

Fairbanks Fish & Game Advisory Committee Meeting Minutes

Wednesday, March 18th, 2026 at 6:00 pm

JP Jones Community Center (2400 Rickert Street)

- I. **Call to Order:** Chair Levi Lewellyn called the meeting to order at 6:00 PM.
- II. **Members Present:** Levi Lewellyn (chair), Mark Richards (vice chair), Krystal Lapp (secretary), Gale Vick, Virgil Umphenour, Gabriel Davis, Mike Tinker, Warren Giuchici, Chuck Derrick, John Haddix, James Paine, Julia Hnilicka
Alternates Present: Eric Angslinger (seated), Jacques Etcheverry
Alternates Absent:
Members Absent: Ricko DeWilde, John Wisnieski, Lance Nelson
Number Needed for Quorum on AC: 8 - Quorum was met.
- III. **Introduce Fish and Game Staff Present:**
 - a. Matt Olson (ADF&G Yukon Fall Season Manager)
 - b. Andy Griska (ADF&G Sport Fish Division)
 - c. Deena Jallen, (ADF&G Yukon Summer Season Fishery Manager)
 - d. Jeff Wells (ADF&G Area Biologist – Division of Wildlife Conservation)
 - e. Lindsey Drees (ADF&G Assistant Area Biologist, Fairbanks)
 - f. Mark Nelson (ADF&G Area Biologist)
 - g. Kyle Campbell (Board Support)
- IV. **Introduce Guests Present:**
 - a. Tyrel Palmer – Member of the Public
 - b. Mark Lindberg - retired faculty member at UAF, and now a professional photographer
 - c. Aarati Nepali - student of University of Alaska Fairbanks
 - d. Emma Heil – Member of the Public
 - e. Dave Loring, Board of Game
- V. **Approval of Agenda**
 - a. The agenda for the March 18, 2026, meeting was reviewed. A request was made to amend the agenda to include discussion of House Bill 297 under New Business and a letter of support for Dave Loring for Board of Game reappointment.
Motion: To approve the agenda as amended.
Second: Seconded
Outcome: Motion passed by unanimous consent with no objections.
- VI. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: 2/11/2026**
 - a. The committee reviewed the February 11, 2026, meeting minutes.
Motion: Approve the previous meeting minutes as presented.
Second: Seconded
Outcome: Motion passed by unanimous consent with no objections.
- VII. **Reports**

- a. **Chair's report** - Chair Levi Lewellyn reported that he had no updates to present at this time and moved the meeting to agency staff reports.
- b. **ADFG Staff:**
 - i. **Jeff Wells (ADF&G Area Biologist – Division of Wildlife Conservation)**
 - a. Moose population monitoring: Recent surveys of radio-collared cows in Unit 20A indicate adult survival within normal ranges, but calf survival is currently very low, likely due to deep snow and prolonged cold temperatures this winter.
 - b. Based on these findings, ADF&G has decided to cancel the antlerless moose hunts in Unit 20A for the upcoming fall season as a precautionary management measure.
 - c. Wells also reported on Fairbanks Management Area (FMA) moose capture efforts, noting strong public participation with more than 150 reports of moose sightings submitted by the public, which assisted with collaring operations.
 - d. A wolf survey conducted in the Minto Flats Management Area documented approximately 40 wolves, consistent with densities observed in previous surveys conducted in 2019–2020.
 - e. Staff also discussed upcoming moose browse surveys and capture projects planned for early spring.
 - ii. **Andy Griska (ADF&G Sport Fish Division)** reported that there were few new updates for the committee. He noted that king salmon fishing remains closed, and confirmed that bait use is allowed in tributaries, as no additional restrictions were implemented this season.
 - iii. **Matt Olson (ADF&G Yukon Fall Season Manager)** provided an update on the pike fishery. Harvest activity has been slower than usual, with approximately 121 fish harvested to date, likely due to unusually cold winter conditions. Olson reported that the trail to the fishery area had recently been broken and was passable, and that conditions should allow additional opportunity if weather remains stable. He also noted that the preseason Yukon River Panel meeting will occur in Fairbanks in early April, followed by the preseason meeting in Anchorage the following week.
 - iv. **Deena Jallen (ADF&G Yukon Summer Season Fishery Manager)** reported that the official Yukon River salmon forecast had not yet been released, but it would be presented soon through the Joint Technical Committee report and the Yukon River Panel meeting. She noted that staff are monitoring spring breakup conditions and potential flooding, which could affect early season operations such as the Pilot Station sonar project scheduled to begin in early June.
 - v. **Discussion & Questions from Committee:**
 - a. A committee member asked about reports suggesting the possibility of heavy spring flooding and whether ADF&G has monitoring capabilities in place. ADF&G staff responded that the department does not directly monitor flood conditions, but instead relies on reports from individuals traveling in the field. Staff indicated they provide updates when available and encourage hunters or travelers to contact the department for the latest trail and safety information before traveling into remote areas.

