

## Northern Norton Sound Advisory Committee Meeting

Date: Tuesday, December 3rd, 2024

Location: UAF Nagozruk Room

Call to Order- 1:10pm

### Roll Call

1. Charlie Lean- present
2. Brandon Ahmasuk- Absent, Sick
3. Jacob Mannix- Present
4. Andrew McCann- Present
5. Kevin Knowlton- Present
6. Louis Stang- Present
7. Henry Olanna Jr- Present Late @ 1:40pm
8. Jack Fagerstrom- absent
9. Johnson Eningowuk- Present
10. Clifford Seetok- absent
11. Davis Lincoln- Present, phone
12. Tom Gray- present
13. Patrick Knodel- absent, travel
14. Tommy Obruk- absent- unexcused---Sam?
15. Luis Brizuela- absent

Quorum- 8

### **ADF&G Staff**

Helen Cold- ADF&G Subsistence

Art Nelson- ADF&G Boards Support

Shawna Carpovich- ADF&G Research Coordinator

Marianna Mallory- Subsistence

Sam Kirby- Regulatory Program Assistant

Alex Hansen- Wildlife Biologist, Kotzebue

Sara Henslee- Area Biologist Unit 22

Alicia Carson- Assistant AB Unit 22

Quanit Ali- Wildlife Researcher

Kevin Clark- Area Manager, Comm Fish

Ethan Kelso- Fishery Biologist, Comm Fish

### **Members of the Public**

Jeffrey Groenke- Stevens Village, Zoom

Austen Ahmasuk

Anna Lionas- Nome Nugget

John Wade- NSEDC

Kevin Knowlton made a motion to approve the agenda

Second by Drew McCann

Discussion: The AC held discussion on the agenda primarily focused on the wording in the agenda of electing members from the regional villages. AC members Gray and Knowlton expressed that the normal process for the AC is to accept nominations from the villages rather than hold elections. Knowlton and Gray emphasized their concerns that the AC shouldn't have the power to essentially choose who can represent the village and potentially make it a Nome centric AC.

Knowlton specifically stated that whomever the community wants as their AC representative, that person should be seated. It should not be up to AC members to deny a community their right to choose who they want on the AC. Chair Lean suggested a language change from election to “seat” the members from the communities to the AC.

AC supported the language change unanimously and the agenda was approved.

### **Elections**

Johnson Eningowuk was nominated by the village of Shishmaref and the AC members supported his re-seating unanimously.

8 Support, no opposition

Seats for Elim, and Teller did not receive any nominations from villages. Those seats remain vacant.

### **Commercial Fishing Reports**

Ethan Kelson gave a summary of the 2024 commercial crab fishery. 471,200 lbs of crab harvested. 97.6% of the Guideline Harvest Level with a Catch Per Unit Effort of 40. Fish and Game expects that the 2025 season will have a comparable harvest rate. They expect the 2025 season to have a Guideline Harvest Level around 430,000 lbs with an Over Fishing Limit of 630,000 lbs.

Kevin Clark reiterated that we are fishing on the same cohort of crab that have been fished for the last two years. Most of the crab this last season were new shell crab, suggesting there will be good numbers for 2025 but that next year they expect to see more old shell crab.

AC members and fish and game briefly discussed disease in crab, AC Member Mannix stated that some crab caught during the winter subsistence crab fishery had “cottage cheese” disease. Fish and Game staff were not seeing signs of disease or parasites during the summer fishery.

AC member Tom Gray and Kevin Clark discussed how the Guideline Harvest Limit, Allowable Biological Catch and Over Fishing Limits were set. GHL is set to allow a buffer between the GHL and the ABC, the ABC is set 30% less than the OFL.

AC member Gray also had questions about where the majority of the harvest is coming from in the region and if Fish and Game uses that information to manage or manages the resource as a whole. He stated concerns of over fishing by larger boats from outside the region as well as concentrated harvest by regional fishing boats and the impact to subsistence. There was concern about the three crab crashes in the last 40 years and that Fish and Game needs to manage properly to avoid more crashes.

Kevin Clark- Fish and Game manages the crab as a single population. It’s an open access fishery.

Chair Lean summarized the history of the commercial fishery and some of the management actions that have been taken to avoid crashes. A 40 pot limit and the fishery was turned into a super exclusive fishery. They wanted to avoid catching all the mature crab as soon as they matured. The legal options for putting limitations on the fishery are few. It’s important to remember that crab don’t recruit every year, we haven’t had recruitment in this fishery for about 4 years.

