good until October 17th, 2026. Moving further down to Esther Hugo, who is appointed by the North Slope RAC, she was reappointed last year and her appointment is good until April 2027.

Next, moving to the Secretarial appointments, Jack Reakoff, your term expires coming up this June, but you can continue to serve. We will be resubmitting your application for reappointment, but should your term expire, you can continue to serve at the pleasure of the appointing source, which is the Secretary of Interior. Next is Raymond Woods, same thing, Secretarial appointment, good till June 2025. And then next is Gary Hanchett, Secretarial appointment. Good until February 2026.

Next are the Governor of Alaska appointments. Tim Fickus -Tim's term expired this past December 2024. I spoke to Tim and at this time, Tim would like to step down from our Commission. But he would like to try and make it to our November meeting that's scheduled for Fairbanks - just to close out his membership with one last meeting. So that's all pending I did receive interest from Janet Bifelt from Hughes. Incidentally, she's Hugh Bifelt's wife. She has shown interest in joining this Commission. Unfortunately, she

cannot make it to our meeting today. But I will follow up with Janet to help with the application process. Taqulik Hepa is next. Your term expired, similar to Tim's this past December 2024. I know you've reapplied and your application is in the queue. Not sure if you've heard any status report on your application since then? If you've heard anything from the governor's office?

Taqulik Hepa: No, I have not heard anything back. But maybe if I could, maybe I'll follow up with the Boards staff.

Marcy Okada: Thank you Taqulik. And then lastly, Susan Mekiana Morry, Anaktuvuk Pass. She applied last year and her appointment is good til June 2027.

Jack Reakoff: I want to ask Marcy, when are you going to submit my application? What's the application period for those Secretarial appointments?

Marcy Okada: Again, with assistance from our Regional Office Subsistence team. Both your and Raymond's application will be submitted during the open call, which I'm not sure when that time frame is going to be?

Eva Patton: Thanks Marcy and Jack. So with the new administration coming on, there was a hold put on all Federal Register notices. And that's the process by which we announce and receive Secretary of Interior nominations and applications for the Subsistence Resource Commissions. And we just heard recently from our National Park Service, our Washington Office Policy Coordinator, that oversees all NPS advisory committees and she let us know that that hold on Federal Register notices had been lifted and that they would be resuming with that announcement process. It typically takes 90 days. At least that's the time frame that when we announce the SRC meetings publicly that goes also through the Federal Register notice process and it typically takes about 90 days from putting it into the system to it being announced online. So we're maybe, you know, a month or two out. I'll check back in with our Washington office just to see if she can give us a better timeline for when we might be able to see that Federal Register notice. But I would encourage you know everyone that whose appointment has expired or will be expiring to get your reapplication materials into Marcy. And then we can get that submitted right away once that Federal Register notice opens. And we'll keep everybody posted once we know for sure. Thank you.

Jack Reakoff: Thank you. One other note there, Madam Chair. Janet Bifelt - we had that meeting, the Koyukuk River Advisory Committee meeting was held in Hughes. I got weathered out. We did it virtually, but she was elected to be on the Koyukuk River Advisory Committee. So Janet Bifelt is on the Advisory Committee and she wants to become more active in this whole process, so I would encourage you know, working with Janet to get her application into the governor's office, which is a completely different process. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you. I think that's good. Thank you for sharing that and any other questions or comments or discussion on the report of our membership.

Eva Patton: I forgot to mention too. As Marcy noted, and it was reconfirmed by our Washington Policy person that currently it's in your charter and recognized by the Secretary's office that this came about because there was delays in Secretary of Interior appointments in the past. That we have a mechanism in place that ensures that current Secretary of Interior appointments can continue to serve and be active on the SRC until new appointments are made. So in cases like this, where there's a delay in the application or appointment process, current SRC members appointed through the Secretary's office, their seat is still valid and current until a new appointment is made. So you know, just anticipating that there would be a delay with those whose appointments expire in June this summer that you will still be, you know, full member of the SRC until the Secretary makes a following appointment decision. So everybody's good to go still. Just wanted to reconfirm that.

9. Set time and location for next SRC meeting

Taqulik Hepa: I just you know, we should really strive hard when we select these dates and to inform each member that has been appointed or is in the current position pending that we're all there. Getting it on our calendars early is so important. I think it's been a long time since we've had a full SRC Commissioner meeting and it's much needed, you know, for us to all be engaged. Understand what the issues or topics or concerns are from each of our communities, villages within the Gates of the Arctic. I just wanted to mention that so we should really try hard and advocate with each member to make sure that they can be present at all possible.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, the main questions are do we have any conflicting? Marcy, do you have a conflicting calendar like TCC (Tanana Chiefs Conference) meetings and all these other kinds of meetings that get in the way of selecting a workable date? I don't know what's going on. I do know the Board of Fish is meeting earlier, like on November 18. So that might take oxygen out of the room. I would be more inclined to go to the first part of November for this calendar. That would be my sort of preference in Fairbanks, but it's up to the SRC members. If you know of any conflicting meetings in like the week of the 3rd, 4th, 5th around in there? Fourth and 5th would be probably Tuesday, Wednesday. We're having trouble with quorum 'cause people go off to other meetings. And the Regional Councils and the Advisory Committees. We've had people not be able to attend because they're doing other meetings. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Jack. Marcy, are you aware of any other meetings that in addition to the meeting you mentioned about the fisheries around the 18th?

Marcy Okada: Thank you Jack for pointing this out. I do try to include in your meeting packet calendars, any meetings that are already scheduled and I do receive Board of Fish and Board of Game meeting notices via e-mail, but I just checked my e-mail and I wasn't aware of this Board of Fish meeting. In regards to the Tanana Chiefs Board meeting that was scheduled last year at the same time that our SRC meeting was last November. Normally, Tanana Chiefs Conference has their annual convention in March, middle of March and that last year's November meeting was kind of, you know, it was the second Board meeting for them, that was unanticipated. You know, like when we meet in April, didn't know at the time that they were gonna have a Board meeting in November 'cause it hadn't been announced yet. But I do understand your concern, 'cause once we do put our meeting dates into the Federal Register as a notice, we're locked into your meeting dates, essentially. And you know, we're always planning our November meeting in April, so it's hard to say what's gonna pop up in the next couple of months or so. But to the best of my knowledge with the calendar that's in your meeting packet and with your announcement of the Board of Fish meeting that week of November 17th, we'll try and move ahead to schedule for the November meeting as best we can.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, I just threw out the dates of the 5th and 6th of November in Fairbanks as a primary, and let's discuss that. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Jack. So the first primary date that has been thrown out is November 5-6 in Fairbanks. That works for me. I don't have anything scheduled at this moment and I like that it's not close to the Veteran's Day holiday. Hope we have plans for that, so that's good. Any other comments on the 5th and 6th of November for Fairbanks?

Tristen Pattee: Through the Chair, I am traveling on November 6th back to Red Dog. I like the 4th and 5th, if that's possible. Otherwise, I'll have to call in partial day on the 6th.

Taqulik Hepa: That'll work for me too, Tristen.

Jack Reakoff: I'm good with that.

Raymond Woods: Good for Raymond.

Pollock Simon Sr.: This part of the meeting is good for me.

Gary Hanchett: I'm just wondering if there's any local elections cause Tuesday is the first Tuesday of November and that might interfere if it were the 4th? I'm not sure if there is any. I'm not aware of any. Otherwise, it's good for me.

Taqulik Hepa: I sense that we have a consensus that's a good date, noting that there may be an election on that day.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, I make a motion to have our next meeting for November 4-5 in Fairbanks.

Gary Hanchett: I'll second.

Taqulik Hepa: Motion made by Jack. Seconded by Gary. November 4-5 in Fairbanks for our next meeting. All those in favor of selecting this as their primary date, say aye.

Everyone says aye.

Taqulik Hepa: So we have the primary and then an alternative date. I was gonna say, Tristen, when do you get off? Or when will you be released from Red Dog?

Tristen Pattee: I am at Red Dog scheduled from November 6 to the 20th, but anywhere in those dates while I'm at Red Dog and not traveling, I could join on-line. But yeah, I'll be traveling on the 6th of November and then out of Red Dog on the 20th of November.

Taqulik Hepa: I'm flexible, so I'll go with the discussions of the Commission that are on-line.

Jack Reakoff: I don't want to get in conflict with Thanksgiving. So how about the schedule goes through December? How about like Wednesday, the 3rd and Thursday, the 4th of December?

Taqulik Hepa: Yeah, I like that. How's everyone else's schedule during that time? The 3rd and 4th of December.

Tristen Pattee: Through the Chair, I travel back to Red Dog on the 4th.

Jack Reakoff: Okay. Second and third of December?

Tristen Pattee: That would work for me and thank you all for being flexible with my schedule. I appreciate it.

Taqulik Hepa: A second alternative date would be December 2nd and 3rd. Any other discussion from our members?

Raymond Woods: Good for Raymond. Thank you

Taqulik Hepa: Gary, are you good with the date?

Gary Hanchett: Yes.

Taqulik Hepa: Okay Pollock. How does December 2nd and 3rd as the second alternative date work for you for a meeting in Fairbanks?

Marcy Okada: He might have stepped away from the phone.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, I'll make a motion to schedule our secondary selection for December 2nd – 3rd in Fairbanks.

Taqulik Hepa: Yes, there's a motion by Jack as the alternative dates in Fairbanks would be December 2nd and 3rd. Do we have a second?

Raymond Woods: Second by Raymond.

Taqulik Hepa: Seconded by Raymond. All those in favor with those dates as the alternative date, say aye.

Everyone says aye.

Taqulik Hepa: All those opposed. Okay Marcy, you've got your dates and just please reach out to the other members that aren't present to let them know that they need to work this on their calendar. That would be great. Thank you.

10. SRC Member Community Reports

SRC Member Reports

Taqulik Hepa: So we're going to continue on and we'll open up our Subsistence Resource Commission member reports and I'll go in backwards order to mix up our flow. I think we have Gary, as our first one, we'll go. Gary, Raymond, Jack, Tristen, and then Pollock. And then I'll end.

Gary Hanchett: This is Gary. Nothing to report from Bettles.

Raymond Woods: Well, good morning for you guys. I'm three hours ahead of you guys right now. I'm calling in from Texas. The reason being is I'm down here in Texas with my wife, got some health issues and then I've been away from Alaska for about 5 months or so. But anyway, everything's going good. Looking good. We'll be heading back to Alaska soon with the geese and ducks migration, I hope.

But anyway, I missed the November meeting, but we had a good harvest last fall on fish, moose, and very low on caribou. Caribou is their migration is kind of slow this year. We don't have the luxury of getting all our bulls on the Shungnak River or the Upper Kobuk. Ambler might have a few and down by Kiana, I heard the caribou was moving through that area anyway last fall. Very low on the bulls for our fall season, but we had a good moose season. Moose was all over. We harvest our moose anyway, my family harvest. The Woods family we got a big camp up about 13 miles above Kobuk and we all get together and harvest together, and we do some whitefish seining. We had a good season to dry the whitefish and also sheefish to put away for the fall. Very low on salmon because during the salmon run in August, we had very high water on the Upper Kobuk. Kind of the factor to the migration of the salmon going up and they were way up inside sloughs. But anyway, we had a good season.

Caribou is actually in the different type of routine migration now. They're showing up late November or December to Upper Kobuk. They're still hanging around right now, but they'll start heading north soon. So very low on bulls. So but anyway, that's what's happening with our harvest.

On my last meeting with the Tribal, we had a Carnivore meeting a representative to tell us about the Carnivore report. Some of our ice fishing for bigger whitefish, we seem to have a beaver problem, damaging the little tributaries into the Kobuk River. What happened with the whitefish is what they do, they will spend their summers on the river, but in the winters they go into the lake. And they would go and spawn into the river in the fall. The beavers are damning these little tributaries and sloughs in the lakes that they winter on, so we're having low counts on the whitefish this year, and also the high water was a factor to it too, but anyway.

The Tribal Council, we're having meetings about it. We're talking about it and their concern is about doing something with the beavers on the sloughs and the tributaries, damming the tributaries into the Kobuk. But anyway, the report was on wolves. The Tribal Council, the President/Chair reported that 30 wolves were shot on the Upper Kobuk this year. So that's a good count for eliminating the wolf from... The wolf seems to be the problem right now for the young calves, like for moose and caribou. But anyway, we had a good fall and we had a good winter.

So anyway, in my position right now I had to step down from the Regional Advisory Council because of tending my wife down here in Texas and I also stepped down from the Shungnak Tribal Council this year, but I'm still with the SRC, which is good, I can do. I'm heading back up north again soon, but that's my report. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Arigaa Raymond and I know we'll keep your wife in our prayers and for her to continue to have good health and a speedy recovery to full health. And you gotta do what you gotta do to be there with your family. But your report was very good. Thank you for sharing that. Any questions from the Commission first and then I'll open it up to those others online. Any staff or any others online that wanna make a comment to his report? Thank you, Raymond, for your report. Jack, I'm just gonna step away for two minutes.

Jack Reakoff: OK. Thank you, Madam Chair. So the Western Interior Regional Council, which I'm on that RAC - we met in February 25 and 26 in Fairbanks, and basically discussing fisheries issues, but also other issues that affect the Region. The Koyukuk River Advisory Committee met just a few days ago on the 9th of April in Hughes and we discussed various fisheries issues and then we had Glenn Stout, the Area biologist and Deena Jallen with the Department of Fish and Game in-season manager for the Yukon River give

us reports. Basically, we're talking quite a bit about moose populations and the presentation was brief on the sheep collaring project and moose collaring projects on the Koyukuk River.

Here in Wiseman in the South Slope of the Brooks Range, unlike the southern part of Alaska, is running between 150 to 200% over normal snowfall. We've had 109 1/2 inches of snow fall out of the sky. Here in Wiseman, I take weather daily for the National Weather Service, we had 52 inches of snowfall only in January alone. And so January, we got pounded with snow and there was some of that snow was pretty wet and we had a little bit of rain on the snow in the valley. I didn't detect any crust above about 800 feet in elevation. We had strong winds, really strong winds in mid February and so it ripped the snow off the tops of the mountains which helps the sheep out.

And we had caribou arrive here in mid November is when caribou showed up here. I didn't know where they came from, but Glenn Stout provided a diagram showing the different herds that are in the Brooks Range, and so the caribou that we had right here are Central Arctic. They do not go down the middle of the valley. They're afraid of the road and they went west of the road, they went through Galbraith Lake through the Itkillik Preserve and they've come all the way down here to the latitude of Wiseman. And so we've had, you know, like 400-500 caribou just to the west of Wiseman here. They were pretty thin when they got here, and so then it got really deep snow and they're having a little bit of a pretty tough time with that deep snow. They're in a snow shadow area to the west of us right on the park boundary. And then that wind come and I saw caribou right on top of the mountains. They went right to the tops of the mountains to get out where they can walk around and don't have to dig through the snow. So when we were pulling traps in March, they looked in fairly decent shape.

So the sheep, there was mortalities. The Western Interior Council - I talked to the Department of Fish and Game and they had some sheep mortalities from snow slides in January/early February and some sheep have fallen. You know, there's predation. So it's not the best of years for the sheep. But the sheep and caribou offspring because of the rainy summers that we've had, the cows and the ewes have a lot of exposure to high quality flowers and protein sources so the size of the caribou calves and the size of the sheep lambs are larger than normal, which helps them get through the winter better.

The hare (snowshoe) population is starting to build up and I've recently in the last month, I'm starting to see hares girding quite a bit. They were girding a little bit last month in March, but now they're really starting to gird willows, which indicates that their population is high and a lot of the small willows are buried underneath the snow right now. We've had snow packs up to 52 inches deep, which moves the hares way up. The moose were dragging bellies. Now the snow is down at 38 inches. And so the hares, they're starting the breeding time right now. So I'm starting to see them in the daytime.

The wolf population is fairly healthy and so I've been training some young guys how to trap. We don't hunt wolves with, we can't follow them with snowmobiles. This is mountain country, so we trap wolves. And so there's a young guy that's got several wolves. He traps with dogs out of Coldfoot, and then my wife's son and I were trapping. And all the wolves that ended up with a lot of those wolf carcasses for my dog. I feed them wolf meat, predator meat to my dogs. All those wolves that I saw were really fat, which if you see fat wolves, that means that the wolves have an advantage on their prey base. And so the caribou that came here were part of it. But some of the wolves' packs were big enough, they were taking quite a few moose and adult moose. One of the moose that was killed was an adult cow on ice and they had a fetus inside. So there is wolf predation, the wolves are doing really, really fat. And so we're harvesting wolves. We take moose and caribou and sheep. You know, when we were able to hunt sheep on this side, we take predators on that side.

There's lots of grouse and there are thousands of ptarmigan. The ptarmigan are migratory – they go from the Arctic Divide and the Arctic Slope. They go fly down to the south when the populations are real high, like they are right now, and the populations are super high. The main reason the ptarmigan are so high is because there's hardly any predation. The raven numbers have declined - phenomenally lower because of bird flu. I drove from Coldfoot all the way to Fairbanks, only counted 10 ravens from Coldfoot to Livengood and so ravens are highly predacious on ptarmigan eggs and baby ptarmigan in the summertime. And so the ptarmigan populations are exceptionally high. Bird flu doesn't seem to affect grouse that much and we have lots and lots of spruce grouse also.

I'm a little concerned about the insect populations. It's something to pay attention to. I saw very few flies, very few ants, very few mosquitoes. And Kanuti Wildlife Refuge documented that there was only 10% of the bumble bees than they normally do. They do a pollinator inventory on the Kanuti Wildlife Refuge. So those are the pulse of what's going on in the country. You know what's happening here.

I do feel that these meetings are virtual like we're on right now, should always be part of our meetings these days so that we can get larger, wider participation from the public that cannot travel or afford to travel to our meeting. So our fall meeting should also have virtual capabilities for people who would like to be on the meeting. We actually had that virtual meeting in Hughes and they were running a Starlink down there and running a virtual meeting and we're getting participation from people that would never have been there. So I do encourage that our SRC from now on even on when we're having face to face meetings, should still have virtual capabilities because more and more people are getting Starlink in the villages. So that would be my report. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you. Very good detailed report. Thank you for that. Commissioners, any questions or comments for Jack's report? I don't have any, but I'm gonna add just in agreement in some of the topics that he did bring up from his report. So thank you, Jack, for that. Any comments from the others online, staff or others? OK, hearing none, we will move on to Tristen.

Tristen Pattee: Thank you, Madam Chair. OK, so my report is for myself and residents from Ambler, Shungnak so I'll start off with a report about caribou. There are people catching caribou this spring, and of course, you know, they came late last fall, late October into November. They are getting the caribou now. You know, they're hanging out near the Shungnak and Kobuk area, kinda near the Pick River, of course, and also along the Ambler Selawik snowmachine trail. So there's groups hanging out in those areas.

