

Yukon Flats Fish & Game Advisory Committee Meeting

Thursday, October 30th, 2025 at 6:30 pm

web/teleconference only

Join the meeting online: <https://bit.ly/yukonflatsACoact30>

Dial in: (669) 444-9171 or (888) 475-4499 Toll-Free

Meeting ID: 824 8314 9927

Passcode: 205680

- I. **Call to Order:** Walter Peter called the meeting to order at 6:54PM
 - a. Bruce Thomas Seconded
- II. **In Attendance:**
Walter Peter (chair), Rhonda Pitka, Larry Nathaniel, Margaret Henry-John (alternate), Bruce Thomas (alternate)
- III. **Not Present:** Ron Yatlin, Michael Peter, Peter Hjelm, Gary Simple Jr., Clayton Tacket, Charles John
- IV. **Number Needed for Quorum on AC: 5**
 - a. Quorum of 5 was established by Walter Peter at 6:54pm
- V. **Secretary Appointment:** Walter Peter appoints Krystal Lapp as secretary for this meeting
- VI. **Introduce Fish and Game Staff Present:**
 - a. Luke Rogers - ADF&G, Wood Bison Restoration Biologist
 - b. Jordan Pruszenski– ADF&G, Assistant Area Biologist for the Northeast
 - c. Mark Bertram – F&W, Yukon Flats Refuge Manager
 - d. Matt Olson ADF&G – Fall Season Area Manager
 - e. Deena Jallen ADF&G – Summer Season Area Manager
 - f. Leila Williams – Filling in for Kyle
- VII. **Introduce Guests Present:**
 - a. Krystal Lapp – Tanana Chiefs Conference
 - b. Jazmyn Vent – Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
 - c. Janessa Newman – Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission
 - d. Craig Chyyhlook – Native Peoples Action
 - e. Ben Stevens
- VIII. **Approval of Agenda**
 - a. Walter Peter motions to approve the agenda
 - b. Larry Nathaniel seconds
 - c. Passed by unanimous consent
- IX. **Approval of Previous Meeting Minutes: 2/26/2025**
 - a. Walter Peter motions to approve the previous meeting minutes
 - b. Larry Nathaniel seconds
 - c. Passed by unanimous consent
- X. **Reports**
 - a. Jordan Pruszenski– ADF&G

- i. ADF&G reported continued challenges conducting fall moose aerial surveys due to insufficient snow cover, which affects sightability. Because of this, biologists plan to shift to spring surveys beginning this year, likely in March, to ensure surveys can occur in predictable weather conditions. Spring surveys will not produce a bull-to-cow ratio, meaning composition data will be lost, but the department stressed the need to obtain population numbers given low moose densities in the Flats and upcoming potential bison releases. The last full moose survey occurred in 2017. Community members expressed concern about declining moose numbers and harvest difficulty, and managers acknowledged predation pressure—particularly from black bears—as a major factor.
- b. Luke Rogers – ADF&G: Wood Bison Restoration Project Update
 - i. The final Minto Flats wood bison release occurred this spring with approximately 60 animals released and 61 currently on the landscape. The department is now beginning planning for a potential wood bison release in the eastern Yukon Flats, with 2027 identified as the earliest likely timeline. The expected release size ranges from roughly 12 to 60 animals, depending on logistics, availability, and stakeholder input. ADF&G emphasized that they are seeking Tribal and Advisory Committee guidance on release considerations, including land selection and cultural/community preferences. Weather and snow-ice events have influenced past herd performance, and the state plans to coordinate closely with communities as planning continues.
- c. Mark Bertram – Yukon Flats Refuge Manager
 - i. Mark Bertram, Acting Refuge Manager for the Yukon Flats National Wildlife Refuge, reported significant staffing reductions across federal agencies, including the Refuge. Over the past several months, three key refuge staff retired: the refuge manager (Jimmy Foxx), habitat biologist (Delia Kretzinger), and pilot biologist (Nikki Guler), leaving the Refuge with only three staff members — himself, wildlife biologist Bryce Lake, and subsistence coordinator Clayton Merrill. Despite the losses, Bertram noted that the Refuge was able to complete most of its mission work this past summer after securing a temporary pilot, but emphasized that future capacity remains uncertain. He anticipates potential reorganization among Alaska refuges to consolidate resources and prioritize conservation capacity moving forward.
- d. Matt Olson ADF&G – ADF&G Fall Season Manager
 - i. The fall season manager discussed how current and proposed regulations could trigger main-stem gillnet closures when the first fall chum are genetically detected, potentially as early as mid-late June. Under the proposal discussed, the first detection would close all gillnet use, including four-inch whitefish nets, until the fall chum run concludes. This would significantly impact subsistence whitefish harvest access. Managers noted that the timing of fall chum arrival increasingly overlaps