Kevin Clark responded by saying that recent functional maturity studies have shown that our legal size crab have been able to spawn 3, maybe even 4 times before becoming legal size. He also responded a question from AC member Drew McCann on how long the 30% OFL buffer has been in place, since 2019 with an increase to 40% in 2020.

### **Finfish Report**

Kevin Clark led the finfish summary. Coho numbers were more inline with historical numbers, there were also no marine water gill net fisheries in District 6 beginning July 1. There was no directed pink fishery this summer. Subsistence needs appeared to have been met in District 5 and 6, but subsistence in Nome appeared to be lower primarily because of low pink salmon returns. District 2 was managed more conservatively based on lower subsistence catch and concerns raised by subsistence users in White Mountain over limited subsistence opportunity. The Pilgrim River rebounded and had good sockeye returns allowing for the limits on subsistence sockeye to be removed.

The plan going forward is to manage for King Salmon conservation in Southern Norton Sound and allow for in river subsistence fishing. He is not anticipating restrictions on the Sinuk River, and looking to open subsistence fishing on the Pilgrim River at the 25 fish limit. If there were restrictions in Port Clarence they would be windows of restriction with windows of openings to allow escapement up the Pilgrim River.

AC members Drew McCann and Tom Gray both raised concerns about coho returns over the last several years. There were also concerns about the effectiveness of counting projects in the region and limited subsistence fishing.

Chair Lean brought up that the return of sockeye in the Pilgrim River was not necessarily a surprise but that after this next year there will likely be very poor returns as there was no brood stock to return.

AC Member Henry Olanna present at 1:40pm

### **Proposals**

#### **Proposal 272- Shellfish. Modify the start of the commercial crab fishing season to open July 1 instead of June 15th in the Norton Sound Region.**

Kevin Knowlton- Motion to Support

Drew McCann- Second

Discussion: Chair Lean stated that the proposal was written by a commercial fisherman and was written to address low meat fill issues with the earlier season opening date. The proposal could be problematic for commercial fishers in Southern Norton Sound as it would likely require them to travel farther and spend more money on fuel to catch crab. The Southern Norton Sound AC in their meeting had suggested a potential compromise date to the proposal.

AC members briefly discussed whether there could be a conservation aspect to the proposal if better meat fill meant fewer crab were caught, but the effects were thought to be minimal.

The Southern Norton Sound AC was not present to comment.

Kevin Clark said that the department's position had not been finalized but there was potentially an allocative aspect to the proposal because the one buyer can decide to start buying whenever they want but a catcher-seller permittee could sell outside of the processing plants buying timeframe.

### **Motion Passed**

**7 in favor**  
**2 opposed**

Since Henry Olanna was now present Kevin Knowlton made a motion to reseal Henry Olanna to the Brevig Mission seat.

Seconded by Drew McCann

Unanimous Support to reseal Henry Olanna to the Brevig Mission seat.

**Proposal 273- Shellfish. Modify the start of the winter fishing season to open by emergency order on or after February 1st.**

Kevin Knowlton- Motion to support

Drew McCann- Second

Discussion: Chair Lean stated that the concern is that during poor ice condition years the stable ice edge gets crowded with pots and people begin to leap frog out onto bad ice to attempt to catch more crab. The cost of a lost pot can be easily made up for by catching more crab on bad ice. The effects of lost pots and ghost fishing is not well known but likely detrimental to the crab population. The intent of the proposal is to allow for an emergency order to close the season to bad ice. Southern Norton Sound supported the proposal.

There was additional discussion from AC member Knowlton on how a standard would be created to determine whether the ice conditions warranted closing or opening. AC member Gray also stated that fishers could still set pots on thin ice, especially because it's easier to cut a hole and that the biggest protection of the fishery is pot limits.

Kevin Clark stated that there would need to be a definition and set conditions so that it wouldn't just be his interpretation of the conditions. This would likely be undertaken by the Board of Fish. On pot loss, the current regulation for the winter fishery allows for 20 pots tags and no more.

Chair Lean stated that there is already precedent for managing a fishery based on ice conditions. Crab fisheries in the Pribilofs were closed as sea ice moved down. You could also make the decision on ice conditions based on the ice edge vs. bathymetry line to determine stable ice, as well as the condition of the ice edge.