I got reports that hunters are finding dead caribou and moose kills. They think it's by wolves. They're seeing quite a bit of the wolves out there right now. I recently flew to Red Dog and when I got to Noorvik, there was a whole bunch of caribou actually just laying right next to the runway, right at the end of the runway, just laying there and you could see them, you know, digging for food so. As I flew over, I could see Noorvik residents getting their caribou as well just right near town. So that was interesting.

We have been pushing for people to be conservative with the cows just because of the concern with the population and so unfortunately, we are witnessing a lot of people posting on Facebook, getting more than their quota and you know, they're also taking cows, which is unfortunate for conserving the herd as much as we could. There has been interest in the caribou numbers. Fish and Game wasn't able to collect a count last year and so we're really hoping that they're able to get out there this year. It was all because of the weather, they weren't able to take the count last year.

Moose definitely been seeing moose around. Just yesterday, I was hauling some wood and I saw groups of moose just hanging out in multiple different creeks. All over, they seem to be resting in the creeks, all in groups.

The fish, of course, last year, we had very high water. That not a lot of people got very much fish. Well, there's some people that set net and they would get some fish, just not as much as usual. As soon as the water dropped, they started getting quite a bit of sheefish, salmon, and one group actually went out seining as well, to get some fish.

What was really cool that I witnessed in Ambler was a community-built fish trap for burbot. They put it in the wrong spot, cause it was their first time, so they didn't get much. But I thought that was pretty neat that the community came together and built a fish trap made out of cottonwood logs and, you know, cut a hole in the ice and build one of those fish traps. And I know it's been successful in Shungnak with a resident there that's done it. That was pretty cool to see. Lots of bears? last summer, last fall. There was a whole bunch last year, so that was great.

For the predators in the area, there's you know, there's lots of wolves. I mean, just a couple days ago a resident in Ambler got two of them. I've got reports from Shungnak people that they caught more than 30 already and they're still going. So there's quite a bit of wolves out there. There was a comment that they wanted people to know that if there is a program for controlling the wolf population, if there's any type of funding or something like that. They're definitely supportive of it. They just feel like the wolves are a big impact of the caribou decline and also the changing of the migration routes.

Comments on the bears – the bears that were harvested, they noticed that a lot of them were very skinny. And it was commented that they think it's because of the high water's lack of fish, that sort of thing. The fuel prices, people are having to strategically plan on their hunting times, the fuel price in Ambler is \$15 a gallon now, which is down from \$18.00 a gallon and the availability is, you know it's not always there and they go through huge gaps, running out of gasoline and stove oil. But what was good with the high water last year, there was many barges that made it, not to Ambler for the fuel, of course, but they did make it to Shungnak and Kobuk quite a bit. So that was helpful for their fuel prices.

I did get comments about the enforcement, so now that with the new regulations in place for the amount of caribou we can get, they did see a presence of state troopers in town and going from house to house. You know, if they see caribou in the yard or their furs, they would interview or talk to those hunters and some people got citations. They were very upset about it, of course. But that's been what's going on there.

Further, further north, I know there's been comments about Noatak and they've been seeing lots and lots of bears and they're to a point where they're encouraging guides to actually go up there and be a guide for bears just because it's such a big problem in that area and breaking in the cabins and getting into their igluks or taking their meat, you know, breaking in. So they're pretty concerned about that.

Like Jack mentioned, there's lots and lots of ptarmigan everywhere. Just right outside our house and in the willows, you know? And so they're quite a bit of them. I did notice the rain. It was raining and then freezing over the tundra. So that's concerning, you know, just for the availability of food and for the caribou. There was a resident that caught a coyote which doesn't happen very often here. That was, you know, I've never seen a coyote in person, but he posted on Facebook and got a coyote here near Ambler. The same hunter also got a lynx as well. So that's my report. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you Tristen. Very good report again, thank you for that. Any comments or questions for Tristen on his report from our Commission?

Jack Reakoff: If I may, Tristen, how deep is your snow again? And how thick is your crust in the snow and how far off the ground is that crust? If you did get a crust?

Tristen Pattee: There is a crust. I'd say it's probably about...Just yesterday I was breaking trail and I think we sunk down probably about foot and a half to two feet for that. But the snow? Yeah, just digging out something yesterday, I'd say it's about 5 foot in areas, 5 foot or more. It's pretty deep in areas. Of course, the mostly tundra areas, it's pretty blown off, but more in the trees, it gets pretty deep and it's like a sugary snow. And so once you get to that point, yeah, you get pretty stuck with a snow machine, just like I did yesterday.

Jack Reakoff: Right. Well, thank you. Appreciate that.

Taqulik Hepa: Any other? Did someone else have a comment or question for Tristen? Any agency staff that want to ask a question or a comment for Tristen's report? If there are no other questions for Tristen, we will move on to Pollock. Pollock, are you on-line for your report?

Pollock Simon Sr.: It's been a long winter in Allakaket, it's been cold and a lot of snow. But the last couple of days, it starts to warm up. You can see the snow sliding off the roof. So spring is just around the corner maybe? Life here is pretty good. We never have no caribou again. Black bears have declined too, no black bears on the Koyukuk River. The wolf population is low. There's not much salmon at least where we can't put our nets for salmon, anyway. They cut us off from fishing. There's no dog salmon, no king salmon. King salmon being the main fish diet for us. We can't put out fish nets now. Life is kind of tough here. The cost of everything is going up. There's not much meat in the store. With the new administration, new president, things are going to change. There won't be money, funds going to be cut back. Life is going to get tougher yet. I don't know why moose, caribou, bear, and sheep are all declining. I don't know what's going on. Just when we need to hunt for our food some more. Pretty tough for us. Nonetheless, we're healthy and we're home. The rabbit population is coming back, there's lots around the house. Some more lynx tracks. The rabbit population coming back after some time. We're going to get some more lynx. My son set some beaver traps, so we're eating beaver meat. It's good for us around this time.

I don't really like this teleconference thing. I'm old and I have to hold the phone all day, maybe two days. I only have a landline phone. Next time teleconference meeting, count me out. I like sit-down meetings better. I think I'll stop here. That's my report. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you Pollock. We heard you loud and clear. I will give an opportunity for the Commissioners to ask any questions or comments for his report.

Jack Reakoff: Pollock, when you're catching whitefish this last summer or in the fall, were they fat or were they thinner than normal because of the high water?

Pollock Simon Sr.: They were in good shape. PJ and I were fishing for a couple of weeks, and we caught sheefish, whitefish. They were good enough to put them away like that.

SRC Chair's Report

Taqulik Hepa: Any other comments for Pollock? From staff? Thank you Pollock, for your very good report again. Good to hear you and thank you. Think I'm the last one.

We still have a lot of snow. We had a big snow dump across the North Slope in the last day or two, so a lot of fluffy snow just dropped. I believe that's a good sign. But right now, people are actively ice-fishing for qaaktaq (arctic cisco), tittaaliq (burbot), chars, lake trout, both in Anaktuvuk Pass and Nuiqsut. The fish seem to be healthy, so people are out enjoying the springtime and participating in that fishing activity, which is good.

There are communities, there are plenty caribou sighted within range of hunters. I think a few caribou are being harvested at this time. The good thing about, you know, just to add that the communications from our residents and the managers for the caribou is that people call and ask what are the regulations? Did I miss anything on the changes? But what I've heard from hunters that the winter caribou have been in good condition. I did receive some from some hunters and there was a good amount of fat on it in the early part of the winter through February. The caribou are looking good.

A lot of furbearers and that could be what's bringing them near our communities and hunters from both communities, including the other ones outside of the Gates of the Arctic communities, are actively harvesting furbearers. We've got the wolves that are being harvested and the comment on the wolves that they are big in agreement with other comments that were said. A lot of big, big wolves

are being harvested, and that's good. Qaviks are being harvested as well, the wolverine. I'm very glad that people are actively harvesting the furbearers to help you know, with the balance of the caribou and so on. I just wanted to mention that.

Let me see what else I got. Tuttu (caribou) are healthy. Lots of snow. I wanted to say that the community of Anaktuvuk Pass has Caribou Association that they developed several years ago, and it was inactive, but it's active again. I did attend a meeting and was invited in January. A good group of respected leaders that have been there for a long time and the next generation of leaders from that community. They did have a interest in receiving notification of our SRC meetings, so that they could introduce themselves and talk about what their priority interests are and how we could advocate together to protect the interests of that community who depends on the caribou so much. So I'm very proud of that. I asked them to inform me of their meeting, so I can attend as much as I can or either telephonically.

I did get a report from a hunter that they did see an otter, a river otter recently, and so that's an interesting observation. I know otters aren't very abundant up here, but they have been reported periodically throughout the years I've been in this position.

I think the last thing I wanted to bring up was just for information and it's outside of our boundaries. But there was a group of hunters that were furbearer hunting in Kaktovik and they came across a pack of wolves and harvested 6 which was good, very healthy. But there was indications and sign that this wolf pack had harvested and killed a polar bear. So very interesting. I thought I just mentioned that and I asked the individual who reported it, if they have any pictures to share with us, that would be good for documentation. And that basically is my report for today. We really haven't heard any...Usually, if there's concerns from hunters about the resources that they're harvesting, the condition of the animal or the landscape that they're hunting on, we usually hear about it. But we haven't. It's been pretty quiet, so that's a good sign that things are abundant and healthy.

I do want to mention that a lot of ptarmigan - in agreement with the comments about the abundance of ptarmigan on this particular year is good. I don't know how to rabbits or hares. I don't know what we call them, but yeah, those are abundant as well. We don't have rabbits up this far north or I don't even know the right term to call them, but hares, I think. But that's my report. Thank you. Any questions for me?

Jack Reakoff: One comment, I've seen otter tracks by Galbraith Lake and over to Toolik. You know, they're the head of the Kuparuk River around where those grayling go into the lakes and stuff. Like in October, I saw otter tracks there.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you. I'll try to reach out to the individual who shared that information with me to get a geographic location of where they saw it, and I'll share it with Marcy so she could share it with others. Any other questions or comments for my report? If not, I appreciate everyone's time for your great reports, good information sharing, a lot of similarities. It's good for us to. I always like this part of the meeting, the best, to see what's going on in your areas. So thank you.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, one comment on the wolves killing that polar bear. I've seen where wolves have killed small grizzlies. Usually, some of the wolves harass the sow and then get one of those cubs away. Was it an adult polar bear, was it? Was it a cub?

Taqulik Hepa: They did not indicate, but I have communications that I could communicate with the hunter to get more details. He did let us know, but I haven't. I just got back to Barrow, so I haven't had a chance to talk with him personally, but I'll reach out to him to get more details and if there's more to add, I'll make sure that Marcy can share that observation as well.

Yeah. And maybe just one other comment, when they do see the wolves, the packs, that it's my understanding from talking with folks is that they're harvesting a good size of the pack, you know and not just one, but you know being successful with getting a good group of the individual packs that are together just as a side note, I wanted to mention. All right. So that concludes our community member reports.

11. Gates of the Arctic SRC Charter – Marcy Okada

Marcy Okada read the charter out loud. This is our most current charter. It was signed by the previous Secretary of Interior, Deb Haaland, signed in July 2023. Highlighted that the designated federal officer (DFO) is the Superintendent of Gates of the Arctic and the duties of the DFO. Marcy covers the main duties on behalf of the DFO/Superintendent. Discussion ensued.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair. Under estimated annual operating costs is \$95,000. Is that an updated figure or is that antiquated at this time? At the time of this Charter?

Eva Patton: Through the Chair. We at the Regional office here, serve on behalf of the SRCs in managing the Federal Advisory Committee Act, the FACA reporting and we work through our National Park Service Policy Office in Washington, DC to maintain all the legal records of the Commission, and so that includes, you know, the current membership annually. You know, the terms of each of the SRC members, your current Charter. Then we update all the SRC meeting summaries and final approved minutes.

And then we also manage tracking of the recommendations that the SRC makes, both to the National Park Service and to the Federal Subsistence Board. And we also track the budget, and we used to have a more generalized budget of the anticipated cost of the SRC and it was in the past more inclusive of the Park Subsistence program overall. And then just within the past year, well, we're going on the second year now where the policy coordinator and those that oversee the FACA database have asked for exact costs. And so we've started tracking those costs now. And so that includes the travel costs for the SRC members, travel costs for the Park Service members. Your participation in the annual Chairs workshop. Per diem provided for the meeting, you know any cost for the meeting venue. Any costs for announcing, you know, news releases and notices and that sort of thing or if there's any translation costs. So now we're tracking the exact costs just specific to the SRC rather than the greater Subsistence program support to the SRC. So that \$95,000 was carried over from when we were estimating a broader general cost, and now we're reporting on actual costs. So it's less than that, but I'm still grateful that that's on the record right now, so that we do have the flexibility to account for all the costs required to support the SRC.

I should note also that we had submitted a request to the National Park Service Director that was Director Chuck Sams, in the previous administration, had submitted a request on behalf of the SRC's, requesting fair compensation and this was in follow up to the Federal Subsistence Regional Advisory Councils making a unified request of all 10 Councils to the Federal Subsistence Program and that was elevated to the Secretary of the Interior requesting fair compensation. And so we requested the same essentially you know, the same equivalent. Since the RACs were established under Section 805 and then the SRCs established under 808 - we wanted to ensure that that request was uniform for both advisory bodies. We had anticipated that because the Subsistence Resource Commissions are entirely managed by the National Park Service, that Director Sams would have that authority to approve compensation. And as it turns out, because it's the Secretaries that oversee and have granted the authority of Title 8 of ANILCA, that that approval of compensation had to come from the Agency head, which was the Secretary of Interior in this case. And unfortunately, while we did get a response at the end of the previous administration that the Secretary of the Interior fully agreed and approved that the Council should get compensation. However, they did not have the authority to enact that funding in the next administration and therefore couldn't grant compensation. So they had suggested to revisit it again, perhaps in another administration that might be supportive and actually be able to approve and provide a budget for that compensation.

Jack Reakoff: Through the Chair, I really appreciate that rundown Eva. So I at this point, my concern with adopting this Charter is that you know that that \$95,000 is adequate to support this Commission's work and so forth and you would say that that would be adequate?

Eva Patton: Yes, for the current functioning of the SRC. Again, we are now required to track the actual cost per year and I think you know that's adequate in terms of providing the travel, providing the per diem, venue costs that encompasses Federal staff that support the SRC. But again, we've been requested to take a broader look in terms of you know the greater work that Marcy does on behalf of Gates of the Arctic as a Subsistence coordinator for the region. So we're not encompassing, you know her salary or her work in that regard. I think you know the \$95,000 does cover the current travel and per diem costs and you know, venue costs.

The other thing though is the park itself getting base funding in order to support the SRC's function and I do know you know this year with the IRA funding that we had, the hope was to boost the SRC's travel funding to be able to meet in rural communities. And so, had utilized that IRA funding to help boost the park's ability to fund travel and that IRA funding is currently on a temporary hold right now. So more funding, you know, for the park itself to be able to support travel to rural communities definitely would be helpful. I you know, I'll let Mark or others there speak more to base funding, but unfortunately the IRA funding is on a temporary hold right now which interrupted this opportunity to meet in Ambler.

Jack Reakoff: I will, for the record, will state that of course this virtual call is going to be more cost effective, but that is not what we wanted. DOGE was actually disrupting the abilities - we're unsure about whether we could meet or not. This virtual meeting does not facilitate the statutory requirements under Title 8 of this Commission's ability to be able to meet as a platform for public comments. It's not nearly as effective as a public face to face meeting. And so a discussion of this \$95,000 on our Charter. I feel that this meeting here is just a stopgap in the normal business of this Commission to be able to meet face to face in the resident zone communities is a very important aspect of this Commission's business and our statutory authority. So I want to make that statement on the record. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Jack, for that. And maybe I'll just add to that 'cause, you know I was having the same thoughts, virtual meetings, it's good to touch base, but my question is with that \$95,000 threshold to facilitate the work of the Commissions, if we decide to have a meeting in one of our communities at a different time - are we able to meet like more than like this meeting and then in between now and November. Because we did not, you know, physically go to what we hope to do to one of our member communities. Would that have been an option? The question that came to my mind when I learned we were gonna do this through Teams.

Marcy Okada: I think what comes to mind is, you know, we usually meet annually, April/May and November, and the timing of the Federal Register notice comes to mind as well. You know, like that has to be done within a certain time frame prior to when SRCs meet and then in this instance it's also whether essentially what paused our meeting so that we had to have it via Teams? You know whether that pause on the funding is still going to be there for us to meet between now and November. I don't necessarily think we we can't meet between April and November, it could be worth shooting for.

Taqulik Hepa: 'Cause you know, the reality is I don't think we know how long this pause is gonna be or with the like I mentioned earlier, my opening statement, to make sure that we're continuing our responsibility and how long is that, you know? So we need to think outside of the box. How can we continue to make progress in the situation that we're in? You know to be flexible and ready to make a different move if it's, you know, that there's still that uncertainty so that we're connecting with the people that we represent in the communities. I just wanted to throw that out there for all of us as Commissioners and staff to think about.

Marcy Okada: Thank you for that Taqulik.

Taqulik Hepa: And then my last comment, just going back to what Eva had mentioned about, you know the previous administration was in agreement to provide some type of compensation to the SRC members. I think that's great. You know, I think this Commission, if you all are in support, that we should reiterate that to the incoming administrators with the new administration, that this continues to be a priority, and it should be communicated sooner than later that we want to continue the momentum to make that a reality.

Jack Reakoff: I'm looking at the Statute of the Red Bible, it's the record of ANILCA, of the entire statutory language. And so the discussion about these hunting plan recommendations is you know, it has to do with local hearings, etcetera with the development of these various hunting plan recommendations since. So the Commission's abilities to meet with the public and to discuss various issues is contingent on travel to those communities. So that should be a part of our record on this, on our Charter that the statutes found in Title 8, section 808 of ANILCA is clear that this Commission is like the Regional Advisory Councils They're basically a platform for the public to have a meaningful role in subsistence management. So that's what the Gates of the Arctic Subsistence Resource Commission is basically and we interact with the Regional Councils. In fact, we have membership from the Regional Councils.

So this Charter discussion, our minutes shall reflect that we are basically have to have travel to the various residents zone communities, to other places for public meetings to have allowed the public to comment and have a meaningful role in subsistence. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Jack, for that. I'm in agreement and hearing back from our communities and the residents is so important, even just to identify potential hunting plan recommendations that we could put forward and that's where it all starts and that's the primary reason why we were formed and it's never too late to get back on track to move toward that overall objective of why we're here, so I agree with that. And I look forward to working in the years to come on moving more toward that direction and being an effective, productive Commission. Thank you. Any other comments on the Charter?

Jack Reakoff: One more comment, Madam Chair. Under #15 record keeping. These records are housed where under the schedule 6.2? Is that digitally archived in the cloud or is that in a safe location?

