

Koyukuk River Fish and Game Advisory Committee Meeting

February 2, 2021 via Teleconference

Meeting called to order at approximately 2pm

Members Present; Gary Hanchett (Bettles, alt), Charles Ned & Vincent Simon (Allakaket), Jack Reakoff (Chairman) & D. Shawn Bergman (Undesignated), Jack Wholechese & Darrell Vent (Huslia), Hugh Bifelt (Hughes)

Members Absent; Harding Sam & Jared Sam (Alatna), Shawn Huffman (Huslia)

Current Vacancies; 1 Undesignated seat, 2 Bettles Seat (no formal election held in Bettles to seat Gary), 1 Allakaket seat

ADF&G staff; Glenn Stout & Sara Longson (DWC), Charles Brazil, Deena Jallen & Christy Gleason (DCF), Lisa Stuby (DSF), Brook McDavid (SUBS), Nissa Pilcher (BDS)

FWS; Vince Mathews, Jeremy Havener

Serena Pitka YRDFA, Bruce Irvin TCC, Brooke Woods TCC and Fish Commission, Christopher Simon (K'oyitl'ots'ina Limited (K-Corp))

Agenda adopted with the addition of Henshaw Creek Concerns

Minutes adopted

Comments from AC members-

Darrell- saw a lot of cow moose this fall on Huslia River, but no calves. Also saw a lot of big animals (brown bear), and with the lack of fish this year thinking that the bears might be preying more heavily on the moose.

More undocumented transporters moving in. Need to have talks with them about wanton waste- we rely heavily on moose since the fish didn't come and there aren't caribou. Might need to be a future discussion about this.

Vincent- incident of hunters this fall trying to give meat to villagers, but it was already too spoiled. Would like to have something set up with the villages to get meat from hunters to villages.

There was a long discussion here on this subject. It was noted that the Board of Game cannot do anything more than they already have on this, that it is already required for hunters to get their meat out of the field and that there is a meat on the bone requirement in this area that this AC submitted to help with this. Some ideas discussed was that TCC apply for grants to help with meat distribution and or work with Kanuti Refuge; transporting meat, freezers in Bettles, ADF&G Check station to aide in meat distribution (it was noted that the current Koyukuk Check station is for data gathering not for meat distribution), community education fliers to help nonlocal hunters know before they take a moose how to take care of meat and where they can bring it.

Charles Ned- thank you everyone for coming. Noted that this year had been a mild weather until now and not a lot of snow. Noted he observed a lot of planes this fall that were low and scaring moose. There was higher water this summer in the river and it reduced the numbers of eddies and made it harder to get fish. Observed a lot more wolf tracks this winter. We really knocked them down a couple years ago, but they are back. We are trying to take care of them ourselves, but wouldn't mind additional assistance from the state again, especially since they are taking a lot of moose.

Hugh- noted the rainy summer, higher water in lakes, good berry picking. There wasn't a lot of summer chum and we don't get a fall run here, but there was a lot of whitefish and sheefish and that helped.

Jack Wholecheese- hunting was tough this year. This was the first year I haven't gotten a moose this last fall. Fishing was bad. Water was too deep/high, we had our nets in the water but didn't catch salmon- but we did get sheefish and whitefish. The local guides in the area came through this year with giving us meat, which was good. The big animals are hunting just like us in the fall time. Some folks got some black bears this fall. Used to see a lot more black bears and now see a lot more big animals. Outside hunters don't use everything like we do. There are a lot of pieces of the animals that don't get used, and that is wasteful to us. We should brainstorm how we can stop this wanton waste.

Shawn Bergman – nothing to report

Chris Simon – just called to listen

DWC Update

Wolf survey done in the predator control area- currently the wolf population has recovered fully from that program

Moose hunt statistics for the area given- very close to average on total harvest of moose in the fall.

Moose Twinning question – Huslia Flats; have seen high twinning rates, suggesting habitat is good and/or cow didn't have a calf at heel (aka the calf was lost the spring before), so this might be more indicative of a survival response (aka high predation rate).

Darrel noted that there was a good strain of bulls out there, but since the fish numbers are down then the bears really went after the moose calves, how can we fix this, we are on federal lands so predator control is difficult. Would like to slow down the big animal population.

Department noted that Darrel was correct, predator control isn't an option on federal lands. The bull cow ratio is good, but the yearling bulls were low which loops back into the high predation rate on calves. Newsletters sent out to hunters on age data – noted a shift in age structure in the population.