- b. Committee members asked ADF&G staff whether they had reviewed House Bill 321, which proposes changes affecting state wildlife refuges across Alaska. Staff indicated they had not yet reviewed the bill in detail and were not prepared to comment on potential impacts during the meeting. Staff noted that the department would likely review the legislation further as it progresses through the legislative process, including during upcoming preseason coordination meetings with federal partners and fisheries managers, where additional discussion may occur.
- c. ADF&G staff were also asked about expected spring breakup conditions and how they could affect fishery operations. Staff acknowledged that they had begun hearing early reports that breakup could be late and potentially rough, which could affect operations such as the Pilot Station sonar project, typically deployed in early June. Staff indicated they would continue monitoring conditions and coordinating with partner agencies and communities along the river.
- d. A member of the committee asked whether ADF&G had observed wolf-coyote hybrids (“coywolves”) in the Fairbanks area after observing a large animal believed to be a coyote near Cache Creek. ADF&G staff responded that coyotes are known to occur in the Fairbanks area, including reports from the Dome and surrounding areas. However, staff noted they were not aware of confirmed wolf-coyote hybrids in Interior Alaska and indicated that the department occasionally receives photos from the public asking for identification of wolves or coyotes
- e. ADF&G staff confirmed that caribou hunting is restricted within 100 feet of either side of the road in specific portions of the Steese Highway corridor. Staff explained that this restriction applies to areas of Units 20B and 25C near Twelvemile Summit and Eagle Summit, where hunting activity and road access are concentrated. The setback requirement is intended to improve hunter safety and reduce roadside hunting conflicts, requiring hunters to move a short distance away from the roadway before harvesting animals. Staff noted that the restriction is implemented through registration permit conditions and management language, rather than being codified directly in regulation. Other Agency Staff - No additional reports were provided by other agency staff at this time. The Chair asked if any other agency representatives wished to speak, and none came forward. The meeting then proceeded to the next agenda item.
- f. Committee member John Haddix raised the upcoming Tanana River salmon survey project. He noted that Eric Shane from the University of Alaska Fairbanks may present at a future Advisory Committee meeting regarding the project, which is scheduled to begin this summer. The survey will be a cooperative effort between the University of Alaska Fairbanks, the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, and Fort Wainwright.

VIII. **Public Comment** – Members of the public were invited to provide comments.

- a. **Mark Lindberg (Fairbanks)** provided comments and introduced a proposal he is considering submitting related to Central Arctic caribou hunting along the Dalton Highway corridor (Unit

26B). Lindberg explained that he has hunted the Central Arctic herd since the early 1990s and has observed significant increases in hunting activity along the highway in recent years, particularly involving hunters using vehicles to locate and pursue caribou. He expressed concerns about hunter safety and traffic hazards, noting instances of hunters stopping vehicles in travel lanes, leaving vehicle doors open along the roadway, and attempting to intercept caribou close to the road. Lindberg stated that the proposal he is developing would consider requiring archery hunters to be a minimum distance off the road before shooting, in order to encourage hunters to park safely and pursue animals on foot rather than from vehicles.

- b. Committee members discussed the proposal and raised several considerations, including whether a setback requirement could help address safety concerns, the possibility of making any restriction seasonal, and whether a shorter setback distance (such as 100 yards) might be more practical than the originally suggested quarter mile. Members also noted that the Board of Game has limited authority over vehicle use and road regulations, which may affect how such a proposal could be structured. Lindberg indicated he was open to modifying the proposal based on committee feedback and would consider revising the language for future discussion.
- c. Additional discussion included observations from committee members and members of the public regarding increased hunting pressure along the Dalton Highway corridor and examples of unsafe vehicle behavior observed during caribou hunting seasons.
- d. No additional public comments were offered.

