

Meeting Minutes

Susitna Valley Advisory Committee

October 15, 2024

Talkeetna Library, Talkeetna, AK (5:00 pm)

- I. Call to Order: 5:02
- II. Roll Call (Need 4 members for a quorum)
Members Present: Bryan Kirby, Steve Harrison, Todd Kingery, Eli Hoffman, Mark Burcar, Dave Fish, Robert Gerlach, Tim Buechle.
Members Absent (Excused): None
Members Absent (Unexcused): None
- III. Fish and Game Staff Present:
 - a. Gerrit VanDest, Leila Williams
- IV. Guests Present:
 - a. Mike Wood, Dewey Bitler
- V. Approval of Agenda Tim motion, Eli Second
- VI. Elections
 - a. 4 Seats open (2 full & 2 Alternates) (Steve Harrison, Robert Gerlach, Todd Kingery, Dave Fish) All members ran unopposed and retained their seats.
 - b. Bryan Kirby (Chair/Secretary), Steve Harrison (Vice Chair)
 - c. Board Members: Eli Hoffman, Mark Burcar, Robert Gerlach, Tim Buechle
 - d. Alternates: Todd Kingery, Dave Fish
- VII. Public Comment
Mr. Bitler spoke about Otter trapping. See attached for his report.
- VIII. New Business
 - a. ACR's
 - i. (2) after talking with local F&G fish biologist it did not meet all the criteria
 - ii. (3) after talking with local F&G fish biologist it did not meet all the criteria
 - b. [Board of Fish Proposals](#)
 - i. The AC felt this was out of our area of expertise and will not be sending in comments.
 - c. [Board of Game Proposals](#)
 - i. Proposals 1, 43, 64, 75, 154 unanimous support
 - ii. Proposals 2, 3, 47, 63, 83, 84 unanimous oppose

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- iii. Tabled 42, 48, 57, 58, 78 so Glennallen area game biologists can answer questions at next meeting
- iv. Proposals to discuss at next meeting:
 - 1. 4, 45, 46, 49, 61, 62, 66, 68, 69, 70, 71, 72, 76, 77, 80, 81, 82, 89, 139, 141

- IX. Set next meeting date:

At the meeting the board chose December 18th at 5:00 Talkeetna Library. The library is not available so the date is changed to **December 17th at 5:00pm at the Talkeetna Library.**
- X. Other
None:
- XI. Adjourn 7:04 pm

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Susitna Valley - Northern Pike/Otter Ecosystem

There have been minimal, if not any, salmon returning to the Susitna drainage system. In 2006, 69,800 sockeye salmon returned to Shell Lake, near Skwentna AK. In 2014, only 6 sockeye salmon returned. Red Shirt Lake, Trapper Lake, Alexander Lake, and Shell Lake have been decimated by Northern Pike. Alexander Creek once supported a multimillion-dollar sport fish industry with ten full time lodges, along with numerous guides, air and boat charter services-all of which are no longer in operation since the king salmon fisheries plummeted. The Pike also affects muskrat, waterfowl, invertebrates, frogs and other non-salmonid fishes. The introduction of pike has affected the whole ecosystem. Alaska Department of Fish & Game, along with Cook Inlet Aquaculture association(CIAA) have spent north of \$800,000 netting Northern Pike, trying to eradicate them. In 2019, 1,323 northern pike were harvested by gill net from Shell Lake during the open water season May 23-Sept 24. Approximately 56 Northern Pike were partially eaten by river otter. There is a need for a natural predator of the pike to be relentlessly pursuing them 365 days a year.

There is no predator of fish more suited for this task than the river otter. They regularly eat 2-3 pounds of fish per day, are efficient, and offer a "no cost" solution to a complicated and costly problem. River otters can dive to 60 feet, stay under water for 4 minutes, swim about 6 mph and live up to 20 years. Their pups are born toothless and blind anytime between January(during trapping season) to June. Their eyes open 7 weeks later. In their 20 year lifespan, each river otter has the potential to eat over 10,000lbs of fish.

The trapping season in Unit 14 and 16 goes from Nov 10-March 31 with "no limit". At \$100 a pelt it doesn't make sense to spend 1 million dollars on gill netting pike, when the river otter can do it for us. There needs to be a restriction on river otter harvest in all non-native pike habitats. In trapping region IV from 2016 to 2021 (according to Fish & Game sealing records) 889 river otters were taken.

Pike of all sizes consume salmon, but the smaller pike eat the most. River otters eat smaller pike, the ones that typically eat the juvenile salmon. We have studied the salmon problem for years and have found many problems. The northern pike is one problem that can be handled by the river otter if you give it a chance.

With that said I believe that the trapping season, specifically on river otters, needs to be restricted

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Dewey Bitler

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References:

- 1.Shell Lake Sockeye Salmon report 2019
Andy Wizik
2. ADFG river otter species profile
3. ADFG 2021 wildlife management report(trapping)
- 4.Alaska fish and wildlife news September 2016