Vincent asked about caribou movement through Anaktuvuk Pass; Department noted that Region V manages that herd and will get back to you. Chairman Reakoff noted that he thinks that communities should be able to get updates from the Department, on where caribou proximity is. Caribou may be within striking distance of 20-30 miles. Fuel costs are so high in these villages, it is not economical to scout large radiuses to randomly encounter caribou.

Chairman Reakoff – we have had two bad winters in 2018/19' and 2019/20'. Early deep snow with 1.5" of rain on snow in October, then rain on 4-5 feet of snow in late winter .75-1.25" of rain on the snow. The ice-glazed snow **decimated** the sheep on the south slope in GMU24. In 5 months observation in 2020 spring through fall only 31 ewes, 3 lambs, and 7 small rams were found. The current winter of 2020/21' is much better for the extremely low sheep population. There are a lot of wolves with deep snow advantage and high hare population the last 3 years. Hare numbers are down 70% but still a relatively high crash, lynx are still fat. Wolves are ranging far and will be cannibalize one another with shallow snow pack. Moose population is down but not as much as Dall sheep.

Department – Covid issues this fall in the refuge for surveys, as well as some budget restrictions, data shows less nonlocal hunters this fall through the check stations, and local harvest was up.

DCF Update

Staff Updates, Holly Carroll has moved on to the FWS Yukon Manager.

Update on the summer season for Chinook and summer chum given.

Hugh- mesh size; Koyukuk River doesn't have to change mesh size since those fish don't go to Canada right? Department noted that this year there was a mesh size restriction in place in the entire drainage to help get the larger female chinooks spawning as well.

Darrel – there is still issues in the ocean (climate change, desalination, high sea intervention) that we can't fix, and this is influencing mesh size restrictions now which we have never had that before

Update on fall season for fall chum

Jack W. – concerned with on bycatch/high sea interception of fish

Darrel – many factors, toxins, desalination, hatchery fish out competing wild, but it is an issue

Henshaw Creek Concerns

Chairman Reakoff noted that he had observed some of the local creeks and waterways had discolored – blue and orange iron oxide. He was concerned that this sign of heavy metals in the water will reduce PH and negatively impact fish. DCF will look into this and get back to the AC.

Boards Update

BOG/BOF Meeting Cycle update for 2020-2021 given – meetings for both boards will be postponed until 2021-2022. Comments on elections of members and officers (members would like to wait until a face to face meeting is held for both)

There was some loud interference and many members got off the line. Vincent Simon and Shawn Bergman were not able to call back in

WACH Working Group

Chair would like to have the AC nominate two members to represent the working group to nominate the names forward to their coordinator due to some issues and lack of representation at the last meeting. Darrel Vent and Jack Reakoff nominated. Darrell was voted to be the primary representative, and Jack Reakoff as secondary.

AC would also like a letter drafted and sent to the communities of Allakaket, Alatna, Bettles, Hughes and Huslia with the ACs recommendation seeking endorsement.

BOF Proposal Deadline (May 10, 2021)

This is a topic that has been discussed at the last two Koyukuk River AC meetings, and the AC is still in support to draft and submit a proposal to allow rod and reel as subsistence gear in a portion of the Koyukuk drainage excluding the 5 mile radius around the Dalton Hwy. When it was time to vote to submit the proposal, during the role call vote it appeared that the meeting had lost Hugh Bifelt and the AC lost quorum. Jack Reakoff will draft and submit proposal in his name and the AC can support it next year. After looking at past minutes, it was noted that the last meeting on 12-16-2019, this proposal premise was fully supported by the full quorum, therefore be submitted under the Koyukuk River AC's name.

****Shawn Bergman was able to rejoin and quorum was reestablished ****

Board of Game Proposal

PROPOSAL 189 BOG Proposal on Brown Bear Tag Fee Exemption Authorization

Little discussion, noted this was something that needed to occur annually.

SUPPORTED (6-0)

Lack of AC representation at BOG/BOF Meetings

Chairman Reakoff – the boards do not read the AC record of comments into record, so those listening don't hear what the ACs comments and position on the proposals being deliberated.

Advisory Committees put a lot of work into these meetings and these meetings cost the state a lot of money. The record is incomplete because the archive is audio and the AC records are written.

The Chair on this issue read a draft letter into the record, and the AC would like to submit the letter to the BOG and the BOF for their March Meetings. Unanimous in support

Federal Proposals

No current fisheries proposals that affect this area.

Chairman Reakoff noted that the Gates of the Arctic Subsistence Resource Commission will be submitting a federal proposal for a 2 bear bag limit, on federal lands to mirror the current state regulations for the upcoming federal cycle.

Next meeting will potentially be in late November of 2021. An in-person face to face meeting is much preferred.