with late summer fishing, creating challenges when applying rigid preseason dates. They highlighted the need to balance conservation with ensuring communities retain some access to non-salmon subsistence fisheries.

- e. Deena Jallen ADF&G – ADF&G Summer Season Manager
 - i. The summer season manager reported very poor Chinook and chum runs in 2025. The total Chinook run at Pilot Station was approximately 60,000 fish, with only 23,000–24,000 passing Eagle—well below the 71,000 escapement objective. As a result, Chinook fishing was closed all season, and a two-plus-week closure on four-inch gear was implemented to protect kings during migration. The summer chum run was approximately 400,000 fish, also too low to allow openings. Subsistence harvest was limited to selective gear for pink, sockeye, and non-salmon species. The manager noted that reduced non-salmon harvest in recent years is tied to limited opportunity and the high fuel cost of going out when few harvestable species are available, making this a very difficult fishing year for communities.

XI. New Business

- a. Comments on Board of Fisheries Arctic/Yukon/Kuskokwim proposals (comments due Nov 3rd)
 - i. Rhonda Pitka motions to only vote and comment on Yukon River Proposals 15, 16 and 17
 - ii. Larry Nathaniel seconds
 - iii. Passed by unanimous consent

XII. Other Business

- a. Reminder: TM940 subsistence permits open November 1, 2025. Rhonda Pitka encouraged all Yukon Flats residents to apply early to secure permits due to low moose harvest and increased food security needs

XIII. Select Representative:

- a. Board of Fisheries AYK Meeting - Nov 18-22 in Fairbanks
 - i. Larry Nathaniel volunteers to attend the meeting
 - ii. Rhonda Pitka motions to send Larry Nathaniel to the AYK Board of Fish meeting in Fairbanks, Alaska, November 18-22, 2025
 - iii. Walter Peter seconds
 - iv. Passed by unanimous consent
- b. Rhonda Pitka motions to appoint Larry Nathaniel as the Yukon Flats AC representative to the Wood Bison Working Group meeting December 2-4, 2025 in Fairbanks, Alaska
 - i. Bruce Thomas seconds
 - ii. Passed by unanimous consent

XIV. Set next meeting date: January 14, 2026 @ 6:30PM

XV.

