

Bureau of Land Management

Alaska Resource Advisory Council Meeting

Virtual, Zoom

Tuesday, May 25, 2021

**Council members present:** Bronk Jorgensen, David Gregory, Erik Kenning, Fannie Suvlu, Jeff Bruno, Jessie Badger, John Schell, Jusdi Doucet, Justin Mason, Rada Khadjinova, Rod Arno, Sean Sullivan, Stan Foo, Scott Sundberg

**Council members absent:** none

**BLM representatives present:** Chad Padgett (BLM Alaska State Director and Designated Federal Official (DFO)) Melinda Bolton, Lesli Ellis-Wouters, Alysia Hancock, Bonnie Million, Chris Mckee, Dara Glass, Leslie Holland, Dave Mushovic, Kevin Pendergast, Nichelle, (Shelly Jones, Nicole Hayes, Paul Krabacher, Serena Sweet, Stacie McIntosh, Tom Heinlein, Zach Million.

**Representatives of other agencies:** Sara Taylor (DOI)

**Members of the public present (or on conference line):** Christopher Simmons (Audubon), Megan Condon (Native American Rights Fund), Deantha Skibinski (Alaska Miners Assn.), Hailey Standish (Doyon), Jamie Marunde (Doyon), Jen Leahy (Theodore Roosevelt Conservation Partnership), Joe Bovee (Ahtna), Kathryn Martin (Ahtna), Suzanne Little (Pew Charitable Trusts), Robin Dublin (Alaska Department of Fish & Game, Subsistence), Tisha Kuhns (Calista Corporation), Dale Jackson (Calista Corporation), Susan Magee (Alaska Department of Fish & Game) Jonathan Simon (Van Ness Feldman LLP).

*9:05 a.m. RAC Coordinator Opens Meeting – Melinda Bolton*

**Bolton:** announced the meeting is open shares background of the group and its statutory duties, provided guidance on using zoom, reminds attendees the meeting is being recorded, gives outline of the day.

*9:13 a.m. State Director Welcome – Chad Padgett*

**Padgett:** greeted members and introduced himself and BLM Alaska priorities.

### *9:20 Alaska Leadership Team Introductions*

Deputy State Directors and District Office Managers within BLM Alaska introduced themselves and explained their areas of expertise and/or the lands their offices are focused on managing.

### *9:30 a.m. RAC Member Introductions*

Each RAC member introduced themselves and briefly shared the areas of interest they represent, professional background, and where they are from. Sarah Taylor, Department of Interior Policy Advisor, also introduced herself.

### *9:50 a.m. Shared November Subcommittee Draft Meeting Minutes*

<https://www.blm.gov/get-involved/resource-advisory-council/near-you/alaska/rac/minutes-and-resolutions>

A vote on approval will be held once a Chair vote has taken place.

### *10:00 a.m. Lands and Cadastral Update – Erika Reed [Presentation on File]*

**RAC Member Bronk Jorgensen:** I've heard recently at AMA meetings about the PLOs (Public Land Orders). I don't quite understand; the new administration has changed how the process is supposed to work. Did the process ever really change? From the old PLOs when they were lifted and the ones that were more recently about to be lifted? If the process was good in the past, why is the process no longer good? Why are only some of the PLO's being questioned?

**Reed:** Those PLOs can't be undone. The Dingell act is a new situation. Those old RMPs (Resource Management Plans) couldn't have conceived of that during those NEPA projects. I can't completely answer the way the new administration is looking at things. We need more face-to-face time with them. We're doing more consultation with the tribes, starting tomorrow. The reason I mention the D1s have been modified in the past with limited opening orders, like metalliferous exploration in the past, like millions of acres were opened. Millions more were opened for state selections. I think we'll see an interim decision specific to the veterans and then revocations when there's more analysis done. What that'll look like, I don't know. I think it'll depend on what the administration hears in consultation.

***State Director Chad Padgett had to step out.***

**RAC Member Bronk Jorgensen:** It's a little tough to follow. It sure does change the landscape with what just happened for a lot of reasons. Is the consultation with the tribes open to the public to comment on the PLOs and possible questions?

**RAC Member Justin Mason:** Looks like some land near Denali will be conveyed, want to know how an easement can be established.

**Reed:** The statute requires us to maintain access to public land. Where it gets reserved or how many [easements] get reserved are always a sticking point. Some people feel there can't be enough, and others feel they'd like fewer. We need to not create a burden on the landowner. Recommend reaching out to Dave Mushovic ([dmushovi@blm.gov](mailto:dmushovi@blm.gov); (907) 271-4682).

