

*Disclaimer: These minutes of the Subsistence Resource Commission for Wrangell-St. Elias National Park are NOT an official transcript of the Commission proceedings. Rather, the minutes serve as a summary of the topics discussed and actions taken by the Commission and as an index to the audio recording of the meeting. The official record of the Commission proceedings is the audio recording.*

## **MINUTES WRANGELL-ST. ELIAS SUBSISTENCE RESOURCE COMMISSION**

February 3<sup>rd</sup>, 2026

Microsoft Teams and by teleconference

Minutes were chair certified for accuracy on February 6, 2026.

- 1) **Call to order:** Sue Entsminger, the Subsistence Resource Commission (SRC) chair, called the meeting to order at 5:07 P.M.
  
- 2) **SRC roll call and confirmation of quorum:** Present were Sue Entsminger, Bruce Ervin, Mercedes Knighten, Clint Marshall, Suzanne McCarthy, Kaleb Rowland, and Dan Stevens.
  
- 3) **Introduction of Commission members, staff, and guests:**  
SRC members: Sue Entsminger, Bruce Ervin, Mercedes Knighten, Clint Marshall, Suzanne McCarthy, Kaleb Rowland, and Dan Stevens  
  
Department of Interior: Sara Taylor  
  
NPS staff:  
AKRO: Eva Patton  
WRST: Joshua Scott, Benjamin Pister, Amber Cohen  
  
Tribal government or tribal organization representatives: Deanna Kosbruk (AITRC), David Hooper (AITRC), Kathryn Martin (Ahtna, Inc)  
  
Members of the public: Paul Claus (McCarthy), Jesse Heinbaugh (Copper Center), Allison Sayer (Copper River Record)
  
- 4) **Housekeeping announcements:** Amber Cohen explained the purpose of the meeting and detailed instructions for participating in the meeting. She reviewed Robert’s Rules of Order.
  
- 5) **Brief member reports:** Mercedes Knighten moved to table reports to the February 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> meeting which Kaleb Rowland seconded. The motion passed by unanimous consent.
  
- 6) **Overview of Secretarial Programmatic Review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program:** Sara Taylor, Policy Advisor for the Office of the Secretary, provided an overview. She gave background about the office and for the programmatic review, which came from executive order 14153 “Unleashing Alaska’s Extraordinary Resource Potential”. Though the

following topics were the focus of the review, she encouraged the Commission to provide any additional information as well.

1. The 2024 move of the Office of Subsistence Management (OSM), from within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior, to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget of the Department of the Interior,
2. Criteria for regional advisory council membership,
3. Membership of the Federal Subsistence Board,
4. Federal regulations and state regulations for duplication and inconsistency,
5. Regulations applicable to special actions,
6. Role of the State of Alaska and its Department of Fish and Game in the Federal Subsistence Management Program, and
7. Board policies and procedures for rural determinations.

**7) Review recommendations from December 22<sup>nd</sup> working group and provide SRC recommendations:**

1. Amber Cohen reviewed the following recommendations from the working group:
  - i) **The 2024 move of the Office of Subsistence Management, from within the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service of the Department of the Interior, to the Office of the Assistant Secretary for Policy, Management and Budget of the Department of the Interior:**
    - Working group recommendation: Leave the Office of Subsistence Management in its current situation, but agency staff should remember to stay engaged with subsistence users.
  - ii) **Criteria for Regional Advisory Council (RAC) membership:**
    - Working group recommendation: Elections like the Advisory Committee model could be an option but the candidates should still meet criteria before being listed on a ballot. It is important that an election does not become a popularity contest and the candidates are still qualified. RACs should be made up of local people who know their region. More outreach is needed to get people to apply for the RAC seats. OSM should consolidate questions on the application
  - iii) **Membership of the Federal Subsistence Board:**
    - Working group recommendation: Keep the current membership structure of the Federal Subsistence Board because it allows more public involved in the process.
  - iv) **Federal regulations and state regulations for duplication and inconsistency:**
    - Working group recommendation: State and federal regulations have different purposes, and federal regulations exist for the rural priority. These regulations help people in rural areas put food in their freezers. What might look like a duplication is not really one. It is in both regulations for a reason.
  - v) **Regulations applicable to special actions:**
    - Recommendation: Special actions are important tools for managers and should be used to protect resources.
  - vi) **Role of the State of Alaska and its Department of Fish and Game in the Federal Subsistence Management Program:**
    - Recommendation: Federal subsistence management program exists because the State of Alaska cannot legally manage for a rural preference. It is important that

local rural voices are heard in these processes. The voices of Alaskans and rural Alaskans should be given greater weight and leverage than those who do not live in the state. The State should not have the ability to vote for federal subsistence management as a member of the FSB, because the FSB is not a voting member on the Board of Game or Fisheries.

