

# **KOBUK VALLEY SUBSISTENCE RESOURCE COMMISSION**

## **Meeting Minutes**

Northwest Arctic Heritage Center  
171 Third Avenue, Kotzebue AK 99752  
February 26, 2025

### **Call to Order**

The meeting was called to order on Thursday February 26, 2025 at 1:00pm by Chair, Tristen Pattee. Commission members Benny Westlake, Merle Custer, Gordon Newlin, and Tristen Pattee were present in person. Member Kevin Moto was present via phone. Nellie Griest was not present and was excused for a Maniilaq Board Meeting. Member Rosa Horner was not present and was not excused. With five out of seven seated Commission members present (Council has two vacant seat(s)) the quorum was established.

### **Invocation - Moment of Silence**

### **Attendees:**

*Asterisk \* identifies if present via teleconference.*

- Merle Custer
- Tristen Pattee
- Benny Westlake
- Gordon Newlin
- Kevin Moto\*
- Emily Creek, Western Arctic National Parklands, NPS
- Brendan Doucet, Western Arctic National Parklands, NPS
- Raime Fronstin, Western Arctic National Parklands, NPS
- Matha Fronsini, Western Arctic National Parklands, NPS
- Jim Hans, Western Arctic National Parklands, NPS
- Annie Carlson, Western Arctic National Parklands, NPS
- Eva Patton, Alaska Regional Office, NPS\*
- Kyle Joly, Gates of the Arctic, NPS
- Alex Hansen, Alaska Department of Fish & Game Kotzebue
- Sam Kirby, Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Anchorage\*
- Wil Wiese, Selawik National Wildlife Refuge, FWS
- Susan Georgette, Kotzebue community member

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

Motion by Member Custer, seconded by Member Westlake, to approve the Fall 2024 meeting minutes as presented.

The motion passed on an unanimous vote.

### **Park's Welcome and Review of the Charter and Commission Purpose – Annie Carlson, NPS**

Park gave an update on the vacant Superintendent position.  
SRC had no comments.

### **Review and Adoption of Agenda**

Emily Creek: I suggest we add, in new business, the call for wildlife proposals and to add presentation about Kiana Traditional Use Study by Hannah Atkinson at 4pm.

Motion by Member Custer, seconded by Member Newlin, to approve the winter 2025 meeting minutes as modified.

Motion passed on an unanimous vote.

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

Emily gave update vacancies and interested applicants she's received. No other action needed at this time.

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

Merle Custer of Shungnak: Everything is good so far. Herd is nearby and people harvesting. We saw 11 wolves in one day and 6 the next day, Shungnak has a wolf problem in the wintertime. Lots of meetings and conferences in the community, people are busy.

Gordon Newlin of Noorvik: There is a small herd of caribou around the airport.

Benny Westlake of Kiana: Caribou came, better late than never. Hunters have been going out to harvest for elders, and meals for SAR team and people who are making crosses. Lots of fish, summer was bad but winter has been better. Wolves are moving away from town towards the mountains. Been seeing lynx. Less moose around town with the caribou nearby. No black bear sightings yet, usually when it gets warm they come out of their dens.

Tristen Pattee of Ambler: Caribou showed up, later. I am concerned about seeing posts about harvesting of cows, unfortunate that there seems to be a lack of concern. At Red Dog, the caribou are near the road. There have been lots of ptarmigan—really fat. Wolves have been following the caribou herd. Fishing, a group in Ambler built a traditional fishing trap for burbot (mudshark)—they've been successful, was really cool to see.

Kevin Moto of Deering: Seeing a few bunches of caribou near Deering, people are hunting like they've never seen caribou before. These are healthy animals. Deering is not seeing the harvest reduction plans. SNAP is on hold and the store shelves are empty and you have to order through AC. Subsistence food is really important and people are happy to have meat.

Emily Creek reads Nellie Griest of Shungnak's update transcribed over the phone during a member check-in: "Wolves in Shungnak, coming into community by groups and chasing caribou nearby the

village. One day they'd be somewhere and the next day somewhere else. The caribou are getting moved around. Had Fish and Game people out of Fairbanks were there, need to start hunting wolves. In summer wolves were eating dried fish. The people who hunt wolves are all gone from the community and there is no one to trap or hunt the wolves. That's why they're overpopulated.

Beaver dams, getting extremely overwhelming. Can't go inside the sloughs anymore because of the beaver dams. We need to find a beaver grant...people cannot reach allotments up the sloughs. Need bounty on beaver. We don't need beaver every day. One or two are good to eat, but not all the time. Last five years lost two relatives because they drank from the river and it was contamination by beaver. Have to bring water to camp now. No matter how much you boil the water, the contamination doesn't clear up. Last summer there was a rumor that someone was coming to help the village come clear the beaver igloos, but never happened. Weather don't cooperative anymore."

**Park Report:** Annie Carlson of Western Arctic National Parklands gave a Park update to the Commission.

Tristen Pattee: Trade Fair what is that?

Emily Creek: Explains a brief history of Qatjut.