Eva Patton: Yeah. Thank you, Jack and through the Chair. So you know, in terms of the record keeping, so both you know Marcy as your SRC coordinator keeps records within Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. And then each of the SRC coordinators shares those documents in terms of the minutes and meeting summaries and then we keep those records at the Regional office and they are now being posted to our Regional web page. Then we at the Regional office manage all of the SRC information for the FACA database and those records are continually being updated every year and then they get reviewed and certified for accuracy by our National Park Service Policy Office in Washington, DC. So the FACA database is a DOI-wide database and there's about approximately 500 federal advisory committees across the entire United States and that FACA database combines all of those committees in one place. And that's online and the information becomes public, once it's been certified. The current year's information isn't available to the public, but all previous years' information is available and I can provide that link to the FACA database too. That's open to everybody to look into that database and find the records from the past year and to the origins of the SRC.

Jack Reakoff: Through the Chair. I think that answers my question. I want to make sure that it's just not paper files that are subject to loss from catastrophic events like floods or fires or something. So thank you, Eva. Thank you, Madam Chair. That's my questions.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you. Any other questions from our Commissioners? I did have a question but I forgot what I was going to ask. I'm sorry. Maybe it'll come back to me in a minute.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, at this time, I'd like to make a motion to adopt this Charter. It's my impression that we have to make it an action item and make a motion to adopt the Charter. If with the attached and it should be at the attached discussion on this Charter at this point.

Taqulik Hepa: OK, we have a motion on the floor to adopt the Charter with this attached discussion. Do we have a second?

Gary Hanchett: I'll second it, Gary.

Taqulik Hepa: OK, we've got a second by Gary. Any discussion from the Commission on this motion? Hearing none, we will go to a vote to all those in favor of adopting the Charter as presented, along with the attachment of our discussions, say aye.

Everyone says aye.

Taqulik Hepa: All those opposed. Hearing none, we have an action item approving our Charter.

OK, very good discussion and thank you for that review. I enjoyed it. It's always a good reminder to know what the Charter is and if it's good and I look forward to having this discussion in the future again, when it's that time.

12. December 2024 SRC Chairs Workshop Info Share – Taqulik Hepa

Taqulik Hepa: We have the report from myself and Jack, if you can add, maybe after I give a brief summary of the December 2024 All-Chairs meeting that happened in Anchorage. So Jack and I were able to participate in that along with Marcy. I can't remember what other staff from the Gates of the Arctic were there, but Marcy was definitely there. I believe this is the third meeting I've attended as the Chair. It's a great gathering of the Chairs from the 7 Park Service parks from across Alaska. It's a time for the Commission Chairs and staff to come together to share information, share concerns or activities that are happening within each of our parks. And also there at this meeting, there was an opportunity for certain parks to share some of their success stories and we heard some presentations on caribou from a southern park, which was really, really interesting and good. I'm not going to get into those details. I don't have my notes in front of me to do so. But what I really appreciated at this meeting is we had a session where just the Chairs were in closed session for a big part of the meeting, where we came together and just talked about collectively the concerns that we had together, and how we could make improvements in building strategy together from the various parks and the SRCs. So that was really good, a great session. It built a sense of a bond, you know, to the adjacent and other parks within Alaska. A lot of similarities and common themes came out which were good.

One thing that I do remember was the possibility of us having joint SRC meetings where we might have similar issues of concern or things that we want to work toward. And I thought that was a really good one as well. That's all I have on my notes that I took. Jack, is there anything else? Or Marcy that you want to report back from the All-Chairs meeting?

Jack Reakoff: No, I think you did a great job encapsulating that, Taqulik.

Taqulik Hepa: I really, really enjoyed that closed session with all the Chairs where it really, the bonding that happened between us. And maybe the other thing I want to mention is just the atmosphere of the meeting with the park staff and the Commissioners, I think, has really come a long way at this particular meeting. You felt this sense of positivity. You know, like we have a good future to work toward things. I commend the staff that were present there, and the leadership to help feed into that positivity. You know that we got important things to talk about, important things to partner and work together on. To address, the concerns of the people who live within or adjacent to the parks that was huge for me. I don't know if you sensed that as well, Marcy and/or Jack or whoever else was there.

Jack Reakoff: I've always benefited highly from those Chairs meetings. The commonality of various issues that was a real, that's what those revolve around and I really appreciate how other Commissions deal with various issues. So two heads are better than one and those are worthwhile, the Chairs meetings are very worthwhile. I would enjoy having a meeting with Kobuk Valley at some point. Maybe next spring in Ambler for discussing various common issues in that western part of the park.

Taqulik Hepa: Yep, we should drive for that. I think that would be really good 'cause that was a main part of our closed session from our Chairs. Marcy, I think I heard you.

Marcy Okada: Thank you, Madam Chair, I think there were a couple of suggestions for the next Chairs workshop. It was mentioned that a list of SRC members that are in attendance and where they're from for each SRC would be helpful. There was the thought that in order to recruit new SRC members, it would be great if there was a video created in order to inspire folks in joining an SRC. And then also, folks were interested in maybe hearing from long time SRC members on why did they choose to serve on an SRC? 'Cause perhaps folks could find inspiration from that also. Then also I think someone suggested more frequent, informal conversations between staff and SRC members on what some of the ecosystem issues are currently.

Yeah, I thank both of you, Madam Chair and Jack for participating in that workshop last year. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you. And then my only other comment 'cause I was traveling, I got my packet, I sent that update from me. But maybe a recommendation is if the Chairs and the SRC members could just get a one-page summary, so I would have a better time to go back and find my documents so I could review my notes. My timing for prepping for this meeting was very short timing. I've been traveling quite a bit to the villages and elsewhere, but just a one-page summary would be helpful so we can give more of the detailed discussions and outcomes from that Chairs meeting would be helpful, I think for all. Thank you. Any other comments or questions on the Chairs workshop from our people online and members?

Mark Dowdle: Madam Chair, this is Mark Dowdle. I too attended, but it was virtually, unfortunately, I had to call in. So it's kind of a different perspective, but I too thought it was a great meeting and all of the things. I didn't have anything to add to the content that you described, but I'm really glad that it occurred and I was really happy to hear about the bonding and the conversations that the Chairs got to have. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Mark. And I'm glad you were able to participate online. Okay, last call for discussion on that agenda item. Hearing none.

13. Agency and Public Comments

Taqulik Hepa: We are going to move on to agenda item 13 and I think after this we'll call for a lunch break. So the next agenda item we have is agency and public comments. This gives an opportunity for any agency, participants that are online or just the general public, to give it an opportunity for you to share public comments to the Commission for us to hear, to consider, to be aware of. So I can't really see if a hand goes up. So Marcy or Ellen, if you could let me know if anyone would like to have an opportunity to provide public comment. So it's open at this time. Ok, I don't see, I don't hear anyone. You can hear me?

Marcy Okada: We can hear you. There's no hands up at this time.

The Commission took a lunch break from 1130am to 1pm.

14. Old Business

RAC Meeting Updates – North Slope, Western Interior, Northwest Arctic – Marcy Okada

Marcy Okada: Thank you, Madam Chair. I'll provide updates on these three RAC meetings. I'll first start off with the Western Interior RAC update, of which both Jack and Pollock were in attendance. The meeting was held here in Fairbanks, February 25th and 26th. There was quite a bit of public comments and we also have Nissa, who is the Western Interior RAC coordinator on the meeting call as well. Folks can feel free to add information as they see fit.

Some of the public and tribal comments that were added were someone shared comments on the importance of traditional ecological knowledge and how elders have been sharing their knowledge and observations over the decades. But people feel like they've been sharing the same information over and over with scientists. While people are out at fish camp, knowledge is passed down. Another person shared that brown bears are starting to taste good in the fall time since there aren't any salmon and they're eating more blueberries and plants, so they're no longer musky smelling. And people are seeing white fat on these grizzly bears, which indicate that the bears taste good. There were two people who shared that they were disappointed that the North Pacific Fishery Management Council outreach and education session on chum salmon bycatch management in the Bering Sea that the Western Interior RAC hosted did not allow for more public testimony. So the same session was held with the Eastern Interior RAC.

The 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.

And then for agency updates, specifically on the Teshekpuk caribou herd update with the area biologist from Utqiagvik, Carmen Daggett. She shared that the caribou calf weights were the lowest on record and there was a mix of Teshekpuk and Central Arctic herd caribou in the area between the John River and the North Fork of the Koyukuk. And again, this meeting was in late February.

Taqulik Hepa: Do you know if it was from calf weights from right after they're born or a year later? I'm just trying to understand the lowest rates of born calves or yearlings?

Marcy Okada: That's a good question. I don't have the answer to that. I don't know at what age the calf weights were taken.

Taqulik Hepa: I'll ask her when I see her.

Marcy Okada: An update by Mark Nelson for Alaska Department of Fish and Game for the Central Arctic caribou herd. Mark Nelson shared the following that from 2015 to 2016, there were 70,000 caribou. Then there was a sharp decline to 20,000 Central Arctic caribou. Since then, the parturition rates have been good. The three-year old parturition rate was at 85%. The last photo census was done in 2022 and there were about 35,000 caribou. And then, because the population is growing, the Board of Game increased the bag limit to 5 caribou for any resident hunter and two bulls for non-residents, of which that was discussed at our meeting in Anaktuvuk Pass last April. That increase in the bag limit.

Jack Reakoff: I'd like to get Nissa Pilcher's if she has any additional.

Nissa Pilcher: I don't have any additional. I think Marcy did a fantastic job.

Marcy Okada: So for the next meeting update the North Slope RAC met in Utqiagvik on February 28th, it was a one day meeting. Both Esther Hugo and Peter Earl Williams of Anaktuvuk Pass were in attendance at this meeting. Maybe just for the record cause Esther's not here with us at our SRC meeting. I'll just share the Council member report that she provided and then also share Earl's report as well.

So Esther shared at this RAC meeting. Last summer, there was a lot of south winds. It would calm down for one day and then the winds would start up again. The bears weren't as abundant. There were berries available, both blueberries and black berries (crowberries). People were looking for caribou stragglers and hunting female caribou. The caribou were really healthy. She was preparing caribou intestines for her siblings. Young hunters were going into the mountains to get sheep. Lots of rabbits and lots of ground squirrels under peoples' homes. Last spring, the ice-fishing wasn't as good – she takes her grandson and granddaughter ice-fishing. In the fall time, there was lots of foxes. Wolves are coming around the village looking for caribou.

Since fall time, lots of open water near the Glacier. Near Anatktuok, it hasn't froze this winter. The John River is just open water which is unusual. She observes the mountains to make sure there isn't rockslides. Soakpak has lots of cliffs, but there hasn't been much change.

People saw a lynx last fall, roaming through the willows. In the last two years, the spring caribou start migrating north during the second to third week in March. Caribou are currently in the foothills nearby. Telling young hunters to go get them. People are ice-fishing now for arctic chars and lake trout at Chandler Lake. People go out in the morning and come back at night.

People have been successful trapping wolves. Her nephew, JJ, lost a trap to a large wolf. He eventually found the wolf after 1 week. Trappers are going south down to the trees and also making a trail to the west to the Killik area to go trapping for wolves and wolverines. They use the fur for parka ruffs.

Been seeing one lone muskox in the summer north of Anaktuvuk Pass. There's concerns about muskox scaring away the caribou.

And then Earl's report was just last fall people in Anaktuvuk were hunting caribou. There was a bear around. Bears scare away the caribou. Lots of ground squirrels around.

Same thing 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 that's the update on the North Slope RAC meeting.

Jack Reakoff: What did she say the Teshekpuk Herd was? Was that your second highest? What was the number?

Marcy Okada: I don't think she gave. I didn't. Yeah, she just said second highest population count.

And then lastly, for the Northwest Arctic RAC meeting, of which Tristen was in attendance. Northwest Arctic RAC met in Kotzebue on March 26th and 27th. Tristen gave a similar report to our SRC meeting at the 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.

And then just to let folks know, there's an Arctic Beaver Observation Network study overview. So as Raymond had mentioned, folks are seeing more and more beavers in the Upper Kobuk River area. And Alaska Department of Fish and Game is conducting this project. This project's being conducted in the communities of Kotzebue, Noatak, and Shungnak. People just really have concerns about an increase in beaver and the beaver population and about water contamination. And you know, getting Giardia from this increase in beavers.

Similar to the Rusting Rivers project that Jon O'Donnell shared at your meeting in November last year. This project was shared with the Northwest Arctic RAC and overall the RAC members have concerns about water quality and impacts to drinking water for these communities as more drainages are becoming rusting rivers. And so those were the comments that were shared. And Tristen, if you have anything to add, feel free.

Tristen Pattee: Thanks Marcy. Yeah, nothing to add. It was a good meeting, very productive. We've made quite a bit of proposals and we wrote quite a few letters of support for different agencies and people doing their studies and those things.

Marcy Okada: So that was for the RAC meeting updates.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair. Right. I would like to commend Marcy. Those are fairly thorough notes that she did and I've I really appreciate her giving a rundown off of each one of those.

You know, our Regional Council in Northwest Arctic and North Slope. So thank you very much, Marcy. Appreciate that.

Taqulik Hepa: Me too. Thank you, Marcy. That was a good note for us to keep in the back of our minds as we put game management from many different regimes into our minds as we try to make sense of it all. So that was really easy to understand and follow. Thank you. Any questions for Marcy on this report on the RAC updates? Hearing none, I will turn the floor over to Eva Patton for the Federal Subsistence Board update.

Federal Subsistence Board Update – Eva Patton

Eva Patton: Thank you, Taqulik. Hi, this is Eva with again the National Park Service Regional Subsistence Program here in Anchorage. And yeah, Marcy, really appreciate all the updates from all the RAC meetings we've been participating in. It's really nice to hear all the Council member reports again that you know that tie in to our communities and the Gates of the Arctic as well. Yeah. So maybe before I start with the Federal Subsistence Board updates, I'd like to provide some updates on the Office of Subsistence Management, all interrelated, I think

You all had heard the news at your previous meeting that the Office of Subsistence Management or OSM moved. They were previously housed under US Fish and Wildlife Service and they have moved to the Assistant Secretary's office or it's the Office of Policy Management and Budget. And that office is based under the Assistant Secretary's office under the Secretary of Interior in Washington, DC. OSM still resides here in Alaska, in Anchorage, they're still at the Fish and Wildlife Office. They've just changed the agency that they are under.

And one of the great news is that Crystal Ciisquq Leonetti, who many of you know, she was the Tribal Affairs specialist for Fish and Wildlife Service for many, many years. She comes from Dillingham, Alaska, and grew up a subsistence way of life. And she was acting in the OSM Director role for about 5 months. And the good news is, is that she is now the permanent Director. She was hired on permanently as the Director of OSM. I've worked with Crystal for many, many years and she's just very positive and proactive. And just a tremendous amount of positive energy to get things done and a real positive force I think for OSM. Will be a real positive in all her relationships in working with the federal subsistence program and a real advocate for our subsistence community. So that's really great news.

The other big change that has occurred is that there was a proposed rule to add three additional public member seats to the Federal Subsistence Board. So previously, the Federal Subsistence Board was made-up of five federal agencies - Forest Service. U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the Bureau of Land Management, National Park Service and the Bureau of Indian Affairs. And then there were three public members, or the Chair and three public members. Chair Anthony Christensen from Hydaberg and then our public members are Charlie Brower, who all of you know from Utqiagvik and Rhonda Pitka from Beaver. And the new rule added three additional public seats and these were public members nominated by Tribal entities. And those new public members were appointed and able to serve on the Federal Subsistence Board at the most recent regulatory meeting, which happened on February 4th through the 7th. And those new public members are Raymond Oney of Alakanuk in the YK Delta region, and many of you may know Ray Oney has served as the Chair of the YK Delta Subsistence Regional Advisory Council for many years. I've worked with Ray for many, many years and just

one of the kindest, most thoughtful and knowledgeable people I know. And brings, you know, his lifetime of experience and knowledge to the Federal Subsistence Board. The other is Frank Woods from Dillingham. Also has served in many capacities - representing subsistence for the Bristol Bay region. And then Benjamin Payenna from Nome. And also you know, equally lifetime subsistence representative who's served in many capacities representing subsistence with federal subsistence and I think he served on Marine Mammal Commission, Ice Seal Committee and other roles as well. So those are the three new public members that have been appointed to the Board. And they jumped right into there was training workshops for our new public members, along with the federal subsistence management program staff and our solicitors. And they've just jumped right into the work, very active. In the Board meeting, asking a lot of really great questions and engaging with the public and all of our liaisons to the Board, which are RAC Chairs. So that's the big news in terms of the Federal Subsistence Board.

Unfortunately, we have had some departures in the change in administration. Most of the federal agency heads are essentially SES positions which can be appointed or selected with each administration. So unfortunately, we did lose Sarah Creachbaum, our National Park Service Director, retired in February, at the end of February. And we have just recently also lost a couple other federal agency members from BLM and the Forest Service. So those public members are really important for that continuity and subsistence representation on the Board, and we'll certainly keep everyone posted as we learn more.

We're really fortunate that Dave Alberg, who has been our National Park Service, Alaska Deputy Director is staying in his role and will be acting as the Regional Director and he is fully committed to serving on the Federal Subsistence Board. And he's already really involved with issues coming up, such as, you know, special actions in the meantime. And he's got a good heart and a steady hand and really committed to continuing Park Service's engagement with subsistence so that's good news, I think for all of us.

This was a fisheries regulatory cycle and so there were not many at all proposals that were relevant to Gates of the Arctic National Park. There were some with crossover proposals that the North Slope and Western Interior Councils addressed for closure reviews, and just because communities have customary and traditional use for those closure reviews. But they were really closer to the Yukon River. So no fisheries proposals of relevance to Gates of the Arctic communities. But there was one deferred wildlife proposal, which Marcy had discussed was the statewide bear proposal. The proposal for the sale of bear hides and that was deferred from the last Federal Subsistence Board meeting and the Board did again vote to defer action on this because there were significant and substantial developments to that proposal and the proposal analysis that the Board felt was important for the Regional Advisory Councils to be able to review the updated proposal and outcomes and make a recommendation to the Board. So the Board will now take action on that at their summer work session which is scheduled for the end of July.

Marcy Okada: And just for reference, sorry, there's handouts up behind Tab 3 that go along with what Eva has shared.
Eva Patton: And that is all I have for the Federal Subsistence Board updates, unless there's any questions?

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Eva. Questions for Eva on her report to us for the Federal Subsistence Board meetings and management?

Jack Reakoff: No, that was very thorough. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: OK. Thank you, Eva. Very good too. I agree in agreement, great updates, I like it. We've been going for just over an hour or two. Is it 2 hours now? Do we want a break or we want to continue on with Park Service staff reports? We have, I think, four more, five more presentations. We'll resume in 15 minutes.

15. New Business

WIRAC Draft Sheep Management Strategy Discussion – SRC and NPS Staff

Teams Recording Part 2

Taqulik Hepa: So I will turn the floor over to the Park Service to lead the discussion and their review.