**Mushovic:** Erika's covered it well. We're happy to hear from anyone with an interest in it. Happy to talk about specific ones [potential easements] if you want to send me a message.

**RAC Member Stan Foo** - Erica (Reed), Thanks for the great update. A very complex issue, but progress nonetheless.

*11:10 a.m. Land Use Planning Update – Kevin Pendergast/Serena Sweet  
[Presentation on File]*

**RAC Member Stan Foo** - any improvements on how cumbersome the plans are, they were changed, are they changed again?

**Pendergast** mentioned the new CEQ (Council on Environmental Quality) guidance.

**Sweet** - regulations require us to get processes done in less than two years. That was reiterated last September and really being focused on now.

**RAC Member Bronk Jorgensen:** One of the things that I've always had an issue with on the planning process are the ACECs (Areas of Critical Environmental Concern) that are in these new plans. More of a comment than a question. Look at the list of new folks on here, I think that process should be addressed for them.

**RAC Member Stan Foo** - want to reiterate they're easy to nominate, they're included in draft documents, not always final documents. Seems to be a mystery how little it takes to nominate an area. From the mining and development sector, it seems the ACECs create de facto wilderness areas. BLM has said that's not the case. If that's true it needs to be more clearly defined. Just continuing the conversation on ACECs we've had for several years. We need to clarify what they are and are not.

**Padgett:** we're working to do education on multiple fronts on how we actually manage those.

*11:40 a.m. Break for Lunch*

*12:45 p.m. Resume Meeting for Public Comment*

**Kathryn Martin, Ahtna Incorporated:** why is conveyances taking so long? We're the biggest state in the union, but it's been 50 years. Is it funding of lack of personnel or both? I want to mention maintenance and funding for [Alaska Native Claims Settlement Act (ANCSA)] 17(b) [easements] in Alaska. BLM only gets involved if it's blocked. It seems like it's also always the landowner's responsibility.

**Joe Bovee, Ahtna Incorporated:** How can we as ANCs (Alaska Native Corporations) work with the delegation to help improve the speed of the ANCSA conveyances? Is it funding, regulatory or staffing issue, thanks.

**Emailed comments** pasted below public verbal comments in their entirety

*1:00 p.m. Recreation Update – Z. Million [presentation on file]*

**RAC Member David Gregory** asks about volunteers to help with the workload.

**Anchorage Field Office Manager Bonnie Million:** <https://www.volunteer.gov> for long term positions like campground hosts. Three people out of Central Yukon FO, we're using volunteers, one as a campground host, and a handy man for wayside maintenance. There is a similar situation at EIFO (Easter Interior Field Office), they hold a 3-day national outdoor day volunteer program for [Pinnell Mountain Trail](#).

**RAC Member Stan Foo:** News about cruise ships coming back. Any forecast about Traffic coming back across border?

**Million:** no updates on that, but on the cruise ship bill that was signed the other day, cruise lines have started booking in anticipation of that. First one is due to arrive 7/24.

**RAC Member Rod Arno:** thanks for the overview. Relating back to the volunteers. The outdoor council has tried in the past to volunteer to improve access in the Nelchina Basin. At that time, we were told it would be too much trouble. Can something like that be organized through your office for someone like outdoor council to do some trail clean up on 17(b) easements?

**Million:** I know it can be a big workload for 17(b) maintenance for some of the offices. I would be glad to put you in touch with some of them.

**Padgett:** I want to take advantage of volunteers as much as possible to alleviate budget and staff pressures. Thanks for offering.

**RAC Member Sean “Sully” Sullivan:** lots of people on the peninsula who want to help improve access to recreation routes down here, they’ve got equipment and know how.

**RAC Member Scott “Sunny” Sundberg:** SRMA (Special Recreation Management Area) the image you used is of the company I used to own. Heli skiing is a great opportunity. I definitely want to improve education and awareness for max capacity [for permittees/operators] for areas like Haines. It’s important that we don’t overdo it. My big concern is that having 4 operators in the Haines area is a bit much, based on 20 years of experience.

**Sully:** would that be a total usage and not a total operator issue?

**Sunny:** it depends on what works for each operator, they need to be able to do more than break even. What does it take to be economically feasible and viable, including in the Valdez area? [Agencies] Can’t just give permits to boost the economy if it doesn’t benefit the pioneer operator or the other operators who have developed the system. I’m all about good competition, but I think follow through is important for the managing agencies, including boroughs offering permits. It may prove there’s enough space for four. We just need to study it more.