Alaska Board of Fisheries Arctic/Yukon/Kuskokwim Meeting Proposals November 18-22, 2025 Fairbanks, AK			
Proposal Number	Proposal Description		
Support, Support as Amended, Oppose, No Action	Number Support	Number Oppose	Comments, Discussion (list Pros and Cons), Amendments to Proposal, Voting Notes
<i>Note: Effective September 2019, when abstentions occur, the action or decision of a majority of the remaining members at a meeting at which a quorum is present is an act of the committee. For example, a vote tally of 7-6-2 means the motion carries. Members abstaining from voting must provide an explanation that is included in the committee record.</i>			
12	Add eel stick as a legal subsistence gear type for nonsalmon species in the Kuskokwim Area.		
13	Amend sport fishing season for king salmon in the upper Kuskokwim River.		
14	Repeal bag and possession limits for sheefish in the Kanektok, Goodnews, and Arolik Rivers.		
15	Establish a 2 year closure on harvest of Yukon River Fall Chum salmon.		
Opposed	1	4	The committee discussed that multiple conservation measures are already in place for fall chum and that there is no evidence an additional two-year closure would aid recovery.
16	Close the mainstem Yukon River to the use 4” or less mesh gillnets for Fall Chum salmon conservation.		
Opposed	0	5	No comments
17	Allow the use of 6” or less mesh gillnets during times of salmon conservation.		
Support as Amended	5	0	Amendment: Add Yukon Flats tributaries and sloughs to the proposal allowing the use of 6” or less mesh gillnets during salmon conservation periods. Amendment to include Alfred Creek, Dutt, Conan Creek, upstream of the Dull River Confluence, Edburg Slough, Fish Creek upstream of the Fish Slough Confluence, Grass River upstream of the 17 Mile Sioux Confluence, Island Lake Creek, Martin Creek upstream of the Cut-Off, Slough Confluence, Nolitna Creek, Old Lost Creek, Rogers Creek, Ross Creek, Sucker River, the Chautaundoc River, and Twin Lakes Creek.
18	Repeal the bag limit reduction and modify the open season for northern pike in Minto Flats.		
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Support, Support as Amended, Oppose, No Action	Number Support	Number Oppose	Comments, Discussion (list Pros and Cons), Amendments to Proposal, Voting Notes
20			Repeal the bag limit reduction for northern pike in portions of Minto Flats.
21			Allow a catch-and-release fishery for northern pike and modify gear in Harding Lake.
22			Allow a catch-and-release fishery for northern pike in Harding Lake.
23			Repeal special regulations for northern pike in Volkmar Lake.
24			Repeal designated youth fishing days for Arctic grayling in the Chena River.
25			Repeal registration requirement for ice houses that are not removed from the ice daily in the Tanana River Area.
26			Repeal Arctic grayling special regulations and gear restrictions for the confluence area of the Tanana River and Shaw Creek.
27			Increase the bag and possession limit of stocked species in Rainbow Lake.
28			Define beach seine gear specifications in effect when Norton Sound-Port Clarence subsistence fisheries are closed and immediately reopened with the non-retention of specific salmon species.
29			Establish a seasonal harvest limit of 25 sockeye salmon for the Sinuk River subsistence fishery.
30			Increase waters closed to subsistence fishing in the Sinuk River.
31			Expand waters closed to subsistence fishing for salmon in the Sinuk River.
32			Repeal the subsistence fishing schedule in the marine waters of west of Cape Nome in Subdistrict 1 of the Norton Sound District.
33			Prohibit the retention of king salmon when subsistence fishing with a beach seine in the Pilgram River.

Alaska Board of Fisheries Arctic/Yukon/Kuskokwim Meeting Proposals November 18-22, 2025 Fairbanks, AK			
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34			Reduce the subsistence fishing annual limit for Pilgram River king salmon.
35			Repeal the requirement for hook and like subsistence fishermen to follow sport fishing bag and possession limits in the northern Norton Sound area.
36			Allow catch and release sport fishing for king salmon in the Unalakleet River drainage when the subsistence fishery is closed to the retention of kings.
37			Close sport fishing for king salmon in the Pilgrim River.
38			Modify hook size specifications when sport fishing for salmon in the Northwestern Management Area.
39			Reduce the annual bag and possession limits for sheefish.
40			Establish a subsistence sheefish permit in the Kotzebue Area.
41			Allow the use of bow and arrow when subsistence fishing for non-salmon fish species in the Arctic-Kotzebue Area.
42			Close waters in the Kotzebue District adjacent to the end of the Kotzebue airport runway to subsistence and commercial fishing.
43			Repeal the commercial fishing season for sheefish in the Kotzebue District.

Adjournment: Motion to adjourn meeting at 8:43PM by Rhonda Pitka, seconded by Walter Peter.

Minutes Recorded By: Krystal Lapp
 Minutes Approved By: Walter Peter
 Date: 10/30/2025