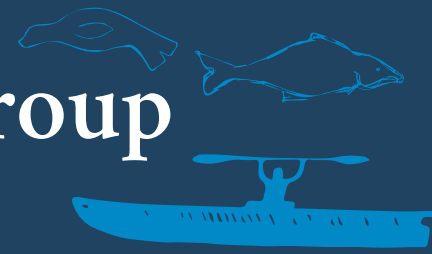




# Bering Sea Elders Group

## Spring/Summer 2024



### BSEG RECOGNIZES YOUNG PROVIDER & CULTURE BEARERS

In February, the Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) announced that Dezmond Tokeinna of the Native Village of Wales and Charitie Ropati of the Native Village of Kongiganak had been selected as recipients of BSEG's inaugural Young Provider and Young Culture Bearer Awards. This honor was established to recognize two young people under the age of 25 who perpetuate their Alaska Native culture and contribute to the health and well-being of their community.



*Charitie Ropati, BSEG's 2024 Young Provider Award Recipient.*

"The Bering Sea Elders Group is proud that we have many young people who are living examples of our culture and values," said BSEG Executive Director Jaylene Wheeler. "This acknowledgement is in recognition of these incredible role models who serve their communities in many ways, including in activities that are grounded in Indigenous knowledge, responsible stewardship, and caring for others."

To be considered for an award, a recipient had to be nominated by a family or community member, board member, or their school's teacher or administrator. They were also required to be affiliated with one of BSEG's Member Tribes or reside in a Northern Bering Sea Climate

Resilience Area community.

Dezmond was nominated by the Native Village of Wales, who said in their nomination statement that Dezmond "exceeds in his school studies and loves to Eskimo dance. He dances and celebrates his culture throughout the year, including on the Fourth of July, Thanksgiving and Christmas. He has traveled with the Kingikmiut Dance Group to other dance festivals. Also, he participates

in the family-owned reindeer corral each year. There is a lot of work that happens during the annual corral from rounding them up to branding fawns."

Charitie Ropati, was nominated by her family. "Charitie has participated in the United Nations and addresses the struggles and issues relating to climate change that is affecting rural communities across Alaska." Her research examines the ways that the "climate crisis" affects plant ecology in Alaska and how this relates to cultural resilience. She has also been recognized as an Arctic Youth Ambassador, Arctic Resilient Communities Youth Fellow, and is the World Wildlife Fund-United States Conservation Leadership Award winner for 2023. Currently, Charitie is attending the University of Columbia and will graduate in May with a bachelor's degree in civil engineering.

### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



BSEG's mission is to speak and work together as one voice to protect and respect our traditional ways, the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children's future.

I'm excited to share that, as of January 1, 2024, BSEG is operating as its own nonprofit. This provides us a pathway to further advance organizational priorities, including the loss of our salmon. "Salmon is vital and life sustaining," states Chair Jerry Ivanoff. "If we do not address and fix this loss of our salmon resources in our subsistence lifestyle, our Tribes will be hurt and hungry for generations to come."

Since 2008, BSEG has worked on a variety of issues such as food security, fisheries, traditional knowledge, climate change, and co-management. Much of this has been done in coalition with the Association of Village Council Presidents, Kawerak, Inc., and other Tribes and Tribal organizations. These relationships have been productive and beneficial, and we deeply appreciate our coalition partners. We are all stronger when we work together.

If you would like more information about BSEG or any of the topics discussed in this newsletter, please visit the BSEG website.

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# BERING INTERGOVERNMENTAL TRIBAL ADVISORY COUNCIL UPDATE

Since January, the Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council (TAC) responded to several issues impacting the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area (NBSCRA). One of these issues included opposition to the Northern Bering Sea Effects of Trawling Survey (NETS). In January, the TAC requested the immediate and full suspension of all actions related to the proposed NETS research project. The proposed project involves the use of harmful commercial non-pelagic trawl gear in the NBSCRA. The TAC argued that the way the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) had developed the NETS project was in breach of Executive Order 13754, the Order that established the NBSCRA.

The opposition was successful. Janet Coit, Director of NOAA Fisheries, announced in a letter sent to Tribal



Photo courtesy of Darren Kayotuk.

leaders that, "To provide more space for continued dialogue, NOAA Fisheries has decided not to move forward with the NETS research project this year. We value our responsibilities to and partnerships with Alaska Native communities and want to ensure NOAA is creating space for respectful dialogue and trust building."

Another important issue addressed by the TAC was H.R.6285, Alaska's

Right to Produce Act. In January, the TAC reached out to Alaska's U.S. Representative Mary Peltola regarding H.R.6285 and urged her to amend the legislation to remove any direct or indirect references to E.O. 13754, which created the NBSCRA. As written, H.R.6285 would rescind E.O. 13754, which itself is groundbreaking in its ecosystem protections and acknowledgement of Tribal Co-Management. E.O. 13754 is the result of decades of advocacy by Bering Sea Tribes. The status of any amendments to the bill is still pending.