**Sully:** sometimes you need to scale back to keep them all operating. Sometimes it’s momentary operations cut back. It’s going to be an epic season this year. There’s a lot of people brand new to these industries, doing it for the first time. COVID really drove people out there. We’re seeing this big boom. It will be important to open more available land if we have it.

**Sunny:** the [Ring of Fire \[Resource Management Plan\] and Haines \[Amendment\]](#) process was really frustrating to wait for it to be developed. The last administration got it done in 18 mos. Kudos to them. The heli skiing community looks at it like, we’re snow farmers; our success is dependent on how often we can get out there and rake in the product. Have a couple lean years and people forget about it. Watched as a bystander this year and we had one of our better years in 6 years because we had established protocols. I hope people get out and use their backyards - it’s a great resource.

**RAC Member Bronk Jorgensen:** with the garbage pictures, is some of this from subsistence users?

**Million:** Not a result of subsistence use, it’s mostly at developed recreation sites with high visitation over the weekends. If they’ve been car camping or driving through and the need to dump their trash.

**RAC Member Justin Mason:** definitely interested in getting schools involved in volunteering. Back country hunters and anglers definitely want to help volunteer at access points on public lands and waterways.

**Million:** just met with president and they'll be helping with wildlife staff. I'll keep them updated on what they need. Keep me reminded when you have time to volunteer.

*2:03 p.m. Break*

*2:15 p.m. Subsistence Board Update – Paul “Chris” Mckee/Chad Padgett  
[Presentation on File]*

**RAC Member Sean Sullivan** asks for more information about proposals.

**Mckee:** the wildlife proposals are more frequent. That request for proposals just closed yesterday. It's advantageous to get on their list serve so you get regular updates on what's being proposed and reviewed. You don't have to be a Federally qualified subsistence user to make a proposal. Some of other proposals come from subsistence RACs. Usually, they're something like I want a longer season, bigger harvest limit, etc.

**RAC Member Rod Arno:** Does the public have an opportunity to comment on OSM (Office of Subsistence) data and analysis on the special action requests in 23 and 26 a?

**Mckee:** no, they won't take comments at the teleconference. They had opened it up to written comments and a recent public hearing where people testified. All that information both the written and testimony is being incorporated to their analysis. It'll be posted no less than two weeks before the meeting, around the first week of June. You'll be able to see OSMs position and logic they've used to come to their recommendations they'll make to the board. But at the next teleconference not testimony. Nor any more written testimony.

**RAC Member Rod Arno:** But comments on the analysis?

**Mckee:** the special requests are different than traditional proposals. For special actions they don't usually accept the written comments because it's a time crunch to get it done. They inconsistently accept verbal comments. They'll get the analysis online, but you won't be able to provide written comment.

**RAC Member Justin Mason:** Any scientific data or just anecdotal used to make these decisions?

**Mckee:** there's biological background, population status, harvest information (gross estimate), cultural knowledge section, anthropological etc. There is also a current events section where they'll cover the comments received. And other background on the public testimony from non-federally qualified subsistence users and federally qualified subsistence users and their

perceptions of diversion of herd migration, people being displaced from their traditional hunting grounds.

Already a closure along a drainage in unit 23 along the Noatak. A lot of local users felt it was an effective closure to target user conflict.

**Padgett:** regarding the program including the temporary special action. We fielded about 250 commenters in the last comment period. It's the most I've seen. Those ran almost 90 in opposition to the action. In addition to that they've accepted comment throughout. Rod I would encourage you to listen to what the discussion is and call in anyway, so at least you know what the discussions are. And you can see the transcripts. A lot of times we don't get good participation from the public in these meetings. They can be very localized. We don't get a broad public input and it means we don't have as much transparency of what we're doing. Chris downplayed the workload. The packages I've gotten are 1200 pages long. It's hard for both the staff and board members to have an informed vote. It's good when people call in and have a perspective on the info. I encourage you to call in; they're important.

**Mckee:** about 250 people commented and maybe 5 or 6 in support of it

**RAC Member Justin Mason:** I don't know if it's a trend, but it's disturbing to see subsistence and recreation seem to be pitted against each other in these things. I want to make sure we don't see, like, something we saw in Denali that was anecdotal evidence concerning the ptarmigan numbers in some access areas. They threw out a regulation to cut the season a month short, without any scientific data to support the decision. It cut out the month of spring break and cut out opportunity to get out with your kids in March when the weather and day light improves. That was three years ago, and I don't see that opportunity coming back. I hate to see that.

**Mckee:** when I started at OSM 5 or 6 years ago we didn't see that many requests to close lands. It used to be that winter weather was bad, so we need the season extended. It seems the closure requests are more common in the last 4 or 5 years. They were rare 10 years ago.