Ellen Lyons: Madam Chair and Commissioners, I just want to say, first of all, I just want to say thank you for allowing or giving the opportunity for the National Park Service to review the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council's Dall Sheep management strategy and providing our input for your consideration, and I'm also apologizing that you guys are stuck with me and that Zack wasn't able to attend today, but he has a very excellent reason. He is receiving an award from Purdue in Indiana and so he cannot be here. If you ask questions that I cannot answer, Kyle is here to support me, and I am absolutely happy to take your questions and forward them to Zack for his response. What I would like to do first is just kind of go over a little bit of the park's response and then, you know, feel free to interrupt me and ask questions at any time, but we'll also have opportunities for questions after my summary.

So first I just want to say we found really quite a few areas of alignment between the proposed management strategy for the Dall's sheep and the park policies. If you look on the first page of the National Park Service's review, it's just after page 8 in your documentation. You know, clearly we have a shared goal of maintaining natural and healthy populations of Dall's sheep within the park. That's very important to everyone. And also other areas of alignment is that we do consider subsistence harvest of sheep, the priority consumptive use. We would also allow limited use subsistence harvest when the population can support it. We manage sheep

at the GMU or sub GMU level or even a finer geographic scale when we have the data to support that. And we would implement harvest restrictions when the population cannot support it or we have data that is limiting or limited data. We're also paying special attention to the Itkillik Preserve to ensure we understand the implications of sport hunting and subsistence hunting in the same area, and that it's currently road accessible. And we do also value and conduct remote monitoring of weather and use that when we're analyzing our data.

So beyond what we found to be, you know, joint or an alignment with one another, we also just wanted to provide some clarity to some topics that were brought up in the guidelines for your consideration. Some of these include distance sampling - why we do the survey during July in the aircraft, ram composition data, use of carrying capacity, and use of annuli in harvest regulations. So I'm going to leave it up to the Commission right now, if you would like me to kind of go over each of those first or if you would just like to ask questions, it's up to you guys.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, I would prefer to go through each one of these categories of their comments individually, so that we can comment on each one, interact on each one of those. So go ahead, Ellen, with your distance samples category first.

Ellen Lyons: OK, thank you. So the distance sampling starts on the back of the first page, so the second page of the National Park Service response. It has highlighted in bold, why we use distance sampling if you want to look at that as I provide my comments. So we use distance sampling in the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve to monitor and collect sheep data because of two things. One - it's a huge area and in order to effectively get the data that we need in a way that's as affordable, distant sampling is the most statistically defensible way to do that. So it's scientifically rigorous, it's cost effective and it's repeatable. So that's primarily why we use distance sampling. For an example, I would just like to note that if you were to compare minimum count to distant sampling in Gates of the Arctic, a conservative estimate of the cost for minimum count would be about \$486,808 to do and 75 flight days to do the minimum count sampling in Gates of the Arctic. And that is not a sustainable, you know, cost for us to be able to collect the data. And it's really important to us that we're getting data across the entire park as we can because our responsibility is to preserve and protect the resource across the entire park. And so we need to get the best data that we can across this large area.

Taqulik Hepa: Maybe before you continue, if you could just briefly just in a few words, explain to us exactly what is distance sampling? I understand the broader survey that is the expensive one, but specifically what is distance sampling?

Ellen Lyons: OK, I'm gonna do my best. And Kyle, please feel free to jump in. Or if you wanna do that, that would be great.

Kyle Joly: Hey everyone, this is Kyle Joly, Wildlife Biologist for Gates of the Arctic, Yeah, so the distance sampling is basically you're flying random transects that are chosen in a geographic information system GIS, and you fly those transects and you figure out how many sheep there are and how far off the transect they are. And that's the distance part of the distance sampling and so it's a random sample of observations of sheep and you know their location and their distance from the sample line and that provides an estimate of how many sheep are in the greater survey area. Minimum count is just you go to an area and count every single sheep.

Taquik Hepa: Yeah. Thank you.

Ellen Lyons: So, Madam Chair, at this time. I guess I'd like to see if anyone else has any questions about the distance sampling?

Jack Reakoff: I had a discussion about this with Zack and Marcy about couple 3 weeks ago. Whatever it was. What I'm unclear about is the elevation where these random transects are? Can they fall on a valley floor? It's a specific elevation - there's a lot of consideration about where Dall's sheep might be found and whether these transects, it's just to get an overall, you know, if it falls on the valley first, you get an overall density, including the valley, is there any thresholds about that part of it?

Kyle Joly: Madam Chair. Yeah. So that's a good question, Jack. I haven't done distance sampling, so I'm not hyper aware of the specifications, but my understanding is that it looks at sheep habitat so they're not flying like down the Itkillik River. You know down the Koyukuk or something like that. So they are in sheep habitat, but there are areas that are lower quality and areas that are higher quality. I'm not sure, if there's an upwards elevation cut-off or not, not that I know of. So I'm sorry, I'll have better details on that, but that's a question that we can defer to Zack and get a really specific answer to you later on.

Jack Reakoff: I understand if you're using distance sampling, the time frame in July is appropriate because the sheep are spread out. You know they've come off of their spring habitat. They're starting to spread out depending on temperature, they can be higher or lower in elevation, they can be concentrating on higher elevations. If it's really hot and July can typically be excessively hot. It can be like between 65 to 85° and they don't like heat and so they might lay in the shade. Depends on the time of day when you're flying and a whole bunch of factors like that. The elevations in July are going to be higher than they would be in the spring and the spring time they can be landing within 200-300 feet off the valley floor depending on the break up timing 'cause they're down low to eat green grass. And that's usually in conducive with mineral sources. So I understand the distance sampling or if it calculates properly. I do feel that you should analyze the elevation factor, the transects.

So a minimum count comes up with more sheep, but if you get a close numbers. And I've looked at the numbers that's happened with minimum count in 1A and 1B to the east of the road and then the distance sample and they're kind of close. They're not exactly close. Sightability can be a problem with distance sampling. You might be missing groups of sheep where your transect happens to be. And then the other aspect of distance sampling, it's all looking upslope of your transect. If there's a bunch of sheep below you, you can't

count it. That's kind of a problem because we need to have composition. You know the distance sampling thing is to look at the sheep that you actually see and then get a composition of those. That's a big, major part of understanding the sheep population.

So I will be agreeable to that, but this ecology aspect of sheep is sheep are not just randomly distributed in June. I'll send you pictures of where sheep are lambing. It's almost bare ground. It's all bare ground almost, and it's green feed. That's why they're there. So if you want composition data, mid-June gives you how many lambs are actually being born and rams and ewes are kind of still in aggregate. So the management strategy is teaching you what sheep are doing. Don't discount that sheep are unsightable in the springtime or June because they're in the snow. No, they're not, they're on south-facing slopes, is what they're doing. I will agree with distance sampling. I think that it's a cost-effective way to do it.

I do think that there should be some fine tuning about this elevation thing and what you're actually accomplishing whether that can be slightly fine-tuned. So unfortunately, we don't have Zack to talk about these finer points of this distance-sample technique compared to minimum count. Which minimum count, they basically turn the pilots loose, they fly all around. They try and find as many sheep as they can, and a lot of pilots were really good at doing that. So that would be my comments on the distance sampling aspect that it should be a primary for Park Service utilization.

Ellen Lyons: Thank you, Jack. I appreciate your input and we will definitely take that and provide it to Zack and he can respond or follow up with you to provide additional information. And also your comments about July leads into the next one, which is why we do it in July. The sampling in the past has been done in July and we would like to continue doing that to ensure we can compare to past years and make better estimates and draw better conclusions. Also, I know that you just provided information rebutting this, but we feel that we can see the sheep better. We want to ensure that there's no snow for better visibility.

Jack Reakoff: You come here around the 10th of June and I will take you out and I will show you most of the sheep in this valley on the south-facing slopes towards the valley prints. That's where they like to go. They're looking for green feed and so go back to the ecology part of this. Why are they there? Because that's where the flowers start blooming. And all those sheep need protein, and they're all eating predominantly dryas flowers around the 10th of June. That's the first of the 10th of June - they're eating buds, they're moving into the flowers and then July, they've moved away from that because that's all pollinated, they're moving up. It's not a sightability factor, in fact, you can see them. They stand out like sore thumbs on a green slope. So I'm talking mid-June, not in May. I'm talking about in mid-June post lambing. There's two lambing periods. May and then if it's a tough winter, a lot of those ewes will produce in around the 8th to the 10th of June. You start to capture all of the post lambing. What your lambing/parturition rate is and stuff like that. But don't discount this management strategy, because somebody tells you you can't see them in June. That's not true. Bring yourself and Zack up there and we will look at sheep and bring Erin with you. She's real good at spotting sheep.

Ellen Lyons: Okay, I appreciate your input, I really do, Jack.

Kyle Joly: Through the Chair. Yeah Jack, I was just wondering from your observations are those groups of sheep in June, are they still mixed or are the rams doing something different than the ewes at that time?

Jack Reakoff: The rams are aggregated in ram groups, but something about those ewes when they're lambing, the rams still stay near them. I don't know if it's some pheromone. They lip curl, they stay near, they're in the same areas as the ewes. So many times, you'll see rams and ewes mixed together whereas later in the summer, the rams might be literally miles away from where the ewes are at.

Kyle Joly: Yeah, that's really useful and sheep are harder...Oh, I was just gonna ask kind of a follow up you know, obviously sheep are harder to spot in the snow, but you know what proportion of animals do you think are on these south facing slopes and readily visible? Do you have any kind of guesstimate? Like what percent are there and what percent are?

Jack Reakoff: I would estimate that 90% of sheep are on south facing slopes that are greening up, typically southeast facing slopes. Has to do with the way that the sun hits the mountains, and it's sunnier in the morning than it is in the afternoon. There are various reasons why that all happens.

But the other aspect is not all surveys have been done in July. U.S Fish and Wildlife did the Atigun Gorge survey in mid-June every year from 1986 to 2012. That's a long data set, and that's a composition survey. That was all done in mid-June. I'm trying to get Merben at U.S. Fish and Wildlife Arctic Refuge to redo that to continue that survey because we have a long data set there. And why did they do that because you can look at the data you can. It's in the management strategy paper. That's why I embedded it in there. You look at that data to see how many ewes and see how many rams they're seeing. That's all the south facing slope of the Atigun River from Galbraith Lake, basically down to the end of the Atigun Gorge. That's what that is. Look at the data that's sitting right there in front of you, Kyle. You see the ewes and you see the rams all there on the same slope. That's what they're looking at. They're walking down the river on the north bank. They're looking across the river at the south-facing slope. That's what they're doing. It's an easy thing to do there because it is an east-west transect.

Kyle Joly: Yeah. Thanks for that, Jack. I will take that information to Zack and relay it to him. I think it is worthwhile for him to come up during that time period and take a look for himself.

Jack Reakoff: So I'm getting ahold of U.S. Fish and Wildlife. Merben told me that they're gonna try and do that. They say wait, we can't get planes. I said you got guys in your office that can walk that, they walked it for years. They got Clayton, this new guy, their subsistence guy. They got people that will walk that and Zack would probably highly enjoy going along on that trip to see what that looks like. I would encourage National Park Service to send Zach along with them. Looks like he could walk.

Gary Hanchett: I've got a question for Kyle. Has it been tried to use thermals - thermal scoping? When you do run into these snow fields with possibility of traveling sheep. In other words, it would just provide a peripheral method to get more information if it exists. It might be cost prohibitive, but I don't know, but has that been conceived?

Kyle Joly: Thank you, Commissioner Hanchett, for that question. You know, we're just kind of in the early stages of trying to figure out if we can use infrared and things like that. There are people that are finding success with it. People are starting to use it for moose surveys. We haven't gotten that far. There are a lot of different technologies, even from binoculars to cameras to remote sensing type things so. Some people have done work with it. I think it's still kind of in its infancy and we haven't had kind of the resources to start looking into that yet.

Gary Hanchett: That's understandable, yeah. Thank you.

Jack Reakoff: That's all I had on that subject. Thank you.

Ellen Lyons: Thank you, Jack. Really appreciate those comments. So the next one is ram composition data. And so again, this is on the 5th page and the ram composition data is the title. So our feedback on this one is that there's really no definitive way for the National Park Service to collect such fine scale data on rams over the large spatial scales that we monitor. We don't feel like it's the best thing to try and discern the age class to that fine of scale. So we would need to pick larger class sizes. And so that's kind of our feedback on that. We would be afraid if we tried to identify on the age classes and that kind of skill, we would introduce a lot of error and that would make the data not very usable.

Jack Reakoff: Well, Madam Chair, I'll comment on that aspect. So I'll give you that. I gave these age classes - these are with fine scale that we're using a spotting scope in the Atigun Gorge. That's where these numbers come from. These numbers are in that comp data. From the air, you could go half, three quarter, and full curl because you have data that says you see so many full curl or legal. We call them "legal" and so many other rams. We're already making a definitive statement. You're saying that there's so many full curl. How did you come up with that number, if you don't know what you're looking at?

So I would say you can do a high definition camera video of a ram group and you don't want to fly right up against them. You stay back, you zoom in on that ram group, and you fly along. They'll just a lot of times, they'll just stand there if you fly right over them like you're scaring them when you're doing distance sampling, you're really, really close to the mountain. You scare them, they run all over the place. So you if you get back, get a video of those various ram groups. Anybody can discern a half, three quarter, and full curl. What does that mean? That means half curl is three years old to four, three quarters is five to six, and full curl is 7 to on up. What you do is, what's the most important number there is the half curls. How many are there that tells you your age class of recruitments? So this by guess and by golly counting legal sheep that doesn't do you a lick of good because in a hunted area like Itkillik with heavy hunting pressure, all legal rams are taken, 1A and 1B. So statistically, almost all legal rams are taken annually. So that's how you would discern. You don't need to go to the fine scale that's stated here, but you could go for Park Service aerial counts, half, $\frac{3}{4}$, and full curl. That's easy to do.

Ellen Lyons: Yeah, we will definitely take that to Zack again. And I don't think the comments negate that idea. You know, so it was just that to do $\frac{1}{2}$, $\frac{5}{8}$, $\frac{3}{4}$, $\frac{7}{8}$ and full curl, that fine of a scale is not really feasible. Definitely will bring that information to Zack though.

Jack Reakoff: So, Madam, Madam Chair, I just wanna make one final statement here. That's why we're having this discussion - these comments to clarify certain things that we need to have in this management strategy. So these are excellent comments. You can't get that fine of scale, but you can get the finest scale that I just described. So thank you. I appreciate these comments. I think you understand the abilities that you can do. And so you know you can't. So let's do this. You have to understand, this is what we need. The state pushes back about composition and we have no idea what our sheep population is in age class. If we knew how many half curl sheep have been in the Park Service survey, the last three surveys - we'd have a basic demographic of the population. Any biologist will tell you that, wouldn't they Kyle?

Kyle Joly: Yeah, you know, I agree with the comments that the scale that you initially had laid out, it is too fine for our work. You know the way it would work is that you'd fly a transect, you'd see sheep, and then you'd have to go back, whip out the video camera, turn on the video camera, do another pass and take that. But I think at the half, $\frac{3}{4}$, full curl - knowing that there's a little bit of slop in that, I mean you can see that with the naked eye. At 100 yards, 200 yards and certainly with a decent camera, I think you know one half, $\frac{3}{4}$, full is something that's discernible.

Jack Reakoff: One more comment on the biological aspects for caribou surveys. It's small, medium and large bulls. Moose is yearling, medium and large bulls. Those give you what your recruitments are. That's why they do that. Go to Laine Adams, he had 18 years of caribou analysis of what those age classes of the different sizes are. People use these compositions with the male component to tell you what the female component is. That's why they're doing that. So it's imperative that we have a knowledge of what our sheep population is doing, because I think we're running out of ewes that are actually in their peak of fecundity. We're gonna start to see lower lamb numbers unless we get younger ewes entering the population. So we're going back to biology school too much. So let's just keep moving here. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Raymond Woods: Madam Chair. You know it's been like 10-12 years since the study started a survey since 2012, 2013 and 14. In 2025, we're still talking about where the sheep eats or what they do or what? I mean, that won't bring us anywhere, knowing about what the sheep does. We need to talk about where is the sheep? You know, my dad took me sheep hunting to the headwaters of

Noatak. We're talking about Douglas Creek, Midas Creek, Kugrak Creek that drains from the south and Midas and Douglas Creek from the north. These are tributaries that flow into the Noatak. Every one of those areas got sheep. My dad took us with a snow machine 300 miles round trip. We're not hunting sheep on an open side, like what we talk about on a survey. Like they go and feed on the south side because of the sun and the vegetation is growing. We went into the canyons, river canyons where you cannot see, I mean, if you were driving a snowmachine, it's just like tundra forever, like 30 miles or 40 miles. But you get to this area where the sheep is, they're hidden in the rocks. They're on the rugged rocks, that's where they feed. My dad knew this since the 1930s and 40s, going on a dog team. And we never miss whenever we go on a snow machine to go hunting, we'll bring sheep back.

Now we're talking about distance where they migrate, on the surveys, it explains that sheep doesn't go farther than six to seven miles away from their habitat. According to my dad, my dad says they move around. Because we went to Kugrak River – Kugrak River is one of the rivers that drains into the Noatak and it comes from the south. Maniilaq River drains into the Kobuk and they almost connected. There are two creeks, two draws that separate them two – Maniilaq River drains to the Kobuk, Kugrak drains to the Noatak. Now our people used to hunt sheep on the Maniilaq River, headwaters of the Maniilaq River. I don't know if they're still there. I never been there. My dad haven't bring me there, but I heard it from Joe Sun. I heard it from Wilson Tickett Sr., the late guys who died in the 1980s.

Now it's been 20 years since almost 2025 years since I went hunting with my dad. Now, 15-20 years, 15 years ago, we saw sheep. And I did see them because I was working for at the time, I was working for NANA Trespass. I was a supervisor and we're flying and looking for caribou. Bornite is 17 miles from Shungnak, it's 12 miles from Kobuk on the road. The sheep we saw, there was a mother and a lamb. Actually we saw three, that was 15 years ago. Now if we're talking about maybe they do migrate? Now there's some sightseeing. Well, some people saw some across Pah River up by the foothills of the Brooks Range. Now, where exactly on the survey, how much boundary do we have in studying the sheep on the Brooks Range? They, according to my dad, they're down in the canyon. They're not up on the mountain. They don't winter up on a mountain. They winter on the canyon.

There's two lakes on the headwaters of Douglas Creek - Douglas Creek drains from the north to the Noatak. In between those two lakes, there's a river that connects them. Now this is 200 feet of canyon walls on that creek. And then if you were to come up to those two lakes, it would be just like a tundra and just 2 lakes, you can see the two lakes, but in between you cannot see the canyon. That's where the sheep is. I don't know how much aerial recon that the Park Service have or the biologist who study this. But I think we need to talk about where exactly the locations of these sheep instead of studying one little area or a few little other areas that we need to study about that we know the sheep are there, we need to find them. We need to find their habitat for how they do. You know the traditional information that we have and inherited from our grandparents. You know the way they talk about sheep, you know, the sheep is still there.