Tristen Pattee: What happens to the housing your getting rid of?

Annie Carlson: Explains that the houses will go for bid first, and if no one wants and can remove then they will be demolished because this housing project is a replacement project.

Tristen Pattee: Is Arctic Travelers a culture camp?

Annie Carlson: Its recreation focused.

## **New Business**

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

Emily Creek: Just having an open discussion of caribou with Alex and Kyle here.

Tristen Pattee: With the collars, do you notice them hanging around closer to villages? They seem a lot more visible.

Alex Hansen: Yes, we see them setting up shop close to villages. Its good, and its also concerning. We appreciate the need for meat, we just need to be cautious as we harvest those cows. If we look into history, at the lowest the herd was we see the highest harvest on record.

Tristen Pattee: The event in Anchorage, is it just the Western Arctic or Teshekpuk too?

Alex Hansen: WACH. Briefly explains the goals and purposes of the group.

\*Emily gets the Cooperative Management Plan to show the SRC

Alex Hansen: Last census was summer of 2023, its all-weather dependent. Alex explains some details of how the ratios and statistics work in the management plan and how they conduct the census.

Kevin Moto: My concern is when the animals go close to town that means they're trying to get protection from predators—there's a lot of wolves spreading them out and making smaller groups. Would that affect the counting?

Alex Hansen: Explains the census, which takes place in July when there are aggregations. One thing we look for is very defined edges. It's the timing and we account for every collar. (Versus in the winter when they separate out more.) Absolutely there are some we miss, but not a lot. We could never count them in the winter because they are spread across 100,000 miles potentially. We want to be able to photograph them in one day ideally.

Tristen Pattee: It seems like enforcement was more visible, to me that was good, so people follow the law.

Alex Hansen: if we want to preserve the herd, we all need to participate. Just talked to the trooper, he's not out to get people and more focused on helping people get legal.

[00:48:00]

Our photos are good enough we can almost always detect calves and adults. If anyone wants to see, you can come by the office and look at them.

## **B. Research Update**

### **i. Western Arctic National Parklands Resource Stewardship Strategy Update: Annie Carlson**

Tristen Pattee: Are there sites that are in danger of being washed away?

Annie Carlson: Yes, both archeological sites and camps. Emily went out along the coast to see damage from Typhoon Merbok, we don't know what happened this October.

Tristen Pattee: What about Onion Portage? Is the water level concerning?

Brendan Doucet: I didn't see any impacts last year, the part of the site nearest to the river has been excavated, so there isn't much to erode out. Onion Portage is one of the safer sites. The Ig site is one that is of concern. Its closer to Kiana. That one is much closer to the river. Went last year, seems pretty stable but it could change.

Tristen Pattee: What would be the plan?

Brendan Doucet: Gather info and bring it to the tribes. We may let stuff wash away. Human remains would be a bigger concern. Rescue excavations would not be done unless requested.

Tristen Pattee: Its all documented well in books?

Brendan Doucet: Yes.

Kevin Moto: With holds on money and stuff, are there any concerns that some of the work the park service has planned—Good Hope area—any concern that these will stop, will there be money for that?

Annie Carlson: There are some holds on our funding, and we don't know what will happen. We don't know—sorry I don't have a great answer.

Emily Creek: I can follow up with Jeanette in Nome. I'll be in touch, Kevin.

[Break]

## **ii. Park Permitted Projects Compliance Update: Martha Frontsin**

Tristen Pattee: Inquiry on status of rusted river study.

Asked a question about the Haffenreffer project.

Emily Creek: Since that isn't taking place on parklands, we don't put in for a permit to do that, but that project is on-going.

Kevin Moto: I notice we are doing a lot of research, when we test for microbes—can we test for the what those beaver put out? Are we doing any public relation type projects?

Raime Fronstin: Regarding beaver, there are groups studying the beaver and impacts of beavers here, that is on-going.

Emily Creek: UAF PhD student. And the State Subsistence Division. I believe these folks will be presenting at the Northwest Arctic RAC, and usually that is broadcast on KOTZ and I can send you the agenda so you can listen into that presentation.

Kevin Moto: Okay.

## **C: SRC Chairs Update: Emily Creek**

No SRC comments

## **D: SRC Business, Fall meetings dates**

[01:43:00]

SRC recommendations: Early and mid-October are now often when caribou start arriving, early November or even late September would be better.

## **E: Federal Subsistence Board, call for wildlife proposals:**

Emily Creek reads memo and hands it out. Emily also provides a draft proposal CAKR SRC wrote but didn't have quorum to vote on at their meeting.

### **i. Ptarmigan season**

Will Wiese FWS: Explains the issue of un-aligned ptarmigan dates between state and federal lands. CAKR SRC drafted a proposal but were not able to vote on it. Asked it to be shared with KOVA SRC.

Alex Hansen: The bag limit on state is 50, and I don't know that anyone gets that many.

Tristen Pattee: No I don't think so

Will Wiese: The idea was to get the seasons aligned so no one gets in trouble if they harvested dinner while out good hunting or something like that, but at that time of year no one is getting that many.