**Padgett:** one more point to that end. Chris is doing something I'm big on regarding the board, is look at the scientific data. I want to make sure we're looking thoroughly at the conservation concerns. We have to make that judgement call with anecdotal evidence but I'm wanting data to consider before we decide. Second, it's important to spread out access to reduce user conflict and get people spread out. Everyone wants an experience to subsistence hunt or sport hunt and not be on top of one another. To wrap it up, as a board member, it's the opportunities to bring things together to coexist, spread out that access in accordance with good science.

*2:48 p.m. Break*

*3:03 p.m. Roundtable*

**RAC Member David Gregory:**

Interested in more education and outreach on maintenance. We have 17(b)s here that people want to use but they're not clearly marked. We have OHVs tearing up the tundra. They are all about getting money and surveys, using volunteers with user groups, liability is a concern and insurance is a concern for the landowner.

**RAC Member Erik Kenning:**

Getting in depth was great. Maintaining Multiuse for BLM is important. ASRC (Arctic Slope Regional Corporation) is a major land user up here, we want to see multiple uses across lands. With land use plans it impacts the lands adjacent to ours. We want BLM to be sensitive to what the actions might do to the neighboring landowners, whether it's village or native corps. We spend a lot of time looking at the pros and cons of EISs and then we're doing it again a few years later. We've got limited staff for these things, and we'd like the Fed to be cognizant of that. Conveyance priorities are important. Want to sort out that list and get things finalized and see where we stand with everything. Circling back to subsistence and the WSA 21-01 with closures in 23 and 26a; we're the main landowner in 26a, regardless we'll have to plan and make a decision. The decision being made June 16 will impact people one month later. We'll be preventing trespass and closing access points. We're concerned with liability, general trespass, and littering. It'll be a short timeframe, to ramp up and a big cost and maintain the access points. Definitely want to follow up on 17bs in our area and not having funds to mark them.

**RAC Member Bronk Jorgensen:** Thanks everyone. From my side of it, one thing that wasn't touched on today that is a significant issue for mining trapping and hunting are prior existing rights under ANILCA. I don't believe the prior existing rights are being given to Alaskans under the law which affects all those user groups and has big implications for BLM. It should tie into all the land-use plans. Since I've been involved with BLM and mining and then on the RAC and going through the 40-mile plan, these things never end. For the public I think that's a bad thing. When these management plans take a decade to go through the process and then, there's a switch of administration and the process on the plan wasn't current and that affects PLOs, I see no resolution that's good for any side when there's no continuity. It's also an issue of ACECs and access points. Other topic for me is mining reclamation. I don't think there's been resolution on that issue, and it'll keep being a problem for federal placer users and BLM. Significant permit issues, they're going to blow out sections of wade creek where BLM reclamations didn't work. To have those standards imposed on the miner is not correct.



**RAC Member Jeff Bruno:**

A lot of these topics touch on State DNR, I'll take them back to the team and identify what we can tackle on the RAC and get guidance on some of the other topics, like BLM planning, allotment, and survey issues. Keep getting my feet wet for now and come to the next meeting with more interaction.

**RAC Member Jessie Badger:**

It is impressive how much you all do. Frustrating to see you work so hard through the processes and wish there was a better easier way for you. Thanks for staying on.

**RAC Member John Schell:**

It is informative and interesting conversation in education around subsistence, access, versus recreation user groups. Thankful for the comments made to help me understand the conflicts. Going forward I'm representing energy and minerals with my expertise in oil and gas. I definitely have interest in BLM resources in this area include what will happen with access in ANWR, NPR-A, and the new IAP. New admin directives and uncertainties I hope the RAC can help participate in and provide guidance along those lines as well.

**RAC Member Jusdi Doucet:**

Great job Melinda coordinating and BLM staff presenting and answering questions. I know it's hard work to put in to all these presentations and distill such complex information. Great job making it understandable. As a state rep seat, I'm especially interested in the Land Transfer and Land Use Plans. I was able to meet with BLM staff to clarify some information outside of the meeting it was really helpful, if you need it reach out.

Like Jeff said, I have some digesting to do and consider the projects with DNR to make progress.

**RAC Member Justin Mason:**

When Sully (Sean Sullivan) and Sunny (Scott Sundberg) got to talking about heliskiing. I learned a lot about it. It's great to hear from people from different backgrounds just in that couple minute chat.

I'll always come back to keeping opportunities from going away and keeping access open. I'm here to help with the easements and access points and volunteer and help in any way I can to see movement on those. It's good to see we all know there's no easy solution on any one solution. It's great to meet with everyone to have these discussions. Its what makes this country awesome.