Now technology, we're still talking about problems with technology. How to find the best cameras to locate these areas to make the best count? What we need to do is for our funding, to make more funding from the government or to do more studies, we need to let them know we need to do this. We need to bring, we need to do more surveys and then bring our boundaries out further instead of in the central areas of the Brooks Range. Thank you.

Jack Reakoff: No. Yeah. I mean, Raymond's absolutely right where the sheep are at in the winter, it's completely different than where they are in the spring or the summer time. They go to specific kinds of habitat where they know there's not going to be too deep a snow or they got lots of cliffs to hang out by, so the wolves don't catch them. So Raymond's discussion of winter habitat is absolutely correct. Those are the kinds of places that they're going to be in winter. So thank you very much for all. I wrote that stuff down, Raymond. I really appreciate that.

Raymond Woods: Oh, thank you, Jack.

Taqulik Hepa: Go ahead, Ellen or Kyle, continue. Thank you, Raymond, for that as well.

Kyle Joly: Thank you, Madam Chair. Raymond, thank you. That's, you know, a lot of great information and a lot of helpful support. I would say that you know, there are some sheep that tend to hang around and there are some sheep that tend to move about. And I think, you know, Fish and Game has a big collaring study out and hopefully we'll learn more about the movements of sheep, at least on the east side of Gates of the Arctic. We do a lot less on the west side of the Park. We do try and do whole Gates of the Arctic wide surveys. We were trying to do one this year, but between continuing resolutions and frozen funds and some hiring issues, we're not going to be able to do that this year. Hopefully we'll be able to do it again in the future.

And so for people who aren't aware, you know, Douglas and Midas Creek that Raymond was talking about, that's all the way on the west side of the park, adjacent to Noatak National Preserve, where the two park units come together and you know some of the observations that Raymond has is ones I have. I've been doing sheep surveys since the 90s and you know, when I did that kind of work out west, further west than Gates of the Arctic, we used to see a lot of sheep in Gates of the Arctic. And you know, just flying around now and I mostly study caribou, and don't do as much sheep work. But I keep my eyes open for sheep and there's just noticeably less sheep out there, including out west. And so, yeah, I do hope that we're able to pull together another park wide survey. So we're trying to figure out where all the sheep are. So thank you for those comments.

Ellen Lyons: Thank you, Kyle and Jack and Raymond - really appreciate the input. I would like to move on to talk about the carrying capacity and when looking at what you've written in the Dall's sheep management strategy guidelines, the park feels that determining

carrying capacity particularly in the past is not really feasible with the long term monitoring data that we have and additionally carrying capacity is affected by so many variables that differ from year to year, it could be that a population 20 years ago was at carrying capacity at 10,000, I'm making those numbers up. And now it's a much lower level, but it's still at carrying capacity and that it's just something that we can't really measure. So but in general, you know the comments about suppressed populations will return to carrying capacity if weather events permit, I mean that just goes to show you that those weather events really affect the carrying capacity. And so that's kind of our input there is that carrying capacity is difficult to measure, has a lot of variables and we can't really go back and estimate carrying capacity with the long-term monitoring data that we have.

Jack Reakoff: So I have a long term oral history and personal experience history with the Central Brooks Range sheep population. When the park was actually established in 1980, we were just starting into the winters that became more severe than they were in the 60s and 70s. The sheep population was super high in the mid-70s and a lot of the data that was done pre-pipeline construction shows super high numbers of sheep that weren't actually documented, after the park was established.

But the carrying capacity is a facet of what is the main point of this population? We've gone from abysmal lows in 2013, 2008. They didn't even fly surveys in 2018/2019, 2019/2020, where the population was beat right into the ground by deep snow, rain on snow events here. When they started surveying in 2022, 2021 was smoky, and so that's, you know, they said in the discussion in July, the weather doesn't know. They wouldn't even fly survey in 1A and 1B because of smoke, they claimed it was too smoky. Well, it was too smoky in Fairbanks, not here.

The reality is that the sheep population, we have to know what the baseline, what the population can be. It can't be as high as it was in the 1960s and 1970s 'cause it takes 20 years of really easy winters to do that. I saw a sheep that was up to 15 years of age in those days. Now the population is at its lowest abysmal number. We have to go to a medium number as this is what the population can be and so if we're under state regulations every last recruiting ram is being killed and the population is below carrying capacity than what the mean point of the population is we have to be restrictive. That's what we've done. We've closed the sheep hunting down in the park. There's reasons why, but you have to have an idea as you get more and more data over time. This is a long-term thing. This is a hunting plan recommendation that's gonna be here. Hopefully the park will be here for several 100 years, and so we're gonna go through oscillations in the population.

So I do feel that this carrying capacity is a sort of an idea, what the sheep population can actually be. A lot of the surveys were done after the 2013 brutal winter with a one month late winter that killed 66% of the Central Arctic Caribou Herd and killed up to 50 to 75% of the Itkillik sheep. We do have to have some - what is our mean point?

That's what this is talking about is we need to have some kind of an idea so that when we get into populations going down, we need to get restrictive. We can't have ewe harvest. We can't have lots of sport hunters killing every legal ram they can find. We have to get restrictive, so we'd have to have a sort of a baseline number. So over time you'll be able to fine tune that, but right now you have an oscillation of what was your first surveys here in like 2015 or something, all the way down to what we've had recently. And so the 2015 survey is actually after the 2013 sheep decline, where there was only three lambs per 100 ewes in 2013, and there were only six lambs per 100 ewes in 2014. The stress was so much the ewes didn't even produce the next year.

So we've had some population decline. This is talking about – I used the term carrying capacity. That's a common term. What can the landscape support? It can support a heck of a lot more sheep than what we have right now. That's what this is talking about. So over time you may be able to fine-tune this, but we should have like the error bars, this is the range of the population, and we should be up here and we're still way back down here. So that's what I'm talking about.

Taqulik Hepa: I might just add to that. It's made me think of just a couple of points to think about. And looking at it from a broader lens that you know, many different animals are, they go through a population cycles and it's known. I don't know enough about the natural history of Dall's sheep in the high arctic, especially in the Brooks Range or the central Brooks Range. But I think of things such as examples such as the moose and the Colville. You know it's what the geographic area can sustain so many moose. Otherwise, you know it won't grow to be a very big herd at this time with the current conditions. Qaaktaq are the same way or Arctic Cisco that they get up to a certain point. The size of the fish are good and then they start over again. There's like a seven-year cycle that these fish go through and the hunters in the community learn to adapt to that cycle, anticipating that it's probably going to be a low year. Probably going to get small fish, but it's got 7 more years to get to that peak. So you know to look at it, you know in this strategy of you know what's appropriate for this place and the Dall sheep. You know what are the population objectives and to understand that there might be, you know, different management regimes for where we are. These are things that come to mind, as Jack was speaking about the historical trend of the ups and downs. I don't know if that made any sense, but that's what came to my mind. Just food for thought. Thank you.

Kyle Joly: Thank you both very much. You know, I think what's going on here is that the term carrying capacity has a very specific meaning for the scientific community and it has to do with looking at the habitat, which generally is the vegetation, and figuring out how much biomass, how much proteins on the landscape and translating that to how many animals it can support. And I think what is important is what you're mentioning is what do the populations go up to? What do they go down to? What's the variability from year to year and how do we use that to try and manage the herds and try and manage hunting? And I think you know we can do what you want. I just think that we probably got hung up on the term carrying capacity because as far as I know, as far as Zack knows, there is no formula to put in variables to come up with, you know if you have this much of this habitat, you can support 100 sheep and you know that just doesn't exist as far as we know. But we are committed to looking at populations, population trends, population

oscillations, population variability and using that to better manage the sheep and the harvest of them. And so I think we're on the same wavelength here, I think we probably just got tripped on that word carrying capacity.

Jack Reakoff: What term would you prefer to use? That's what this is. That's what this discussion is about. I have a perception of what we're trying to do. You have the same perception, except you got hung up on a terminology. The Department of Fish and Game loves to use carrying capacity. You know, like you know, that's something they really like to use. That's why I use that term. So what term would you like to use to fit this category?

Kyle Joly: You know, I don't have a good term off the top of my head, but I'm willing to give it some thought and work with Zack to kind of provide you some language for you to consider. It's your plan, but you know that's something I think that we can do. I do suspect it's not going to be as nice as 2 words to capture the whole meaning of what we're both thinking about, but we can work on that, and now that we've had this conversation, I understand what you're getting at and I can translate that to Zack as well. And we can work on massaging that so we have a common framework.

Jack Reakoff: Well, you could look at Western Arctic caribou, you could look at a population. Western Arctic got up to 490,000, got down to 75,000 in 1975. And so right now, the workgroup has worked to where 152,000 is way too few caribou for that population. They have sort of a mean point that they're going to. That's the discussion here. That's what we're talking about. So go ahead, Gary,

Gary Hanchett: I'm looking at a pretty complicated project here when you take the whole picture in because you're looking at what's been called the carrying capacity, let's substitute that for sustenance stability factor. And then we got health of sheep in regards to various illnesses that they get. Then there's predation, that's gotta be figured in. And then there's weather. And then, as Taqulik brought up, there's the cyclic behavior of all living things. So it's a pretty big undertaking to get this down and to me it looks like it's a pretty big bite with the funds and the number of people. Especially right now, but it is something that needs to be done. We just don't know where we're at. That's it for me. Thank you.

Kyle Joly: Yeah, Gary. That's an excellent observation. I think you're both right on both fronts. One, it's difficult. And two, it needs to be done. And so you know, that's what we're here for. We'll try and tackle it and you know it might not happen tomorrow, but it is something that needs to be done and so we should get on it.

Jack Reakoff: The Western Interior Council requested comments on this management strategy in April of 2023. We've been requesting comment - your comments are the first clarification comments that we're willing to work with this. We couldn't get anybody. The Department of Fish and Game, nobody wants to talk about composition because that's going to look bad if we got bad numbers coming up behind us.

There's political reasons why your agencies won't comment on this. So the reality is we need to have a management strategy 'cause you're not always gonna be there, Kyle, and neither are you, Ellen. And neither is a whole bunch of people in the next 150, 300 years that are gonna understand what this population is doing. We're actually writing it down to understand how we're gonna manage the sheep as a hunting plan recommendation in the Gates of the Arctic National Park and Preserve. So that would be my comments.

Ellen Lyons: And Jack, thank you very much for those comments. It's really good to have this conversation with this Commission and know that these are our thoughts and we are happy to continue to talk about them. We too want this to be implementable and effective. So you know, though, I think we share a common goal and I think that's really great. I'm glad to hear that these comments were helpful. So that's great.

Jack Reakoff: Very helpful.

Ellen Lyons: So there's just one more and that is a real quick.

Marcy Okada: Pollock has a comment.

Taqulik Hepa: Go ahead, Pollock.

Pollock Simon Sr.: I'd like to make some comments. For the past several years, the sheep population has been declining. Every meeting I go to, says the population is declining. We've been seeing sheep up in the mountains for years. Last couple of years, peoples come back sometimes empty handed. I'd like to see more effort done about the sheep population decline and I want to see if the sheep population could be restored. Cause young people today like to go up into sheep country and climb all around in the mountains. That's fun for them, but there's no sheep. So that's my comments.

Marcy Okada: Thank you, Pollock. And just for reference, Pollock's referring to the Alatna River. Allakaket and Alatna hunters go up the Alatna and sometimes the John River.

Ellen Lyons: Thank you, Pollock. I appreciate those comments. You know, I think we share that common goal of understanding and managing sheep in the way to improve populations and preserve those populations and preserve that subsistence hunting. So you know we are going to definitely continue to work towards those goals in cooperation with this Commission. So thank you.

One last thing about the use of annuli and harvest regulations. The main comment is generally the Park Service will defer to the state regulations when they are not in conflict with Park Service policies, and we find that to be true with regards to the annuli. But of course, the SRC can engage with the Board of Game directly. And you know, again, Zack can answer any more questions in more detail, should you have them.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, this the annuli regulation was - the Western Interior Regional Advisory Council submitted a proposal and myself submitted a proposal to eliminate 8 count annuli. The Board of Game reviewed the proposal. There's very few sheep that takes too long to get there. It might take them 10 years, so the proposal failed last month so.

The problem with counting rings is a lot of novice hunters or even experienced hunters can miscount the rings at a distance and shoot sublegal sheep, shooting younger sheep. A significant number of sheep that are seized when they come in to be sealed, are the hunter misidentified the annuli, and so we were trying to get rid of that. That didn't happen. This management strategy, like I said, was adopted in 2023 before there were any proposals before the Board of Game. And so this maybe an obsolete portion of that, but I don't think so. I think it should still remain in the management strategy that counting rings at a distance is not a great idea. That's a real bad idea.

On Facebook, there are hunters that about 50 to 80% of the hunters with a dead sheep laying in front of a camera can't count the rings on the horns. That's a big problem. So this needs to stay in here, but I don't want to extract it. Future managers have to understand that that has been a problem. Look at that - it's embedded in the management strategy at the back that composition in the Atigun Gorge actually shows that when sheep get to three quarter curl, they start disappearing. Look at the bottom line below the dark line and you'll see when they get to three quarter curl, they start going away. That means that they were shot as sub-legal. Those are almost bulletproof against predation. That's human induced mortalities. And so that number shows you, the managers don't want, they want to cover their eyes and plug their ears and make noise. They don't want to think about that many sheep being killed. This has happened from 1986 to 2012. The area that they surveyed was within a half a mile of the road. When you got lots of hunters all trying to count rings, it's a problem. And we may be at that point in the future if they build a road to Anaktuvuk Pass, there might be all kinds of hunters driving and going up the Itkillik drainage into the preserve. So we need to have this in here you might. It's not applicable right now, but it's something to think about in the future for management. We're thinking about long term here, so that'd be my comment. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Ellen Lyons: And I too will say thank you. I'll say thank you, Madam Chair and Commissioners, for hearing the National Park Service's input on this important topic.

I would also like to on a more personal note, make an announcement that I will be retiring on May 3rd of this year and I just want to express my thanks to this team for allowing me to participate in this, I have learned so much. It has been so wonderful to learn about the issues and hear about the concerns. I think this is a wonderful group and I wish you the best into the future and just thank you so much.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Ellen. Thank you.

Jack Reakoff: Thank you.

Raymond Woods: Madam Chair, Raymond. I just got a comment for this. I think Jack was there also. We went to the game management and we discussed about the caribou, the sheep and Jack did a good presentation on sheep. But the representatives that were there from the game management during that meeting. I mean, there were like 5 empty seats and we went to report to a game management. That was the game management meeting. Game management, Fish and Game will not...They think that we still have problems trying to figure out what this study is all about this management about sheep and all that other stuff that we do with caribou.

What we need to do well, I'll just suggest that we need to make a strategy plan. And we need to put it all together from our table. I represent the Upper Kobuk. My people are looking at me and asking me questions. Okay, what's going on with the sheep? What's going on with the caribou? And when I go to meetings and I'm sitting here, and we're still trying to figure out what the sheep does or what they do or what the count is and we don't have that count yet. It's been over 10 years now since the last survey went out, and then what's the lifetime of a sheep? Maybe 12 years, 13 years. Okay, the lambs that they count, the adults are gone now. And we're still trying to figure out what to do.

If I heard you correctly, Madam Chair, earlier that we need to come up with a good strategy plan, put it together, we need to go back. Us representatives from the Kobuk River or Alatna River, I've been talking to my Tribal Council and I've been getting them involved with our game management. If we get their support inputted to what we're doing here on this table, I think would be a lot stronger and go further with this and maybe game managers will start listening to us. That's all I got. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Raymond, for that and it really makes me think about now what? You know, is this document, do we? Because I honestly, this is a Teams meeting and I think that we've had a good review, a good discussion about it, but it might be just my personal experience, but I'd rather either take action or a clear directive of you know what happens next in-person. So we, you know, we get folks from Anaktuvuk Pass or other members here to see what we have and where do we go from here with this strategy. I think that some of the discussions were that once we adopt the strategy and we get to a place where it's good, then it would lead into other management organizations such as the RACs or the Board of Game, or whoever it may be. So I'm thinking about now what? What were we envisioning for this to go? Any thoughts?

Jack Reakoff: My thoughts would be to you know, we've had a real nice discussion with the National Park Service Gates of the Arctic staff about this whole management strategy and we clarified some issues. Those edits that we discussed during this conversation can be incorporated into a final draft, and then we can provide a final draft for review at our winter meeting in November and then submit it as a hunting plan recommendation. But I would prefer to see it in its final draft. So I'll make a motion that this draft be readdressed by National Park Service, change the various, you know carrying capacity, define that, you know what we're looking for about ram

composition, you know, half, three quarter, full. There were various things we talked about, distance sampling's okay in July, but you still have to think about what sheep are doing throughout their life cycle during the year. And so then we have the final draft before us in our winter meeting and then we make a final decision. So I make a motion to have this edited by National Park Service for our final review in November. That's a motion.

Taqulik Hepa: There's a motion on the floor to have the staff reply to the discussion and make the edits based on our discussions today and present it back to us for a final review and for us to consider action at the November meeting, is there a second?

Raymond Woods: I second it, Raymond.

Taqulik Hepa: Seconded by Raymond. Any discussion on the motion for questions, including our staff?

Gary Hanchett: I have one, this is Gary. Really, really nailed it with getting together with more people that are on the ground in these very local areas because sheep, just like people and caribou and moose, they're kind of specific to where they live and they have different habits. And so it is with the people that hunt them and have for, in this case, thousands of years. So that information is in-value as Raymond has brought out with his dad, hunting. So that would be really good to get into this final draft, real effort to get the local people involved in their specific areas, if at all possible. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you and thank you for bringing. Yes, I was gonna say I'm very supportive of your thoughts and comments there. If we go in November and take action and make this a recommended harvest management strategy for our park then bringing it back to the communities, you know, I think is something within our responsibility as well to share it to get feedback, to let them understand that this is the tool of the strategy that we will be using for this specific stock or herd of Dall's sheep that is referenced in here. So thank you.

Jack Reakoff: Yes, it's my understanding, once we make, if we finalize it in November, then it goes out to the public. My understanding and the Park Service can correct me, when we made hunting plan recommendations that went out to the public again for comments and the Park Service makes a final review. Is that the way that goes again, Ellen, Mark, or Marcy - the process?

Marcy Okada: Jack, we do need to have a public process through the RACs and ACs before it's finalized and then possibly public hearings I believe, maybe in our communities.