**Motion Passed**

**8 in favor**

**1 opposed**

**Proposal 274- Shellfish. Increase the legal size for king crab in the Norton Sound Commercial Fishery from 4- and three-quarter inches to 5 inches and increase the size pot escape mechanisms.**

Jacob Mannix- Motion to support

Tom Gray- Second

Discussion: Chair Lean gave a summary the proposal stating the intent was to get the legal size in line with the marketable size. The current regulations of 4.75" create a harvestable biomass estimate that includes less desirable, not marketable crab. Which in turn contributes to significant handling and additional mortality. By having the legal size in line with marketable size a better estimate of the harvestable biomass of crab is given rather than a biomass that includes less desirable crab. This in turn will reduce handling mortality.

Limited additional discussion on increased winter handling mortality and whether there has been any comments received by the AC from catcher seller permits.

Chair Lean also discussed whether the Board of Fish would require an increase in pot escape mechanisms if the legal size limit were to be increased.

**Motion Passes- unanimous**

**9 in favor**

**0 Opposed**

**Recess at 2:48pm**

**Meeting Back in Order at 3:00pm**

### **ADF&G Wildlife Report**

**Moose:** Sara Henslee gave the wildlife report starting with Moose in Unit 22C. The bull cow ratio in 22C is 28 bulls to 100 cows. The quota for the fall 2024 season was 25 and there was a harvest of 40. All other harvest levels were close to the quotas. 22B west quota 26, harvest 26. 22D Kuzi Quota 27, Harvest 33. 22D Remainder Quota 17, harvest 19. 22B west will have a winter quota of 14 moose. The 22C harvest was high but likely able to be absorbed by the population this year. That likely won't be the case if the high harvest continues. Another composition survey will be flown in Fall 2025 and the next abundance survey will be flown in spring 2026. A browse survey in 22C was conducted for winter browse and there was a browse rate of 9%, and below 35% is the target, based on browse there is room to grow the Unit 22 Moose population.

AC members expressed concern about the harvest in 22C.

Member of the public Austen Ahmasuk expressed the belief that the moose population has been mismanaged by F&G. Emphasizing that there has been continual over harvest of moose and that the Board of Game has refused to address the amount necessary for subsistence. He also suggested that it is interesting to have a 9% browse rate and a moose population that is not growing, suggesting over harvest.

**Moose:** Sara Henslee continued with the wildlife report with discussion on moose harvest in 22E. The bull/cow ratio is decreasing. Non-resident harvest has been decreased, resident harvest has increased. Mrs. Henslee offered clarification to AC member Louis Stang on the current non-resident permit structure. Fish and Game can offer up to 5 non-resident draw permits based on what the resident harvest is. Some hunters make up most of the 22E resident harvest increase. Fish and Game estimates unreported harvest is about 13 moose.

**Musk ox:** there has been an increase in harvest in the earlier months when musk ox are closer to town with 17% of the quota harvested and 1 out of 10 cows harvested. The musk ox population is stable with an estimated abundance of 1932 musk ox, 46/100 bull cow ratio and short yearling ratio of 43/100. The next abundance survey will be in 2028.

AC Member Johnson Eningowuk stated that there is concern from residents in Shishmaref about the musk ox in their area. They are not afraid of people and can be a nuisance. They have torn down people's fish racks. The population is too high and the harvest should be increased.

Fish and Game staff Sara Henslee and Alicia Carson emphasized that the Tier II application period is currently open and encouraged Johnson to apply and to reach out himself or have

others reach out if they wanted assistance or had questions about applying. They further stated that they don't see very many applications from many of the regional villages.

**Bears:** Bear harvest has remained stable with about 100 bears per year in unit 22. The 22C season was closed early last year with the quota. In response to previous requests from AC members the average skull size and age data for the last 10 years appears to be stable. Sow harvest is 37% and the management goal for sow harvest is below 50%.

**Caribou:** Fish and Game was not able to do an abundance survey this last summer, the last abundance estimate from the previous survey was 152,000. The bag limit changes have gone into effect for a bag limit of 15 caribou per year, 1 of which can be a cow.

AC members Johnson Eningowuk and Chair Lean also discussed the mixing of caribou and reindeer and the likelihood that there are resident herds of caribou living permanently on the Seward Peninsula.