**RAC Member Rada Khadjinova:**

Echoed appreciation for presentations. Coming from geodata and mapping perspective. Good

to hear numerous times about defending positions with science data. Please use me as a resource as your best geodata pros for Mapping, hydrography, basic mapping, etc. Up until a year ago Alaska wasn't mapped to a good resolution. We're proud to be part of that group. Wetland specifications and mineral potential requires know where things are, what we want to access, and what we want to avoid.

Technology changes so fast it's amazing. What was hard a year ago could now be possible with technology these days. I'm happy to be a resource on that.

**RAC Member Rod Arno:**

Appreciate the input and to see the passion and professionalism of the presentations and BLM staff. I'm coming from the perspective of being a big game hunter. The state lands are so intertwined with BLM lands. It all just changed since ANILCA. I've been part of the regulatory process for hunting for the last 40 years.

I want to clear up the difference between subsistence and recreation. There are two kinds of subsistence: you have federally qualified subsistence users. We're all Alaska residents and all subsistence users under their regs. With the closures in 23 and 26 the federal closures will put pressure on the state and private lands.

Another thing that came up with Chad is that one of the first things they mention is conservation and section 804, it's not just the subsistence priority and other subsistence uses. The courts recently with the state suit [District Court Judge] Gleason said basically it's not just based on conservation of the resource and it's way of life for the subsistence users.

RS2477 it's really a prime time for BLM to look at how those are managed – roads to access resources. Many times, we're on them. Tie that into the decision on the Klutina lake road, ingress, and egress. There's like 20k miles of RS2477 and more and more are in private ownership on ANCSA lands.

We're anxious to see conveyances done, settled and figure out the checkerboard ownership. I think it's going in the right direction.

**RAC Member Scott Sundberg:**

Lots of good info and coverage of a big state with lots of issues. So important to take lots of people with lots of knowledge to come up with solutions, even if they're cyclical or seemingly no answer to the solution. Happy to help represent Southeast and commercial recreation. Great presentations.

**RAC Member Stan Foo:**

Lots of good updates. Couple of phrases Justin used to describe concerns blocking opportunities and access opportunities we all have concerns about. Certain in the mining and energy side of things that feels like access is threatened with recent actions. Concern ongoing

with RMPs and lengthy process to complete them. I hear a lot of comments those need to be improved. Chad, I appreciate your comment about educating the public about what they are or are not. They highlight ACECs, and it's a loose process; I think that's part of the problem. It would be great if BLM could address that underlying concern.

Conveyance lots of progress over the many years, great day when they're completed.

Regarding Bronk's mention of the placer mining demonstrations, a few years back we made good progress, I'm concerned if we let it go silent, we'll backslide. Please keep reaching out to placer miners and those interested in trapper cabins.

With all that said I appreciate everyone's time and effort to be part of this and all the new members joining in and BLM staff providing good updates on various aspects.

**RAC Member Sean "Sully" Sullivan:**

Concerned about resources and challenges that lie ahead to keep access open and create more access than we already have.

*3:43 p.m. RAC Chair Nominations*

**RAC Member Bronk Jorgensen** recommends Jeff Bruno,

**RAC Member Rada Khadjinova** seconds.

**RAC Member Jeff Bruno** asks if he has a say.

**RAC Member Bronk Jorgensen:** you've managed large projects, all across the state you have a good view, you can manage this group. I see no conflict with you being a state employee, we're all members.

**RAC Member Stan Foo:** Agrees. Jeff you've got a really good demeanor and ear for listening to all sides. I think you work this role in DNR (Alaska Department of Natural Resources), and you have a lot of energy as a new member.

**RAC Member Jessie Badger:** nominates Bronk as co-chair

**RAC Member Scott Sundberg** Seconds

**RAC Member Sean Sullivan** agrees

*3:45 p.m. Wrap and Final Discussions*

RAC Coordinator Melinda Bolton proposes dates of October 5 & 6 for next meeting dates.

*3:50 p.m. Adjourn*

**RAC Member Fannie Suvlu** shared these thoughts on May 27, 1:00 – 1:14 p.m., over the phone. Fannie feels Bronk would be a great chair. Felt meeting was effective and informative. No requests for follow up with presenters. No specific topics for future meetings; October 5&6 work for her as potential dates. Said she is thankful for the land transfer and RMP update. Gave her some good info on the process. That's personal for her since her dad is a Vietnam vet. He didn't get to make his selection.

Will conduct a final vote on Chair(s) electronically before next meeting.

DRAFT