**vii) Board policies and procedures for rural determinations:**

- Recommendation: Rural areas cannot be only determined by factors such as accessibility to larger towns or availability of roads. The Federal Subsistence Board should consult the RACs as they have the knowledge of the area. Rural preference exists because it really helps those living out in rural places.

**2. Public comment:**

- i) Deanna Kosbruk, Regulatory Specialist for the Ahtna Intertribal Resource Commission (AITRC), pointed out that Regional Advisory Councils and Subsistence Resource Commissions are not redundant. The Subsistence Resource Commission is unique, and she felt that the Commission listened to the local people. While the Southcentral Regional Advisory Council listened to concerns of the region, the Commission makes the concerns a priority. She thanked the Commission for listening to subsistence users and their concerns. For the Federal Subsistence Board membership, it would undermine tribal and rural voices to remove the three tribally appointed seats. They are the ones who have experience out on the land. Special actions are conservation tools. The State of Alaska should not have a voting seat on the Federal Subsistence Board. She was unsure where the federal and state regulation duplication and inconsistency topic came from. She encouraged the Commission members and members of the public to use personal experience when writing comments. She was also listening to the Open House held by Department of Interior in Anchorage and heard a couple of members from Safari Club International comment about bringing the state back into the federal subsistence management program to go back to science. She said they could not let everything shift over to the state when they had failed to properly manage natural resources such as wildlife and fisheries.
- ii) David Hooper, anthropologist at AITRC, said that it might be worth waiting to make a decision so the working group could review information from the Department of Interior meeting.

**3. SRC discussion:**

- i) Suzanne McCarthy asked Sara Taylor about the timeline for providing comments.
- ii) Sara Taylor said that the timeline was fluid. They hoped to have all public comments by the middle of February. Then there will be an interagency working group that will work through the comments received from the public, RACs, and SRCs. That group work will go until April, which gives RACs and SRCs extra time to comment. They were also hoping to summarize all the feedback given at the open house. The working group will review if any recommendations require action to make changes. Some changes might be a policy adjustment while others would be a regulatory change. If there was a regulatory change, there would be a proposed rule that would come out in the fall, which would include another public comment period.

- iii) Bruce Ervin said he was fine waiting to comment.
  - iv) Clint Marshall said that because they have more time, it would be good to have more refinement and more input into the response. This might be something they look back on as an important topic, so it was critical they took the time to get it right.
  - v) Mercedes Knighten had recommended wording she wanted to add, particularly to point 4 about the role of the State of Alaska: “While consistency is good, it cannot come at the cost of the **\*\*rural priority\*\***. The State of Alaska is legally barred by its own Constitution from providing a rural priority. Therefore, federal regulations **\*must\*** be different (“inconsistent”) to satisfy the federal mandate of ANILCA. Deference to the State is only appropriate if the State provides the same level of protection for rural users—which it currently cannot do.”
  - vi) Sue Entsminger asked if there should be another meeting of the working group. Mercedes Knighten said the members could email each other to update the recommendations.
4. **SRC action:** Clint Marshall moved to table the comment letter on the Secretarial Programmatic Review of the Federal Subsistence Management Program to the February 27<sup>th</sup> and 28<sup>th</sup> meeting. Suzanne McCarthy seconded. The motion passed unanimously by roll call vote.

#### 8) **Closing comments:**

- Mercedes Knighten asked how the public could give input before the SRC meeting. Amber Cohen said they could email the park, provide comments at the next meeting, or send in comments to regulations.gov.
- Allison Sayer from the Copper River Record said she could publish an announcement in the paper. Sue Entsminger said Allison could write a report on this meeting and include the Commission’s wish to hear public comment.
- Mercedes Knighten said when the working group first met, she did not really understand what they were working on, but after attending several meetings, she was glad to have more time to read and hear public comments. She hoped the public will give as much input as they can. At the Department of Interior open house, they had over 200 people online and were at capacity in the room. She hoped that the public will appreciate the recommendations the Commission’s recommendations.
- Sue Entsminger said she had been going to these meetings for a long time and had the Board progress from 6 members to 8 members to 11 members. She would be happy to give Commission members a call to talk on this topic.
- Clint Marshall thanked everyone for their time and said the Copper River Record should highlight the importance of getting comments from rural community members on this topic. He was thankful they were taking the time to refine and get their recommendations right.
- Bruce Ervin thanked everyone who was involved and said the Commission could make a flyer to get the information out.

- 9) **Adjourn:** Bruce Ervin made the motion to adjourn the meeting which Suzanne McCarthy seconded. The motion passed by unanimous consent. The meeting was adjourned at 6:48 P.M.