Alex Hansen, Wildlife Biologist from Kotzebue joined the caribou discussion to cover WAH questions.

The cow survival rate is 75% and 80% is the long-term average. For herd growth the cow survival rate should be at 85% or higher, we have had low cow survival since 2017. Calf recruitment has been decent.

AC members also asked whether we have age data on cows and whether satellite collars were able to be deployed. Alex Hansen stated that we do not have age data and that 50 collars were deployed in April.

Some additional discussion on declining nutritional value in the caribou food source but Alex Hansen stated he did not have an answer for those questions but there was some satellite research being done on availability of winter forage.

### **Moose Subcommittee Discussion**

AC member Jacob Mannix discussed the intent of the moose subcommittee: Members of the AC and members of the public have long expressed frustrations with the moose hunt in unit 22, primarily the short seasons. The AC has discussed potential options for addressing these concerns but has yet to put forth a proposal. The intent of the subcommittee is to explore potential proposals, draft them and bring them to the full AC for consideration. The subcommittee should work closely with Fish and Game and the public and should be limited in size and try to not impact regional villages. AC member Mannix also stated the subcommittee should try to primarily address the road system accessible hunts and not impact regional village hunts.

AC member Johnson Eningowuk discussed the limitations that the community of Shishmaref has in terms of easy access to moose hunting. Emphasizing the differences between issues that Nome faces versus other communities.

AC member Tom Gray emphasized that even if the subcommittee were to try to only deal with road system issues, the villages would be impacted, that Nome hunters are already hunting out of Shishmaref near Ear Mountain, and into 22E. White Mountain would also be impacted. He also raised concerns about representation on the subcommittee and stated that there needed to

be representation from the villages to ensure that any proposed changes wouldn't impact them or displace more Nome hunters further out.

AC member Mannix stated those concerns were valid and acknowledged and that village representation could be on the subcommittee and that the primary intent of the subcommittee is to attempt to find some kind of solution to the issues that the AC and members of the public have brought up regarding the moose hunt.

AC member Kevin Knowlton raised concerns over availability of people to attend more meetings and that maybe the AC should consider having multiple subcommittees to limit the time and amount of information covered in one meeting.

The AC discussed tentatively holding the first meeting of the subcommittee during the week of January 20th, the AC will need to give adequate notice to Sam Kirby for appropriate public notice.

Kevin Knowlton makes a motion to establish a moose subcommittee.

Tom Gray seconds

8 in favor

0 opposed

Unanimous support

Recess at 4:16pm

Meeting back in order at 4:23pm

**Proposal 151- Pass 6 in favor, 3 oppose**

**Reauthorization of the brown bear tag fee exemption**

Kevin Knowlton makes motion to support

Tom Gray second

Discussion: AC members discussed whether a tag fee could be used to measure hunter participation, people who are actually going to go bear hunting opposed to people taking advantage of opportunistic hunting. AC member Johnson Eningowuk raised concerns that since brown bears were not subsistence food, and shouldn't need to pay \$25 to shoot a bear if need be. Other AC members shared those concerns. AC members Mannix, Stang and Tom Gray stated that conservation costs money, and the tag fee would provide additional funds to Fish and Game.

**Proposal 129- Fail, all opposed**

**Establish the minimum caliber for big game be a barrel bore of at least .25 inches and centerfire**

Jacob Mannix motion to support

Kevin Knowlton Second

Discussion: The AC has historically opposed caliber restrictions. Many residents can only afford one caliber and have successfully hunted with that caliber. AC member Johnson Eningowuk stated he only owns a .22-250 and has successfully hunted moose, musk ox, caribou, and polar bear with it.

ADF&G also offered clarification on the definition of "big game" and listed species that are legally defined big game including, deer and wolf.

**Proposal 130- Fail, all opposed**

**Establish the minimum caliber for the taking of moose to be .243.**

Jacob Mannix motion to support

Tom Gray second

**No action based on previous Motion's action**

**Proposal 131- Fail, all opposed**

**Require identification tags to be attached to traps**

Kevin Knowlton motion to support

Jacob Mannix second

Discussion: The AC briefly discussed the proposal and felt that the proposal was not suitable for a statewide regulation and may be better suited to specific areas.

**Proposal 133- Fail, all opposed**

**Prohibit the use of snow machines to approach and pursue wolverine**

Kevin Knowlton motion to support

Jacob Mannix second

Discussion: The AC briefly discussed existing trapping regulations and how this proposal would affect them.