Jack Reakoff: Right, so like Horns and Antlers. Horns and Antlers was a long process. Once we made the hunting plan recommendation. So they're still gonna be lots of opportunity for public comment. It's not just a done deal. It's gonna be like...it's submitted as a hunting plan recommendation. The public still has a time to comment on it. But we're defining what the hunting plan recommendation is that we're gonna send out. That's what we're actually doing right now and in November.

Taqulik Hepa: And I was going to say I think what would be helpful at this November meeting is to have a timeline or an outline of the process. And you referencing the other example brings me back to it is a long process and there is a process, but I would like to be able to see that visually and absorb it so I could better understand that process as well. Thank you.

Jack Reakoff: Yes, that's a great idea.

Taqulik Hepa: OK. Any other discussion on the motion? Hearing none. All those in favor of the motion for the Park Service to go back, make the edits based on our discussions today and present it to the Commission at the November meeting for us to take action and so on and so forth. So all those in favor of that, please say aye.

Everyone says aye.

Taqulik Hepa: All those opposed, thank you and congratulations. Good job and thank you for the review Park Service and the discussion amongst our Commission.

Jack Reakoff: Yes, thank you very much. Appreciate that.

16. NPS Staff Reports

NPS Regional Office Subsistence Program Update – Eva Patton

Eva Patton: We do have a number of updates at our Regional office here. I'm sure, all of you have, you know, heard big, big times and big change and big shake-ups in the federal government. Sarah Creachbaum retired, she plans to come back to Alaska and volunteer with the parks this summer, so that's good news. Sarah Creachbaum, our Regional Director and you know, one of the big things she wanted to do before she left just recently was to thank all of the Subsistence Resource Commission members. And thank you and thank all of you for a lifetime of dedication and volunteer service to the parks and to our park communities. So a big thank you from Sarah. And again, Dave Alberg, who is our Deputy Director, is acting in Sarah's role and will continue to provide that supporting role for the Federal Subsistence Board and on subsistence for our region.

And also Grant Hildebrand, who is my supervisor. He's the Resources Regional Director for National Park Service, and he did move on to another position. And so we've got someone else on our Resources team who's acting in his role currently. But some of you probably know Grant from over the years in his supporting role, also with the Federal Subsistence Board. And the other big one we have that we just learned recently is that our National Park Service Native Relations Tribal Liaison Program manager, Maija Lukin has also decided to take the leave, the DRP, it's called and this Thursday will be her last day. She did share with all of us a really wonderful e-mail this morning I forwarded it on to Marcy, and I'm sure she would be happy to share with all of you. Her Inupiaq

wisdom and seeing these changes as a part of life and the flow of the seasons and that there's no word for goodbye - that she will see us all later. So her e-mail this morning, I know really warmed my heart and soul and really kind of put my mind in a different place of seeing all this change as a part of life and that we are all in this together and working together and connected to the land and water and the seasons. I'm sure Maija would be really happy to share those thoughts with all of you. So made me really happy, to have that spirit as she moves on.

And so Justin Junge is part of Maija's team here at the Regional office and he will be acting in Maija's role. And so continuing with the Alaska Native Relations and Tribal Program here at the Regional office at the Park Service. And then our Subsistence team, we're all still here. We'll be staying until they force us out the door. So we're really hopeful to be able to continue to serve all of our subsistence communities and parks, and we're just really grateful that we have our broader subsistence community. So all of our subsistence coordinators and our subsistence parks are still here with us, including Marcy and all just really dedicated to serving you and the SRCs and all our subsistence communities, so those are the staff updates here.

I did want to provide an update on IRA funding, so we are still in a holding pattern on that. When the new administration came on, they did freeze all Inflation Reduction Act and BIL (Bipartisan Infrastructure Law) funding. And we at the National Park Service Regional Office had received about 6 million in IRA funding for co-stewardship and food security projects in partnership with all of our subsistence park communities. And so we were in the process of working on those cooperative agreements in conjunction with our rural subsistence communities and Tribes, and had just entered into a contract with the Denali Commission to administer about two million of those funds to help support the interest from our subsistence communities and Tribes in working on co-stewardship projects in conjunction with the park and food security initiatives and infrastructure to help support food security, culture camps, and transmission of knowledge from generation to generation. Those funds have been put on a temporary hold and we are still waiting. What we heard from both our Financial Assistance office that supports us in the cooperative agreements with our park communities and also from the Contracting office that funding is on hold pending review from the current administration to meet Presidential orders and objectives. There are a number of court cases going through about the freezing of funding that's been appropriated by Congress. And then we also have contractual agreements - the money has been obligated to the Park Service and then to our partners. So it is still on temporary hold, but there has been some movement in other arenas that we remain hopeful that those funds may be lifted again at some point here. And we'll certainly keep all of you posted, you know, as we learn more. I know we have many, many communities, that all of us in our parks have been working on important projects and funding to help support subsistence and food security. So, we remain hopeful, and we'll keep you posted, you know, as soon as we hear more on that.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you. Eva. Any questions or comments?

Jack Reakoff: I really enjoyed Sarah Creachbaum, working with the Subsistence Resource Commission over in Anaktuvuk Pass last April when we had that meeting. She's such a nice person and very unassuming. She was a listener. If you listen that much, you're going to understand all the various aspects of things, so I thought she was an excellent Regional Director. I can't say that I've met, you know the top echelon like that and at that willing to think and go into the trenches about various issues. So, that played forward in her role as a Federal Subsistence Board member. So I would make a motion to send a letter of appreciation from our Subsistence Resource Commission for her outstanding work with this Commission and wish her well in her... And hopefully we will bump into her when she's up here volunteering. So I make that motion.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Jack. There's a motion on the floor. Do we have a second?

Gary Hanchett: You have a second.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Gary. So there's a motion by Jack and a second by Gary for us to submit or to write a letter of appreciation for Sarah. Any discussion? Maybe just for the discussion. You know I had the same exact thoughts, and I really enjoyed our short time with her, our interactions in Anaktuvuk Pass. It's sad to see her go because she really did...there was something about her that was so connected. You know, for her to come and spend a couple days in one of our villages was really awesome and she seemed to be really enjoying herself. Very thoughtful. She showed a lot of care in the discussions that we were having and asked a lot of good questions, so I would totally support this. Any other discussions? If not all those in favor of the motion say aye.

Everyone said aye.

Taqulik Hepa: All those opposed. And thank you.

Gary Hanchett: Madam Chair. I have a general statement if you will? Probably I don't know exactly how to word this, but I think I probably speak for everybody there that we understand and have great sympathy for federal workers, particularly those we know associated with the SRC. It's a sad time. Hopefully it will be over soon, and things will be better than they were before all this occurred. I wish to thank you all for that patience that you've always shown. And your perseverance. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Gary. Maybe just to that point. Yeah, go ahead, Jack, I'm thinking, but go ahead.

Jack Reakoff: I really agree with Gary. You know, I know a lot of federal employees. They work really hard and they're really unsung heroes and they're not just... The perception is that they don't do a lot of stuff (the recording broke up). I'm happy that Eva, Marcy, Mark, you know the people who are staying and gonna help us continue along. We got to bring up new federal employees. Now that's the problem with that. If you drive away the federal employees - we lose continuity, we lose institutional knowledge. So I totally agree

with Gary that we have some very valuable people that we've actually lost. And so I highly appreciate federal and state employees. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Jack. And I think you both said it. I was just in agreement that, you know, just being with this Commission and with the Department of Wildlife Management for a long time. With the Park Service in particular, in this role that I've been sitting in that I've seen a lot of good positive changes - the willingness to partner. I'm just giving encouragement to the staff that are there, you know that through these changes in administrations we see mainly people in certain positions come and go, but we totally appreciate, you know, the progress that we made and I look forward to continuing to work with you with this Commission and with the staff to again make progress.

So I just want to give you guys encouragement and that it's visible, you know the partnership and the almost like trust that we're building upon so, thank you.

Marcy Okada: This is Marcy. And thank you, Madam Chair and Commission members. We now more than ever need encouragement. So I truly appreciate the kind words that you've shared. I really do. So thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: And this forward thinking, too, that administrations come and go, so there might...It's kind of like we're talking about the different cycles of different animals that it goes up and down. So sometimes we right their way, but if you're passionate about what you do, you continue to ride those waves and we'll continue to make progress with the good people that we have at the table now and thank you for your investment and dedication to continue your roles. Okay, I think we'll move on.

Ranger Division Update – Mark Dowdle for Scott Sample

Mark Dowdle: Madam Chair, I communicated with Scott earlier today. He wasn't able to be on the call. He is working to train our staff for the summer field season today and was out of the office, but he did let me know that he did not have any significant updates for the Ranger Division, beyond what he reported back at our last meeting in November and Scott Sample is our Chief Park Ranger. He is still with us and for Gates of the Arctic, he is our only Law Enforcement Park Ranger. We do have a Park Ranger in Yukon-Charley, who's duty stationed in Eagle, and he's a Ranger pilot, so he does spend some time in Gates of the Arctic as well. But one thing that I've been working with Scott on is to develop a position, we call it position description, but develop a position that could be more park based, even if the person was duty stationed out of Fairbanks, they would spend a lot of time in the park working with folks like Al Smith up at Anaktuvuk Pass for in-park patrols and to also spend time in our communities and villages as well. So that's something that we're working towards. We're not there yet. And also the potential to hire what we would call a District Ranger, but it would be another law enforcement ranger for Gates of the Arctic. That's the Ranger Division update and I'm happy to answer any questions that you have.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Mark, for that update and we look forward to having Scott at our November meeting, but I'm glad that you were able to provide that summary for him. Any questions or comments from the Commission?

Jack Reakoff: One comment, Madam Chair, I appreciate the law enforcement aspect of the National Park Service and that they're trying to move forward with the budgets that they have. I do feel that you know this is telegraphing to people who would abuse the National Parks, you know, poaching in the parks and so forth. It's at this point, I hope that people don't feel emboldened to just go even to try to use park resources for commercial enterprises even further that may have been occurring already. So I'm happy to hear that you know there's gonna be, you know, publication for a District Ranger etcetera. And so I appreciate that, Mark, that Gates of the Arctic is still moving forward with enforcement of our valuable resources. Thank you, Madam Chair.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you. I was gonna bring muktuk to Ambler, and I unfortunately, I'm eating it by myself, so I'll bring it in November. So that's why I'm taking a bit to finish chewing. Maybe Mark, if you could just let him (Scott Sample) know that the North Slope Borough Planning Department put in a request to add inspectors across the North Slope. And so there might be, hopefully an increase in presence along the Dalton Highway and you know that industrial area as well to make sure that people have the right permits that are required under our permitting under Title 19 of our Home Rule government.

But yeah, I just want to encourage him (Scott Sample) to reach out to me so I could make that connection that they have a way to communicate any potential violations that they could coordinate on. So, if you could let him know that he can call me, and I could connect him with the right people at the Planning Department.

Mark Dowdle: I will certainly do that. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Any other questions related to Scott Sample and the Rangers - information that Mark presented?

Wildlife Update/Western Arctic Caribou Herd – Kyle Joly

Teams Recording Part 2 (second half after Sheep Discussion)

Kyle Joly: Thank you very much. I appreciate you accommodating my schedule. Yeah, just a quick update on caribou. So as a couple people have mentioned, caribou were near a bunch of towns including Ambler, Kobuk, Shungnak. But very, very close basically in

Noorvik, very close to Selawik, close to Kiana, not too far from Buckland. But also on the North Slope - Point Lay, Wainwright had a lot of Western Arctic caribou nearby. And so just as a reminder and an ask, please keep telling people, reminding people to try and lay off the cows as much as they can.

It was another rough winter - we lost 13% of our collars from November to March to mortality. So that's a pretty high number, much higher than we've seen in most winters, except for the last two which were even higher. So it's a little better than the previous couple winters, but still a lot higher than we'd like to see it. When I say we, I should say Fish and Game because we weren't allowed to travel at the end of March. Fish and Game was able to put out our collars and their collars, so there's 34 more GPS collars on Western Arctic herd adult females. So we're back over 100, about 120 GPS collared females in the Western Arctic herd, and that's all the updates I have on caribou. We talked a lot more extensively in the fall and that's all that's new. But I'll be happy to take any questions.

Taqulik Hepa: I just wanted to ask, so there'll be another attempt this summer to do another aerial survey photo census?

Kyle Joly: That's correct, Madam Chair. The Fish and Game did give it a try last year and it just didn't pan out. The Western Arctic herd is one of the more reliable herds. Probably the most reliable herd in getting photo census, so there's reason to be optimistic. Other herds like the Porcupine, just really haven't come together, and it's been a very long time since they've been able to get good census counts. But the Western Arctic herd, generally, there's a real good shot of getting it and the Fish and Game is lining up to get a census done this year and hopefully they'll get that done, given the mortality rates that we've seen last winter and this winter. I'm not expecting fantastic news.

Taqulik Hepa: Any questions for Kyle?

Jack Reakoff: I appreciate Kyle's update on the Western herd. That's a fairly significant mortality.

Taqulik Hepa: OK, if there are no further questions and again, we appreciate your updates. I look forward to hearing more about the Western Arctic caribou. Again, people are calling and asking, reporting what they're seeing at least on the North Slope, in our communities. So I think that's a good sign that people, the awareness is still continuing. Understanding that there is that conservation concern with the Western Arctic Caribou herd, understanding that cows are the most important thing at this time to help this herd recover. I know that our community hunters will be interested in, you know, knowing more about the like you said, 13% of the collars, there was a loss. That's huge, between November and March, so I'll try to share that information. But if there's more factual information that we could bring out to our communities, you know, through our lines of outreach, that would be helpful.

I think the more we get out there all consistently, the more aware people are gonna be. You know, to make sure that they're meeting their need, but also trying to help the herd recover. And I just want to say that I'm glad people are asking questions. Thank you.

Kyle Joly: Thank you so much, Taqulik. I really appreciate it. And getting the word out is super important. We do have some handouts. Marcy, made a nice little handout that we sent out to some of the RACs. I don't know if you've got that, but if not, it's like 5 or 7 pages that I'm sure Marcy will be able to send out to the group. And you know, I just really appreciate this group so much. I learn something every time and you know, having these open discussions is just really beneficial to me, but also the resources, and I just really appreciate it. And if you guys meet tomorrow morning, I will be back on the call. If not, I hope to see you in-person in November. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Hey, just before you leave again, going back to the part about Facebook. I heard somebody mention that you guys have a social media specialist? I don't know the exact title, but this is the kind of information through social media that would be very helpful. And if you know that if we follow you guys in getting that education and outreach out about the current status and what we're learning as time goes by. I think would be very helpful and we can share it, 'cause our Department has a Facebook page as well. So pressing that share button will reach a lot of people across the Slope, who follow our Facebook page as well. Thanks.

Kyle Joly: That's a great recommendation. Yeah, I'll work with Marcy and our social media person to do that, and it's a good reminder for, you know, the entire park staff that if we're more active on that, more people will follow it and then you know that will create a positive feedback and we can have some dialogue and some messaging that can help the resources as well. So thank you so much.

Taqulik Hepa: OK. That was good. A good update much so important to hear these little tidbits as the year goes on. And monitoring is very important indicators that this is what we could call them is important. Again that continuous communication with the people who are harvesting and providing for their communities is important. And you know, even, you know, we were talking about furbearer hunting. That has the potential to help these herds recover. And so we're always encouraging and trying to host workshops to teach the next generation of providers, you know, how do you properly skin a wolf or a qavik (wolverine) or whatever it may be, or to make the garments that keep our hunters warm. Alright, we will move on to old business, go back to old business and we'll start with the RAC meeting updates and Marcy is taking the lead with that update.

Resources Update – Ellen Lyons

Ellen Lyons: Thank you, Madam Chair. Primarily, you know the list is behind TAB 5 of the projects that we are planning for this upcoming summer. Primarily what I want to say to everyone here is that we have a full team of biologists and cultural resource professionals who will be working very hard to implement their projects this year and be as successful this summer as they always have been in the past, getting the information that we need to assess the condition of our resources and share that information with the public. So I'm very, very optimistic that we will have a wonderful field season this year.

As you can see on the list...I do want to address, actually one thing that came up, Jack, you had a question about some BLM surveying that happened in 2024? And you'll find an e-mail from Mark Dowdle in your inbox. But I just wanted to say that that BLM survey work actually occurred on the western side of the park, where the Noatak National Preserve and the Gates of the Arctic boundaries are aligned and then south of that is state land. And so they were clearly delineating land ownership along that boundary. And so that was the work that you had asked about at the last meeting that we had.

Jack Reakoff: Okay. Thank you.

Ellen Lyons: Yep. The BLM will be doing the snowshoe hare work out of Marion Creek. That is a project that Donna DiFolco here in the National Park Service had kind of instigated and was really deeply involved with and now it's under BLM. But the work will continue, and they've really found out a lot of really great information about snowshoe hare habitat and the interaction with lynx, so that work will continue, but just under the BLM.

And then there'll be some collaring and monitoring of 60 sheep in SE Gates of the Arctic, and that'll be led by the Department of Fish and Game. And those are the primary ones that I wanted to draw people's attention to. Again, I just really appreciate the opportunity to be a part of this group as part of the Park Service and I wish you all the best in the years to come. Thank you.

Jack Reakoff: I would like to comment. Thank you very much for your engagement, Ellen. You delved into the various things and made notes and so forth, and I think you did a great job. I hope you have a good retirement and hopefully you'll end up coming up to hike in the Gates of the Arctic Park. We'll run into you up here.

Ellen Lyons: Thank you. It's definitely on my bucket list, so I hope to do the same. I appreciate that, Jack.

Jack Reakoff: I'm not hearing Taqulik, I think you're muted.

Taqulik Hepa: I am. I'm sorry, I'm talking to myself again. I was gonna say I ran into her at the airport the other day and it was good to see her. And I was sad that she was retiring early and again, you know, just a short time with her. I thank you, Ellen, for all that you've done. I really enjoyed our short time together and I'm sure we'll come across each other wherever we may be. As Jack said if you're out exploring the park, maybe I'll be around too. I'll see you somewhere, but thank you.

Ellen Lyons: Thank you, Taqulik. Yeah, I really appreciate that. And like I said, we have a full team here and I have no doubt that the Gates of the Arctic Resources team here at the park is going to continue to do great work with you guys and continue to work with you to get the information that you need. We have a great team here and I will be sorry to leave it.

Taqulik Hepa: And then just for your field projects, I look forward to hearing updates on you know what is collected between our last meeting in November to present. Like for example, the Rusting Rivers, I found that to be very interesting. And there's a few others here, so I look forward to hearing more details on some of these projects next winter. Thank you.

Ellen Lyons: Thank you for that reminder. I also put a link in the chat to a National Park Service news blurb about the Rusting Rivers project, if anyone is interested in looking at it.

Taqulik Hepa: Now, when that concern comes from because we are seeing similar things across the North Slope, and I learned from your guys' presentation what may be happening. So that's good. Thanks. If there's no further questions for Ellen, we will move on to Marcy to provide the subsistence update.