Tristen Pattee: Why did CAKR not vote on this?

Emily Creek: They did not have a quorum so they could not vote.

Tristen Pattee: Oh okay. So we want to align the dates of the federal season to the dates of the state season to make it easier on subsistence users and springtime travelers. As written in the draft proposal by the CAKR SRC. Can I get a motion?

Motion by Member Westlake, seconded by Member Custer, to align the federal ptarmigan season dates to the state season dates as written in the draft proposal by the CAKR SRC.

Motion passed by unanimous vote.

Emily Creek: I will submit this and share the proposal with the RAC at their meeting.

Tristen Pattee: Is this deadline just for us?

Emily Creek: The deadline for federal proposals for individuals or tribal governments can submit proposals up until this April date, if something comes up after this meeting.

## **Old Business: Emily Creek facilitate**

### **A. Park updates**

#### **a. Natural Resources: Raime Fronstin**

Moose

Tristen Pattee: Have you tested thermal imaging on moose?

Raime Fronstin: We are testing it on sheep right now, and moose are bigger.

Tristen Pattee: Only place I've seen sheep is Bornite by Kobuk, maybe 2012-13. More east into Gates. I don't know if the survey the eastern part of Gates.

Sheep

Benny Westlake: Pretty cool to see sheep up there, flying in with Lee's Sea Air. Down low, could see a big grizzly. How huge it was compared to a sheep.

Tristen Pattee: So Bornite is out of the park, are you able to do that?

Raime Fronstin: I don't know honestly, maybe if we are on our way to an area. These areas on the map are where we'd historically see sheep. We see them, but its in the 200s in these areas.

Benny Westlake: East side, 20-30 miles up the Squirrel.

Raime Fronstin: With such a small population the models we have aren't great at producing estimates, I think there were a few groups found. We are working on tweaking their models and working on how to get more accurate estimates with such small populations.

Tristen Pattee: Its concerning because a bit ago it was raining and then froze.

Raime Fronstin: And that's the worst.

Brown Bear

Tristen Pattee: And from friends on the Noatak, they had a lot of bears, even breaking into cabins and stealing meat. They want guides to come in and help them out.

Wolves

Tristen Pattee: If someone takes a wolf, are you able to get a sample from that?

Raime Fronstin: Yes. We can get DNA from fur, but it must have the follicle, but it's easier if it's a small piece of flesh.

Tristen Pattee: What about collaring?

Raime Fronstin: Its really expensive, that's why I am collecting scat instead.

**b. Subsistence Resources:** Emily Creek  
No comments

**c. Cultural Resources:** Brendan Doucet

**d. Resource Protection:** Jim Hans

Tristen Pattee: What is the update of the Sand Dunes Trail?

Annie Carlson: We do not have a plan to build a trail and our recommendation to the Superintendent is to no build a trail, but we have to wait for a decision from a superintendent.

**e. Facilities:** Emily Creek

No comments

**f. Interpretation and Education:** Jon Nicholson

No comments.

**B. Regional Office: Eva Patton**

Tristen Pattee: Can we send an appreciation card for Sarah from this commission?

Emily Creek: Yes, I will get one ready to sign during our break.

[Break]

**C. *Kiana Traditional Use Study* update:** Hannah Atkinson (PSU)

Tristen Pattee: Thank you very much, very interesting.

Merle Custer: Good to see you Hannhah, its Merle.

Hannah Atkinson: Hi Merle, hi Gordon and Benny.

**D. Other agency:** none present

**a. FWS:** Wil Wiese, Selawik National Wildlife Refuge

Tristen Pattee: Is NANA planning on supplementing caribou management or is it a repeat?

Wil Wiese: Idea is we work together and identify needs and instead of an agency being the lead, NANA would be. We are still discussing ideas.

Tristen Pattee: Can you explain the thaw slump?

Wil Wiese: 18 years ago, above the sii fish spawning grounds. Wil explains the study on sii fish.

**b. ADFG:** No update

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

**Close out SRC business**



Motion to adjourn was made by member Westlake and seconded by member Custer.

Motion passed by unanimous vote.

The meeting was adjourned at 4:33pm on February 26, 2025. No meeting tomorrow, business complete.

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Emily Creek, Subsistence Coordinator  
Western Arctic National Parklands

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Eva Patten, DFO  
NPS Subsistence Program

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Tristen Pattee, Chair  
Kobuk Valley Subsistence Resource Commission

These minutes will be formally considered by the Kobuk Valley Subsistence Resource Commission at its next meeting in fall 2025 in Kotzebue, and any corrections or notations will be incorporated in the minutes at that meeting.

Disclaimer: These minutes of the meeting of the Subsistence Resource Commission are NOT an official transcript of the KOVA Commission proceedings. Rather, the minutes serve as a summary of the topics discussed and actions taken by the Commission and as an index to the audio recording of the meeting. The official record of the Commission proceedings is the audio recording on file at the Northwest Arctic Heritage Center Audio Recording File name: *KOVA February 2025 Meeting*