IX. **Old Business** - No items of old business were brought forward for discussion. The Chair asked if there was any old business to address, and none was raised by committee members. The meeting then proceeded to New Business.

X. **New Business**

a. **Game/Trapping Subcommittee Report**

- i. The committee discussed a proposal related to beaver hunting regulations in Unit 20D. A committee member explained that a recent regulatory clarification removed the ability to take beaver with firearms or archery equipment in portions of the Northern Region, which had previously been allowed.
- ii. The proposal being discussed would restore the pre-2022 language and reopen portions of Unit 20D outside of existing closed areas (including areas outside the Chena Closed Area and Creamer's Field) to allow the take of beaver with firearms or archery equipment during the trapping season.
- iii. Discussion included clarification of the current trapping season dates (September 25 – May 31) and the practicality of hunting beaver during different parts of the season. It was noted that beaver hunting is most effective during spring open-water conditions, when daylight is longer and animals are more active.
- iv. Committee members also discussed the circumstances that led to the regulation change, noting that the Board of Game had intended to clarify language during a previous regulatory cycle, but the result had effectively removed hunting methods that had previously been allowed.
- v. The committee reviewed the concept of restoring the earlier language and discussed the potential need to reintroduce the authorization for firearms and archery harvest during the trapping season in Unit 20D.

- vi. No final action was taken during this discussion, and the proposal may return to the committee for further consideration.

b. Fisheries Subcommittee Report

- i. No formal Fisheries Subcommittee report was presented during the meeting.
- ii. Committee members discussed several fisheries-related topics during earlier staff reports, including updates from ADF&G on the Yukon River salmon season outlook, upcoming Yukon River Panel and preseason meetings, and general fisheries management conditions in the Interior region.
- iii. No additional fisheries proposals or actions were brought forward under this agenda item.

c. Board of Game 2026-2027 Call For Proposals for Regions III and V - *due May 1st*

- i. The committee discussed the Alaska Board of Game Call for Proposals for Regions III and V, with proposals due May 1, 2026.
- ii. Members discussed potential proposal topics and encouraged individuals and organizations to submit proposals addressing wildlife management concerns in the region. The committee noted that proposals could be submitted either by individuals or through the Advisory Committee, and that the committee would review and consider potential proposals prior to the submission deadline.
- iii. Several members discussed ideas for proposals related to caribou hunting along the Dalton Highway corridor, including potential setback requirements intended to address increasing hunting pressure and safety concerns near the road. Members also discussed the importance of reviewing proposal language carefully to ensure that recommendations fall within the authority of the Board of Game.
- iv. The committee agreed to continue reviewing potential proposals and proposal language at the next meeting, where members may consider whether to submit proposals on behalf of the Advisory Committee.

d. Other fisheries, wildlife, or committee business as needed

- i. Additional committee business included discussion of a proposal related to hunting practices along the Dalton Highway corridor (Unit 26B). A member of the public presented a draft proposal recommending that archery hunters be required to hunt a minimum distance from the road before shooting, with the goal of reducing unsafe vehicle behavior and conflicts along the highway during caribou hunting seasons.
- ii. Committee members discussed several possible revisions to the proposal, including:
 - 1. Reducing the proposed setback distance from ¼ mile to approximately 100 yards.
 - 2. Making any setback requirement seasonal, potentially applying only during the nonresident hunting season, when hunting pressure is highest.
 - 3. Ensuring that the proposal language focuses on hunting distance requirements, rather than vehicle regulations, since the Board of Game does not have authority over traffic or parking regulations.
 - 4. Members encouraged the proposer to revise the language and bring the proposal back to the Advisory Committee at the next meeting for further consideration. It was noted that the committee could decide at a future meeting whether to submit the proposal on behalf of the Advisory Committee before the May 1, 2026 Board of Game proposal deadline. No formal action was taken. The proposal will be revisited at a future meeting after revisions are made.