Subsistence Update – Marcy Okada

Marcy Okada: Thank you, Madam Chair. I really just have a quick update. Some of it's sort of a re-sharing really. So in times previous meetings I had shared that the Park Service funded Alaska Department of Fish and Game Division of Subsistence Upper Kobuk Comprehensive Harvest Survey project. As we speak, Division of Subsistence staff are up there in Ambler. Not sure Tristen, if they've already stopped by your household, but?

Tristen Pattee: Yes, they have.

Marcy Okada: They have. Oh, good. So they're surveying Ambler this year. And then they're gonna move on to survey Shungnak and Kobuk next year. And then shoot for writing up the report on all three communities and have it finalized by 2028. Unfortunately, I was supposed to be helping with those surveys. The plan was to time it right, so that I could help with the surveys, and then we would have our Subsistence Resource Commission meeting in Ambler, you know, right after. Or anyway, just try and make it coincide, but it didn't work out for various reasons, but I do hope to help with the Shungnak/Kobuk surveys and both the Tribal Councils for Shungnak and Kobuk have approved the project for next year. So that's a quick update for that project.

And then I think I mentioned in times past that there's a Dall's Sheep Traditional Cultural Landscape project with Dr. Annette Watson out of the College of Charleston. That's another National Park Service funded project that mainly formed because at this Commission meeting, we heard that Allakaket and Alatna folks are definitely going to the park to go look for sheep and it's a cultural resource and it's a subsistence resource that they really find important to utilize and to pass on traditional knowledge of how to get up into the park

and go look for sheep and harvest sheep. And so that's why this research project was created and hope to have Dr. Annette Watson present that information at a future SRC meeting as it gets finalized.

And then lastly from meeting to meeting, you guys have been receiving updates from Dr. Taylor Stinchcomb with the Wildlife Conservation Society. She couldn't make it to today's meeting. She's down in the Ahtna region, down by Glenallen, Copper Center. But she has been doing interviews, and this particular project is gonna be focused on Anaktuvuk Pass. And so it's a Park Service funded project that she hopes to get underway in Anaktuvuk Pass in the next couple months once the funding is obligated.

And then lastly, there is an Anaktuvuk Pass Project Jukebox project with the University of Alaska Fairbanks Oral History program. These are old interviews that were conducted by various people like Margaret Blackman, Ed Hall, Joseph Sonnenfeld, Grant Spearman and they were archived at the University's library. And so, you know, just sitting there with no real access to them, and so it's with the hopes that we can share those interviews via the Project Jukebox platform. And every time I was going up to Anaktuvuk Pass, I was working with family members and sharing information about the project. And there's been a lot of support for this project, especially because many, many elders have passed on. One thing we're doing right now is getting release forms signed by family members. Just this past week, I reached out to Mary Hugo at the Simon Paneak Museum. And she has a very strong interest in doing oral history interviews with her aaka, her grandmother and so it'll be a nice partnership between UAF and the Museum up there. So that's my update, if folks have any questions?

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Marcy. I was gonna say again, just having the in person meeting in November, hopefully we're able to do so. I look forward to getting more in depth in person anyways, but yeah, thank you so much. Alright, the last one is the Gates of the Arctic subsistence management plan, Marcy.

Subsistence Management Plan – Marcy Okada

Marcy Okada: Yeah, so given the, you know we want to utilize your time most effectively and efficiently. I sent out 6 chapters. Well, really seven because there's a horns and antlers chapter to this management plan, but also want to for the newer folks that have never taken a look at this management plan, maybe I could just provide a little synopsis?

Taqulik Hepa: That would be great. Thank you.

Marcy Okada: So this is the subsistence management plan for Gates of the Arctic and when we were referencing the Commission's hunting program recommendation, those hunting program recommendations essentially make up part of the management plan. When actions are taken by this Commission, it's documented through this management plan and since the SRC really got going around 1984/1985, you know those earlier years there was a lot of hunting plan recommendations. And then as it moved to 1990, essentially, when the state was out of compliance with ANILCA and the federal subsistence management program was created and the Federal Subsistence Management Board was created, and the Regional Advisory Councils started having meetings because they're the advisory bodies to the Federal Subsistence Board - there were less and less hunting plan recommendations coming from this Commission, because they were effectively submitting wildlife hunting proposals, fisheries proposals to the Federal Subsistence Board. So, the whole federal subsistence management program took over. Not really took over, but essentially the process went that way in regards to regulations for Gates of the Arctic. And that is, did you want to say something, Jack?

Jack Reakoff: You know a cat scratched my legs, sorry.

Marcy Okada: Oh oh. Didn't realize you had a cat.

Taqulik Hepa: I was gonna say, do they have cats in Wiseman running wild? Was it a lynx? OK anyways.

Jack Reakoff: No, it's my wife's son's cat. We're watching him and he's a kitty, so he's rambunctious.

Taqulik Hepa: So this Commission, as are the other SRCs they're tasked with recommending a program for subsistence hunting on park lands and you know, with the sheep management strategy that was discussed today, that'll be submitted into this management plan. So that's basically the briefest summary I could come up with, and I don't know if folks had the chance to go through some of these chapters, but I think the main purpose is to take a look and focus on the actions that were taken which are at the end of every chapter, and it also provides a nice history of what were some of the issues in the past, how were they resolved, what did the SRC take action on, like what were the important issues back then? So I think that's what we're gonna focus on mainly, if folks feel comfortable with that?

Taqulik Hepa: I think that's a good report, yeah. I don't have any objection.

Marcy Okada: Okay, we'll see how far we get. So we'll start with chapter one. Chapter one actually provides a very good background on what is the function of this Commission and hunting plan recommendations. So if a hunting plan recommendation is submitted, the Secretary of Interior must implement the recommendation unless it violates recognized principles of wildlife conservation, it threatens the conservation of healthy populations of wildlife in the park, if it's contrary to the purposes for which the park was established, and then lastly, would it be detrimental to the satisfaction of subsistence needs of local residents? And so if it meets all that criteria, it'll be implemented as a hunting plan recommendation. We already went over the.

Taqulik Hepa: Marcy, just to let you know, I'm gonna try to transition to my desktop, so I could actually read what you have up. Just hold one second. But yeah, you can continue. But you might have a request for me to rejoin. You can continue.

Marcy Okada: OK. And so hunting plan recommendations namely address things such as access, customary and traditional use determinations, eligibility for subsistence, season and harvest limits, methods and means, traditional use areas, trapping, customary trade, cabin use and research. And as I said before really, for these types of things, it was the Federal Subsistence Management Program that started covering those things.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, I'd like to make a comment at this point. I'd like to make a comment on how this progressed. There's a lot of proposals before the State Board of Game regarding, you know, subsistence. They were supposed to be managing rural subsistence, but we couldn't get anywhere with the State Board of Game. They failed the proposals all the time, they were in conflict with state objectives. And when the first year of the Federal Subsistence Board, they ruled on like 286 federal proposals, which would be a phenomenally thick proposal packet. That's because the State Board of Game process would not forthrightly deal with substance management, unless it was in complete non-conflict with non-subsistence uses. So that's why the Subsistence Resource Commissions were pounding away on the State Board of Game to try to get some kind of subsistence issues addressed. So that's from my perspective, having been there in those days.

Marcy Okada: Thank you for sharing that, Jack. You know, one thing to point out is the federal subsistence regulations, initially when they started all of that, those proposals were based on the state hunting regulations. It's because the federal side needed to start with something, and then over the years, being that federal subsistence prioritizes federally qualified rural users, they started modifying those proposals so that it would reflect the federal priority for rural users, but the baseline was the state regulations. And then over the years, they just kept modifying the proposals to uphold the mandate to protect rural subsistence users.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, that's exactly right. They rubber stamped the state regulations even though they were wrong. They had to get something on the books and it was a big...We were really depressed because in 1990, we thought we were gonna get reprieve from the state system. It was in 1991 when the Federal Subsistence Board, they were waiting for the state to have a rural priority that didn't happen. So then the Federal Subsistence Board process really got engaged and that's when regulations - one of the first regulations was to provide a rural priority in the Dalton Highway Corridor Management Area and we've been hunting on that since the fall of 1991. I appreciate you bringing these memories up, Marcy. This is why, how the Federal Subsistence Board process works and then the SRC then started working with the federal program more, on the Regional Councils. So I really appreciate you laying the groundwork for this. You're doing a great job.

Marcy Okada: Thanks Jack. Move down this document. Okay, so it mentions the Charter of which we went through thoroughly today. The first chapter has been updated to reflect our current SRC membership and then we move to Resolution 84-01 and 84 refers to the year and then 01 just refers to that it's the first resolution for that year. So this SRC recommended that the Park Service strive to maintain accurate and higher quality SRC meeting records. Back then, the issue at hand was the recordings were done by tape cassette and so we have many, many tape cassettes. And I don't know, maybe more than several years ago, those tape cassettes are stored in our curation here in our Fairbanks Office, but several years ago, we had some funding to work with UAF Rasmusson Library and all of those tape cassette were digitized. And so now we have digital copies because tape cassettes, as you folks know, they get stringy, they get dried out. And even though they're in curation, some of them were already in bad shape because you'd play it and it sounded like Alvin and the Chipmunks. So UAF was able to slow down the recording, clean them up and digitize them.

So this SRC was concerned about the Park Service having tape recording difficulties at these first few meetings in the 1980s and then they also had requested that draft summary minutes be produced and distributed within 14 to 21 days following each meeting. And at that time, I guess the Park Service got a higher quality audio recorder, but you know fast forward to the modern era. Now we have better recording equipment and then we also have the whole microphone setup so that people can speak into the mike and things can be captured more accurately. So this was really a 1980s issue and early 90s, but we've modernized our equipment to say the least. I think Jack and Taqulik, you came on in the early like 1990 or so, so I'm not sure if things were much better by 1990.

Moving on to the next resolution that was passed in 1985, it's Resolution 85-05, that the SRC created a working outline and topic headings in order to initiate a plan for the subsistence hunting program. Again, this is the very early inception of the SRC, so they were really trying to figure out what's the best way to move forward and creating something from scratch for Gates of the Arctic.

And then Resolution 86-08 was also the beginning of the subsistence management plan for management within the park. And this is all under Title 8, Section 808 of ANILCA. So all of this provides the history you know from the 1980s, as this Commission was really getting started. For instance, in May of 1987, this Commission submitted to the Secretary of Interior and the Governor, the first document attempting to fulfill the requirements of Section 808. It was titled a Subsistence Hunting Program for Gates of the Arctic National Park. It included an overview background and seven hunting plan recommendations.

Taqulik Hepa: So interesting, huh? Yeah, the beginning. I like it. This is a really good review, even though we're doing it online. I'm absorbing so thank you.

Marcy Okada: I mean, it looks like some of the things may have still been the same from back then till now. For instance, it says over the ensuing years the SRC submitted hunting plan recommendations and the NPS attempted to speed up the Secretarial reply process and provide technical information. But as you know, a process is a process, so things take time as things get implemented. And there was a lot of just development stages of how to do things in regards to a subsistence management plan. And a template was created initially by Wrangell St. Elias and Denali SRCs and people were trying to work out the kinks.

So in 1987, there was a hunting plan recommendation submitted to the Secretary of Interior and the Governor - requesting that there be improved communication between state and federal managers and local residents of the park. SRC members felt that improved communication would help develop an appreciation of cultural values by government managers. Similarly, it would provide local residents with a greater appreciation and understanding for regulatory mandates that the state and federal agencies have. So what the Commission suggested was that the Park Service establish 2 cultural/Native liaison positions, develop an intensive, culturally sensitive cross-cultural training program for Park Service staff, and send the Superintendent and other appropriate staff to Regional Elders conferences and other Alaska Native meetings.

So the Secretary responded saying that these recommendations were beyond the authority of the Commission set forth in Section 808, and consequently they were not subject to the requirements of ANILCA. And then the State of Alaska responded in support of the efforts of the Commission to improve cross-cultural communications. And since then there's been some improvement, but back in 1987, the Department of Interior's Alaska Learning Center has developed cross-cultural training opportunities for NPS employees. The NPS in 1990 established key staff positions that answer directly to the Superintendent, a subsistence manager and cultural resource specialist. Positions at the park were created. Park Service conducted a multi-year review of the Subsistence program with full public review in 1997 and they recognized the necessity for continued development and modification of its program based on review and input from the public subsistence users, advisory groups and other state and federal agencies. Park Service staff attended training in cross-cultural communication as necessary.

Currently, employees new to the Park have informal, but mandatory orientation to ANILCA Title 8, resident zone communities, state and federal subsistence management program structures. Also, the function of the SRC and Alaska Native cultures in the region. Senior staff often attend Alaska Federation of Natives conferences, community gatherings and interagency workshops in order to increase the understanding of regional cultures and customary and traditional practices. And locally hire employees with special knowledge of the park resources and cultural traditions are actively recruited and so this continues on.

Most recently, there was Alaska Native Relations training, and that's an interagency effort between all DOI agencies. One of the trainings was held last October and then the most recent one was the last week of February. I attended that training back in 2018 and overall, it's just really well done. I mean, they invite elders from different regions around the state. It's really geared towards folks, local people being able to share their stories. You know difficult stories, because often times it's just stories about folks being out on the land and planes are flying over and they land and you know at the time it's like this is all related to the belief that people were hunting out of season, firearms were confiscated and there was just a lot of miscommunication and misunderstanding and lack of compassion. And you know that relates to the Barrow Duck-in where ducks were, someone was basically criminalized and put in jail and the community came together and said, "Well, if you're arresting this person for hunting a duck out of season, then you're going to have to arrest all of us." And you know that became known as the Barrow Duck-in. And then Ellen recently took that training in late February of this year and if you'd like to...

Ellen Lyons: I did. I just wanted to reiterate what you said is that is one of the best trainings I've ever taken. It is just really incredibly well done and very informative. And really helped in building relationships with people, which I really valued.

Taqulik Hepa: Marcy, if I can make a comment. I know we're just doing a review, but looking at that last bullet point, local hire employees with special knowledge. You know, I think probably back then their goal was I don't know if that objective or that bullet point has been fully met to what they were expecting. And when I read that, I'm thinking that at that time when that was added that they were really hoping that there will be more local people from within the communities within the park or adjacent, would be a part of the employment to tell the story to the visitors. Or you know what I mean? I think that's so that might be one that we could mark to come back to for now.

Marcy Okada: Sure. Yeah, it came in a little bit broken at the end but yeah, if we haven't fully fulfilled that request, then I mean, there's always room to grow. And I believe you're right that the intention was that it would be locally hired people working in their communities to share their own stories.

Taqulik Hepa: Yeah, so maybe when we have further discussion in doing a circle back, we could note that one for further discussion among other ones too. But I wanted to bring that out. Thank you.

Marcy Okada: Thank you, Taqulik. Okay, so some of you might remember this Resolution in 1993. It was to amend the Charter to allocate a representative from the North Slope RAC. I guess back in the day there wasn't a North Slope RAC appointment to this SRC. And with support from the Western Interior RAC and the Northwest Arctic RAC, it became a part of this Commission's charter in 1996. And that's it for chapter one.

Taqulik Hepa: I was going to say thank you, Marcy. That was a good review, a chapter one discussion.

Jack Reakoff: I thought that was a real good baseline to go over, and Marcy did a real good job making that synopsis of that chapter. A lot of those, you know, like the local hire issue was kind of took up quite a bit of a meeting. It was a spring meeting down in Fairbanks and that was quite a discussion issue with you know, we got people coming and going and there was no local people involved in a lot of this that have experience with some of these things. So especially for the interpretive realm, that was kind of a big issue with the SRC. So this brings back all these memories of the long meetings that we had - land transfers in Anaktuvuk Pass and all kinds of stuff. There's some of this stuff in a synopsis, sounds like it just happened. It was kind of parts of various meetings and it was kind of a big issue. So thank you very much for bringing those up, Marcy.

Marcy Okada: That's really why we're doing it now because we still have folks on our Commission that remember going through some of these discussions and the appearance of it, seems like it happened overnight, where changes were made, but you know when you say it was multiple meetings where the discussions were going on for input to be added and changes to be made. It took time. And maybe this may not adequately reflect that, but it's good to have input from long time Commission members.

Okay, I think we can go through this one fairly quickly. I mean it provides a whole background on the park. For this section, just want to focus on that the SRC was actually established in 1982, but they weren't able to start meeting until 1984. And you can imagine that once a Commission is made, is created like this, I mean for a Commission to hit its rhythm and to figure out how things are going to function and all that, takes quite a bit of time.

I have not had a chance to really, you know, now that we have these SRC meeting recordings digitized, it's with the hopes that, you know, you could go to a specific meeting and listen to the discussion that was had about certain issues. In the mid-1990s, the Park Service initiated review of the subsistence laws and regulations. Again, that's similar, that was the time frame of the Federal Subsistence Management Program really taking over. Our subsistence mission statement for the Park Service has not changed. You know it's under ANILCA and the Organic Act of 1916.

These are the main points of the Park Service's subsistence mandate. Protect the opportunity for qualified local rural residents to continue traditional subsistence activities. These subsistence users shall have priority over competing consumptive uses. Recognize that the subsistence way of life may differ from region to region and is continuing to evolve and where appropriate, park management practices may reflect regional diversity. I mean, this Commission itself is a good example of that. Because we cross three different regions - North Slope, Northwest Arctic, and Western Interior. We hear folks' input in today's sheep discussion. You know when Raymond talks about sheep hunting in the Upper Noatak, that's springtime access when there's snow on the ground by snow machine access. When Allakaket and Alatna folks head up into the park, it's fall time hunting, going by boat up the Alatna and John rivers. So that's the fall season. And then on the eastern boundary for sheep hunting - it's also not winter time, it's fall season, maybe late summer. Anaktuvuk Pass - they start sheep hunting in mid-July and sometimes go through October cause you know maybe the caribou haven't come yet. So these three different regions have different time frames that they're hunting sheep.

Promote local involvement and participation in processes associated with subsistence management. Through this Commission, we're promoting local involvement and participation. Ensure that management practices involving the utilization of public lands adequately considers the potential for restriction of subsistence uses and impacts upon resources. Ensure that management of park resources is consistent with the conservation of unimpaired ecosystems and natural and healthy populations of fish and wildlife, incorporating scientific data and principles with traditional knowledge and cultural values. You know this platform of having Commission meetings, allows local people to share information about observations they're making on the landscape within Gates of the Arctic. And it provides a platform for our biologists to attend these meetings and share data from their surveys that they're conducting on various wildlife resources in the park. Promote effective communication and mutual understanding of subsistence uses and related cultural and social values and park purposes and protection between the Park Service subsistence users and state of Alaska and the public. So it's with the hopes that we're upholding all of these mandates listed.