**Proposal 142- Fail, all opposed**

**Permit for selling skins, skulls, and trophies**

Jacob Mannix motion to support

Johnson Eningowuk- second

Discussion: The AC sought clarification on the proposal from the department on what this regulation would apply to. Trophy is defined as lifelike representation of the animal and this regulation would not apply to raw hides and skulls.

**Proposal 143- Fail, all opposed**

**Purchase and sale of game without a permit**

Kevin Knowlton motion to support

Johnson Eningowuk second

Discussion: AC members discussed the language of the proposal, stating it was a double negative and caused confusion.

**Chairs Report on Caribou Working Group**

The Board of Game did not follow the Working Groups proposals. Starting July 1, 2025 the WAH bag limit will be 15 animals, only 1 of which will be a cow. The original proposals saw a lot of resistance from Unit 26 hunters, and led to this compromise proposal, as well as the Board of Games decision to not close the non-resident season.

Tom Gray makes a motion to support Charlie Lean attend the WACH working group.

Kevin Knowlton Seconds

Unanimous support

**Board of Fish Meeting**

Kevin Knowlton makes a motion to support sending Charlie Lean

Tom Gray- second

Unanimous support

## **Finfish Proposals**

The AC discussed a potential proposal to amend the limit for sockeye salmon on the Sinuk River to 25 per permit. This was previously an agenda change request that was denied.

The AC also discussed king salmon on the Pilgrim River and why there was still a 3 salmon limit on the river when escapements have been very, very low. 13 this past season. Several AC members expressed concern over the low numbers of king salmon returning and that the AC should look at options to remove king salmon harvest from the permit.

Kevin Clark with Fish and Game brought up several things the AC should consider if it were to try and conserve king salmon on the Pilgrim River. Restrictions on gill net fishing would likely need to be implemented and the AC would need to consider how far downstream any new regulations would apply.

AC member Tom Gray and others brought up concerns over a lack of escapement goals in the area and that there was value in having a goal or target to manage to.

Kevin Clark with Fish and Game stated that the department is currently in an escapement goal review for the area but that some goals they have currently may not remain, and some may change.

## **Public Comment**

Austen Ahmasuk commented in support of the moose subcommittee and recommended that the subcommittee set very clear goals. He also expressed concern about potential development plans in the region, namely the Graphite One project and how that could negatively impact the Imuruk Basin and the Pilgrim, Kuzitrin, and Agiapuk rivers.

## **Committee Member Comments**

Davis Lincoln commented in support of the moose subcommittee and expressed concern about the low numbers of moose harvested in White Mountain. Additionally, he brought up two proposals that were to be submitted by White Mountain and hoped that the Moose subcommittee may be able to help more.

Johnson Eningowuk discussed difficulties over moose hunting near Shishmaref, namely the limited amount of access and brought up concerns about the impacts of climate change making it difficult to hunt caribou because of the lack of snow. He also reiterated that there were too many musk ox near Shishmaref and that they are a nuisance and that brown bears provided no subsistence value.

Kevin Knowlton addressed member Eningowuk's comments on brown bear, suggesting that perhaps a predator control perspective as opposed to subsistence perspective may encourage more people to take bears and help the moose and caribou. He also recommended encouraging people to apply for the Tier II permit. He also Reiterated the idea that the AC consider shorter more frequent meetings to be more productive on certain topics.

Henry Olanna Jr expressed frustration over communication on the meeting start time.

Tom Gray emphasized that moose hunting can be very costly and that the AC needed to make sure that moose hunting wasn't just set up for certain classes of people. He also reiterated the importance of crabbing to a subsistence lifestyle and the need to keep crabbing as a culture.

Louis Stang thanked state employees and looks forward to work on the moose subcommittee.

Jacob Mannix will be coordinating with Sam Kirby and others to set a meeting date for the first moose meeting.

Charlie Lean thanked members Johnson Eningowuk and Henry Olanna as well Sam Kirby. Will need to meet more with Sam to discuss travel for AC members.

Next meeting date: After March 16 but before April 11th.

Kevin Knowlton motion to adjourn. Meeting Adjourned at 5:57pm

Minutes prepared by: Jacob Mannix

Minutes Approved by:

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "J. Mannix". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, stylized initial "J" and a long, sweeping underline.