iii. Board of Fisheries Statewide Meeting Report

1. Gale Vick reported that the Alaska Board of Fisheries Statewide meeting was currently underway. She noted that Virgil Umphenour and Krystal Lapp were attending the meeting in person, while she had been following the meeting online. Gale also reported that Marit Carlson-Van Dort had been identified as the leading candidate for appointment to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, pending final confirmation. She also announced that the Fairbanks AC Fisheries Subcommittee would meet on April 6 to review upcoming Board of Fisheries proposals for Kodiak, Lower Cook Inlet, and Upper Cook Inlet, and to discuss fisheries-related legislation.
2. Virgil Umphenour reported that approximately 150 people had signed up to testify at the Board of Fisheries meeting, and about 90 had testified so far, with testimony continuing the following day. He noted that hatchery supporters and processors were present in large numbers and were actively coordinating testimony and strategy. Virgil indicated that the group working on hatchery-related issues believed they had a good chance of advancing their proposals. Virgil added that he planned to raise additional points regarding historical restrictions on bottom trawling in state waters around Kodiak during the Committee of the Whole discussions, where new information can be introduced
3. Krystal Lapp reported that she had been meeting with industry representatives and fishing groups during the meeting and described ongoing discussions about possible amendments to reduce impacts while still addressing concerns raised in the proposals. She explained that there was significant concern within the fishing industry about proposed changes, similar to reactions seen during federal fisheries discussions about chum salmon bycatch. She also noted that trawl proposals were a major issue at the meeting, with some groups urging the Board of Fisheries to defer defining trawl gear to the North Pacific Fishery Management Council, which is expected to take up the issue later in the year. Krystal also noted that hatchery production and egg reduction proposals were generating significant debate, particularly between regions with strong hatchery programs and those concerned about impacts on wild salmon.

e. House Bill 297 - Resident Preference for Personal Use Fisheries

- i. The committee discussed House Bill 297, introduced by Representative Schwanke, which proposes creating a resident preference for the taking of fish for personal use or consumption by Alaska residents.
- ii. Committee members discussed the purpose of the legislation and its potential relevance for Alaska residents who rely on fisheries for food security and personal use harvest.
- iii. Motion: The Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee voted unanimously to support House Bill 297.
- iv. Action: Committee member Mike Tinker was appointed to draft a letter of support on behalf of the Advisory Committee.

f. Letter of Support for Dave Loring – Board of Game

- i. The committee discussed a request to provide a letter of support for Dave Loring's reappointment to the Alaska Board of Game. Members noted Loring's long-standing involvement in wildlife management and his experience working on issues affecting rural and Interior Alaska.

- ii. Committee members discussed the importance of having individuals with practical experience and knowledge of Alaska's hunting and wildlife management systems serving on the Board of Game.
- iii. **Motion:** To provide a letter of support from the Fairbanks Fish and Game Advisory Committee for Dave Loring's reappointment to the Alaska Board of Game.
- iv. **Second:** Motion was seconded.
- v. **Action:** Motion passed by unanimous consent.

XI. **Set next meeting date:** April 8, 2026 – 6:00 PM - JP Jones Community Center, Fairbanks.

XII. **Other**

- a. Before adjournment, the committee discussed scheduling and process for upcoming Game/Trapping Subcommittee work. Members considered holding a subcommittee meeting on March 30 to review draft proposals before they are brought to the full Advisory Committee at the next meeting.
- b. Committee members discussed the importance of circulating written proposal drafts to the full committee prior to meetings so members have time to review them before voting. Members noted that draft proposals would be distributed by email ahead of the subcommittee meeting, and recommendations from the subcommittee would then be forwarded to the full Advisory Committee for consideration.
- c. A question was raised regarding the Open Meetings Act and how proposals can be shared and discussed outside of meetings. Kyle Campbell (ADF&G Board Support) clarified that advisory committees are subject to the Open Meetings Act and that formal discussion and action must occur in a public meeting setting, though drafts can be circulated for review beforehand.
- d. Members also briefly discussed upcoming travel schedules and availability for the next meeting before moving to adjournment.

XIII. **Adjourn**

- a. **Motion:** Motion to adjourn was made and seconded.
- b. **Action:** Motion carried.
- c. The meeting adjourned at 9:03 PM.