We also provided a background on the cultural groups that have since time immemorial utilized Gates of the Arctic in the central Brooks Range. I'm not going to go through this, but it's an important component of this management plan. So what I shared earlier was the mission statement for the National Park Service Subsistence program, but now we're on the mission statement for the actual Gates of the Arctic Park. The Park Service preserves and protects the wild and undeveloped character of this vast Arctic wilderness. The opportunity for people to experience solitude and inspiration and pristine mountain landscapes and intact natural systems is of paramount importance. Gates of the Arctic preserves unimpaired ecosystems, and where consumptive uses are allowed, maintaining natural and healthy populations of fish and wildlife. Diverse habitats are preserved by allowing dynamic ecological processes to continue unimpeded. Gates of the Arctic protects and interprets historic and prehistoric sites and cultural landscapes that northern Alaska indigenous cultures and those who more recently followed them have used and occupied for thousands of years. Gates of the Arctic is also committed to protecting continued opportunity for traditional subsistence activities in the park and preserve as the priority consumptive use as well as non-subsistence hunting and trapping in the two preserve units. We recognize subsistence harvest as a natural component of ecosystem processes. And lastly, we strive to provide excellent service and inspire the public to join us as partners in the perpetuation of park and preserve resources for the emotional, spiritual, cultural and scientific benefits for current and future generations.

Taqulik Hepa: Hi Marcy, I have a question or a comment. I know that SRC members along with staff work hard to develop and craft certain sections of this document, but do you know for the mission statement and the purpose and significance, I'm just curious, maybe it was around the time I started, or right after, but was this language created from the park itself, because it's talking about the Gates of the Arctic as a Park or National Park and Preserve. But was, you know, were the SRC members at that time a part of the drafting of the mission statement and so on and so forth? I'm just curious, like the history of that part, you know? Or was it just the federal employees?

Marcy Okada: I think by the looks of it, this mission statement was created by at the time what we had was a Government Performance and Results Act (GIPRA). We utilize GIPRA, you know, as our baseline laws and policies statement so by the looks of it, in the 1990s it was based off of that Act in order to create this mission statement, but also by the looks of the mission statement, it folds in some language from ANILCA Section 201. I can't remember if it's E or F or G which lists out why was Gates of the Arctic

created in 1980. It seems like it's kind of a mingling of languages from different places. So I don't get the impression that it was created by, that input was coming from the SRC.

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair. This mission statement is actually in the ANILCA law. I got the red Bible - SRC members called this document the Red Bible cause I brought that to many early meetings and it's Title II, National Park Service, Section 201(4), which is Gates of the Arctic. It's basically discussing Gates of the Arctic and you know what its purposes are and all those kinds of things that's part of the ANILCA enabling legislation. And so the Park Service just took what the statute was saying and then incorporated that into their mission statement. It's apparent.

Taqulik Hepa: Okay, I was just curious. No, that's very helpful. Thank you. I hope you bring that Red Bible in November.

Jack Reakoff: I used to bring it all the time because it was the statutes were misinterpreted in the early meetings and so once I got the statutes, then I could refute any kind of misinformation.

Taqulik Hepa: Now you don't need to carry it around because you have it memorized, don't you? Just kidding. It's the end of the day, so I gotta have humor, too.

Jack Reakoff: You know it's in there. I know it's around where it's at 'cause I've read it. There's a House and Senate record. So thank you. Appreciate that.

Marcy Okada: Thank you, Jack. Again, specifies the purpose and significance of Gates of the Arctic. This language as Jack had shared comes straight from ANILCA. Also want to point out, I don't know if folks know, but within Gates of the Arctic there are five designated wild rivers and they are the Alatna River, John River, Kobuk River, Noatak River and the North Fork of the Koyukuk River and the entire Tinayaguk River. And there are also two National Natural Landmarks - Walker Lake and Arrigetch Peaks. And the Noatak River drainage is designated as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO.

We mentioned the Nunamiat people of Anaktuvuk Pass and the Koyukon Athabascan cultures and Bob Marshall as well. This is just for you folks to read, but I'm not gonna necessarily go through it.

Taqulik Hepa: You know, as you're going through this document, I keep thinking of in particular, some of the newer members. I'm really glad that Tristen is on and people that haven't gone through this, that they're able to listen, but Susan Morry comes to mind. You know, when she starts to participate and I wish there was a way that we could redo this very quickly with her and Esther and others that aren't here today. Because I could just see her really getting a deep understanding of this document and how it plays into the role that she's taken on. That's my comments. We could figure that one out. Hope we could do that.

Marcy Okada: Yeah, that's a very good point, 'cause I feel like as a group, you know as we're doing now and hopefully at an in-person meeting, it's better done in a group style because folks can share their knowledge as we go through different sections. Especially 'cause you have lived through many of these discussions and remember the meetings that you attended and can provide more of a background on how those discussions went. I mean, my first thought is if I'm in Anaktuvuk Pass, I could sit down with the both of them, but it doesn't have the same effect as you know, yeah. But I'll try figure it out for sure. But that's a good point.

Taqulik Hepa: I was trying to think about that as we were talking, I wanted to say, you know, that we have a like a threshold of 95,000 to conduct the meetings. There was mention of subcommittees, but you know if we have like an opportunity, maybe every couple of years to do this type of review as an option as kind of a subcommittee or like a refresher or an orientation to give the opportunity for newer members that are coming on to get this similar type of in-depth...Or just a refresher, you know, I'd probably come because the more you hear it, the more you learn, the more you get. Just a few comments. Thank you.

Marcy Okada: Yeah. Thank you 'cause I know I'm kinda hitting you guys with a lot of information at once.

Taqulik Hepa: It's good, I'm enjoying it. Thank you.

Marcy Okada: I don't know, I can't quite see because as I present it, I don't know, I might have lost some of you as an audience, but for Tristen and actually Raymond had to drop off. Oh, no, you're still here. Yeah, if as folks are listening to this, for the newer people, this is your first time seeing it, if I haven't completely lost you, what are your thoughts? As you might have looked through certain sections or if you have any questions?

Tristen Pattee: To be honest, I hadn't looked through the whole thing. So, but I'm definitely going to and then I'll have some comments from there, but yeah.

Marcy Okada: Thank you Tristen for your honesty. I know, I sent a lot of documents and gave you guys a lot of homework and no ways did I think that you guys would be able to go through it completely but I guess I'm just hoping to hear feedback on how we can

make this, not more interesting, but just make it more beneficial for newer members, so that it allows you to understand you know, what this Commission is about, where it came from. You know, what are some of the issues that are still occurring? You know, like just how to make better use of folks's time.

Tristen Pattee: Yes, absolutely. And once I do go through it, I'll provide some comments.

Marcy Okada: Okay, thanks Tristen.

Gary Hanchett: Same for me.

Marcy Okada: So this isn't our only management plan for Gates of the Arctic. We have other management plans. Statement for management that was created in 1996 which says protect the opportunity for eligible local rural residents to engage in a subsistence way of life, ensure consistency with recognized scientific ecosystem management principles and the purposes for which the park areas were established. Subsistence use has a preference over all other consumptive uses, and is recognized as a natural part of the ecosystem. I don't think I've ever seen this statement in printed form. But again, when you look at the time frame, it was just trying to, it was with the idea of establishing something to refer to.

We have a general management plan. The original general management plan was created early on, when the park was first created and it was finalized in 1986 and then I don't know if folks remember, but we did an amendment to the general management plan and that's why this says 2016. I don't know if folks remember Jobe Chakuchin, he was our NEPA planner, and so it had to go through the whole process where we shared the draft with our resident zone communities and the public before it could be finalized. And it really was a rather short amendment. Initially, the plan was to designate more, turn eligible wilderness areas into designated wilderness areas, but given the timing of things, designated wilderness was not increased in acres. That was timing with the administration at that point.

Within the general management plan, there's a land protection plan and a wilderness suitability review. As mentioned, they were reviewing non wilderness lands within the park. In the 1990s, the resource management plan was also created. And you have this subsistence management plan as well. This mentions consultation - how consultation needs to be done with affected parties. And all the entities such as this Commission, state of Alaska, the different RACs, Tribes, and knowledgeable individuals. And then there's an important statement that says the subsistence management plan is not a decision-making document, therefore, it did not go through the NEPA process. And it notes as aspects of this plan reach a stage where a decision is to be made, then the appropriate level NEPA compliance will be completed when and where it's required.

Okay, so here's where I was looking for input. So the subsistence program administration, you have this Commission that was started in 1982. It's tasked with recommending a program for subsistence hunting within the park. It mentions the Subsistence management program which Eva had provided an update. You know it's changed and it's no longer under U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, it's moved. So we want this whole section to reflect all this new information but it also has to... Well, it transitions from how it was before and to now. So this whole section needs to be revised and in order to reflect that. And then it also mentions the associated Regional Advisory Councils and as you and I all know, these Council memberships change. And I don't, you know, like similar to how this Commission is - should we just keep updating it to the current roster for these RACs?

Jack Reakoff: I think it should be the current roster. If you're gonna update it, it should just go to the current roster.

Marcy Okada: Okay, and then I think that that helps a lot 'cause, as Taqulik said, you know, if there's a subcommittee offshoot from this Commission, then if the reviews happen more frequently every two years. Then we can modify this so that it reflects the current state of membership for these RACs during that same time frame.

Jack Reakoff: Comment – The Western Interior Council, oddly enough, still has some of those members, myself included. And then there's members that are deceased and there's members that haven't been on the Council for many years. So that's a very antiquated roster.

Marcy Okada: So Ronald Sam was Harding Sam's brother, but he lived on the Allakaket side?

Jack Reakoff: No, no. He lived in Atalna. He was the chairman of the Western Interior Council for years. He was the one who trained me to be the chair. He was a founding member of the Doyon Foundation. So to be updated, all of those councils need to be updated to the current rosters.

Marcy Okada: Yeah and I think that's, I mean you know, it's not up to our subsistence management plan to reflect who all the past RAC members were during such and such years 'cause that's OSM that's keeping track of that, Office of Subsistence Management is keeping track of that so. For the purposes of this subsistence management plan for Gates of Arctic, you know, I agree, it should just be the current roster cause the goal is we're just capturing what this Commission does.

Taqulik Hepa: I agree, but you remember we had that discussion historically about just the list of past members over time. I think for the SRC is an important list to reflect back on for historical purposes. But for the RACs, yes, I agree.

Jack Reakoff: Right.

Marcy Okada: Yep, and I don't remember which chapter that's in, but we do have a running record of Gates of the Arctic SRC membership from the beginning till now. It also mentions dual management of subsistence in Alaska. The Regional Advisory Council system provides all that background. Subsistence fisheries management in the 1990s. State Fish and Game management.

And the oh, it's this chapter Taqulik. And here's the table that has the membership from 1982, of which I shared in the past, but maybe every once in a while, I should stick it into your meeting packet just so folks can see.

Jack Reakoff: I would really like to have that list printed.

Marcy Okada: OK, but yeah here's the whole listing and I can share it. Maybe just put it as a separate e-mail attachment.

Taqulik Hepa: That would be nice.

Gary Hanchett: Madam Chair. I just thought I might throw something out there for a chuckle. Any of the membership been in this SRC or for that matter anywhere and everywhere else. All you gotta do is get ahold of Elon. He got it all down.

Marcy Okada: Thank you, Gary. And then it mentions the subsistence plan organization and layout, and I think you guys might remember, but I imagine you have multiple binders because it went through different phases. This management plan went through different phases and so you must have a binder that has different colored sections that were divided up by and so I need to modify this 'cause I don't think we're gonna take that route anymore. It was a bit much.

Jack Reakoff: OK, Madam Chair, this whole system was devised by Steve Ulvi, he was the subsistence coordinator. There's all these hunting plans scattered all over the office, all over the place. And his idea was to bring these all together and then organize them into these various categories. Then the updates and so forth, were gonna be colored. Somewhere I have a binder that was like 25 years ago or 30 years ago, a long time ago. And so I had a binder, but then we're supposed to get different sheets as it kept updating. We're gonna get more sheets and put them into our binders, but as you can tell our hunting horns and antler thing took like 20 something years to so. By the time we got stuff passed, the binders were buried in my shed somewhere. But it was a good system at that time, but it could be similarly categorized. Similar hunting plan could be categorized, but it could all be digitized where you just keep adding to it. You know that quote, it was a living document. If we kept hearing that it's a living document. This was the days of Roger Siglin and Steve Ulvi.

Marcy Okada: And we definitely wanna keep it as a living document, but like you said, I mean this was digitized, which is how I can share it. That's how I'm able to share it with you now in digitized form. But I do have binders in my office with these different colored pages too. And there's been some lag time in what was being added to it because you know, you guys weren't passing new hunting plan recommendations for a series of years. But no, it's good for me.

Jack Reakoff: I do like the color coding. You know, I do tours and I got a color-coded tour schedule and it helps you to go to the sections that you're needing to look at. And so whether they're digitized or not, I do like the color coding aspect of this thing. You know, just at least for the chapters. That's my input.

Marcy Okada: I think we can find a way to do that digitally so that like you said, if it has to do with something, we know what chapter to go directly to.

Jack Reakoff: So when you scroll a huge document, you don't wanna have to read it all. You could just scroll until you got to the, you know you can find the code for it and then you just go right down until you see that color. Then you just stop. OK, here I am. So for that bigger documents, it's easier to find stuff in it. You know, they look at the index and then go right into.

Taqulik Hepa: Oh, sorry, I thought you were done, Jack. I was gonna say I just wanna take note, it's just about 5:00pm and at some point we should probably have our closing remarks and see where we wanna end our discussion on this management plan? Unless you guys wanna go till 6:00 or 7:00?

Marcy Okada: Yeah. No, Madam Chair, I think we might have lost some folks already. Raymond dropped off because of the time difference and

Raymond Woods: I'm still here, Marcy.

Marcy Okada: Oh shoot, Raymond. I'm sorry, I can't see the screen.

Raymond Woods: It's 8:00 here.

Marcy Okada: Yeah. So even more so we can. But this was a good start and a good introduction. Always open to suggestions on how we can make this easier on you guys. So let's move to closing comments and thank you all for hanging in there.

Taqulik Hepa: Yes, thank you.

Raymond Woods: Oh, that was a great report.

Taqulik Hepa: Yes, I look forward to the discussions too. Continued discussions and getting ideas on how could we better share this information with our new members, members and the communities, the schools. So we'll continue this dialogue. Thank you, Marcy.

Marcy Okada: Yeah. Thank you guys for your patience.

Taqulik Hepa: Before we move on to our closing comments, any closing comments from our Commissioners on the subsistence management plan?

Jack Reakoff: Alright, I would say that it was a great start on getting into this document. Look forward to continuing on, and doing this review. I think it's very beneficial to this Commission.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Jack. Agreed. Any other comments from the Commissioners? Hearing none, we'll move to closing comments.

17. Closing Comments

Raymond Woods: Thank you, Madam Chair. Marcy, thank you so much for all that for your presentation. That was really good. And then you know this meeting was great. I mean, just like what Jack said, whatever we put down and whatever we create and whatever we gonna do to make to represent our people. It's not just for next few years, probably gonna be for next 20 to 200 years and hopefully we put it to concrete that the management program that we working with now will go forever. Because I probably gonna be here for awhile yet, hopefully, and somebody will replace me. So but anyway, we need to. It was a good meeting. I really do. And Marcy, thank you so much for helping me out, giving me all the information and numbers and stuff like that. And Madam Chair, it was good to see you again, good to hear you again. And Jack and Tristen, I will talk to you later and also I'm always forgetting the guy from Bettles, Gary. Thank you guys. And Madam Chair, that's all I got.

Jack Reakoff: I'll say it's just a final comment, Madam Chair, I thought this was a great meeting. Even though it's virtual, I'm gonna be on video all the time 'cause I like to see who's in the room doing stuff. I think this works a lot better than just a phone call and better technologies. This is gonna be a kind of a better way to go. But I do feel that face to face is the apex of this Subsistence Resource Commission. But this digital aspect allows people to, if they're traveling like Raymond or you know people can't attend, they still can participate. So I think it gives the public a little quite a bit better access to the Subsistence Resource Commission that doesn't have the funding to actually attend. I look forward to our next meeting. Thank you very much.

Tristen Pattee: I just want to thank all the presenters and staff and all the Commission members, especially Marcy. And, you know, I appreciate all the hard work you put in. You can definitely tell you put some time into it, and it's really appreciated. I wish you guys could have all made it to Ambler. It's been beautiful here the last few days and it'd been great to see you guys all in person and I'm pretty jealous of that muktuk you're eating there, Taqulik. But yeah, I'm looking forward to another meeting and I thought it was very productive and had a lot of good information and I do enjoy hearing all the reports as well, just like you mentioned Taqulik, and look forward to another meeting in the future.

Gary Hanchett: Well, I too think it was a great meeting. It's pretty much been already said. And I always enjoy our meetings. I do think this one really covered a lot of important issues. I didn't expect that it would be like that, but to me it did. There was a lot of connections made here and I think maybe the present times are bringing that home, without getting too particular into that. So thank you all. Everybody's appreciated.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you. I'll go ahead and give the closing comments. I just want to thank everyone for your time today and I too thought it was a very productive meeting. I enjoyed all the discussions that were well thought out and pretty good for online meeting and I do agree that in person is so much better. But yeah, I think that we're all invested and committed to the roles that we have either as staff or Commission members to make sure that these discussions are happening and that we're having good full, detailed dialogue on the important issues, even that were on our agenda today. So I just wanna congratulate you and thank you for your dedication. I wish you all a happy spring, a safe spring, a productive spring to bring food home. And summer as well. And God bless everyone. Thank you. So we have one agenda item.

If someone wants to make a motion to close, we can go. If not, I'm free for dinner.

Oh, Mark, go ahead. I'm sorry. Hi Mark. I see you now.

Mark Dowdle: Thank you, Madam Chair. I appreciate it. I just wanted to say how much I appreciate the expressions of gratitude towards our recently retired Regional Director and to all of our staff. And it's very much noticed and appreciated. Thank you. I think we recently have gone from agency staff to federal workers, which is all fine with me. We're happy to be here and serving the public and supporting subsistence and being the very best stewards that we can be. And I also think this has been a very good meeting and want to thank all of the Commissioners for your efforts. Thank you.

Taqulik Hepa: Thank you, Mr. Superintendent. OK. Going down to the last item. Do we have a motion to adjourn?

Jack Reakoff: Madam Chair, I see Eva there. I think she has something to say.

Eva Patton: Yeah. No, I just wanted to say thank you. Thank you so much both for the kind words and just thank you all on the SRC for your lifetime of dedication and good work with your communities. So that's all. Thank you and just take care. Enjoy your time with family.

18. Adjournment

Jack Reakoff: Thank you, so I'll make a motion to adjourn.

Raymond Woods: And I will second it.

Taqulik Hepa: OK, Jack. Seconded by Raymond. All those in favor say aye. Aye. Those opposed say goodbye. Have a good night.

Everyone says aye. The meeting adjourns.