Finally, the TAC planned and participated in a joint meeting with the Bering Federal Task Force in mid-April in Washington, DC to begin work on the Salmon Resilience Plan. This two-day event included meetings with Congressional representatives and Executive Branch officials, as well as a co-production of knowledge training.

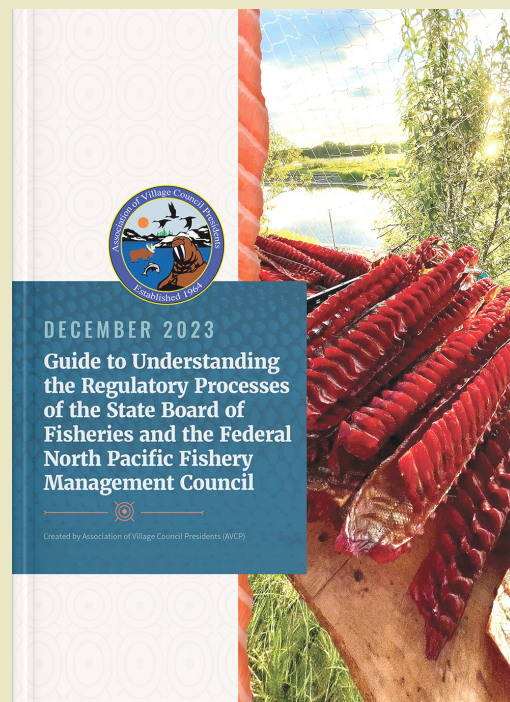
## GET INVOLVED WITH FISHERIES MANAGEMENT!

The Association of Village Council Presidents has created *Understanding the Regulatory Processes of the State Board of Fisheries and FNPDMC*. This guide aims to:

- Increase individual participation in the region's fisheries management process.
- Encourage AVCP Member Tribe and tribal citizen involvement in giving fisheries testimony.

- Advance understanding of the regulatory processes at the state and federal levels.
- Promote tribal representation on fisheries councils, boards, committees, and groups.
- Offer resources for information and involvement in fisheries oversight.

To obtain a copy of the guide, visit the AVCP website at <https://avcp.org>.





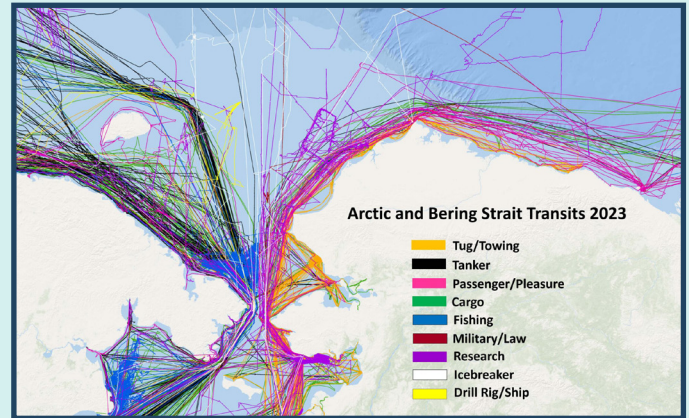
# ARCTIC WATCH WORKSHOP

Vessel transits through the Bering Strait have doubled in the past decade. As the ice-free season lengthens, more ships will continue to pass through. To mitigate those risks and to center Tribal priorities, Kawerak Inc. has partnered with the Marine Exchange of Alaska, and other organizations, to build Arctic Watch, a sea traffic management system for the Bering Strait that would direct vessels in real time on the safest and most efficient routes to keep vessels, communities, and wildlife safe.

In January 2024, Arctic Watch partners held a workshop in Juneau with delegates from Bering Strait area Tribes, along with representatives from the Eskimo Walrus Commission, and BSEG.

Tribes in the Kawerak Region are seeking more information about and influence over the increasing vessel traffic and the potential risks for the environment including marine casualties, and conflicts with subsistence users.

Later this year, Kawerak Inc. will issue a report of the workshop's findings.



## KAWERAK TRIBAL RESEARCH PROTOCOLS GUIDE

**Kawerak-Region  
Tribal Research  
Protocols, Guidelines,  
Expectations & Best Practices**



This document represents  
a Tribal vision for research  
in the Kawerak-Region.



Kawerak, the non-profit Tribal Consortium formed by the 20 Tribes of the Bering Strait Region of has developed the “Kawerak-Region Tribal Research Protocols, Guidelines, Expectations & Best Practices”. This document is to serve as a guide to advance, through various means, the knowledge and research sovereignty of Indigenous people, the Indigenization of knowledge and research, and the promotion of positive relationships between Indigenous communities and research.

“Research is going to continue and increase, especially with the growing interest in the Arctic, and in many ways, this can be seen as a renewed form of colonization. This context is an integral part of why the work in this document is important,” said Kawerak President Melanie Bahnke. “What is contained herein is a good initial step towards asserting and retaining the sovereignty of our region’s Tribes regarding research.

At a fundamental level, research should not happen in our region without Tribal consent, and any researchers who want to have their work considered valid should be following these guidelines.”

The guide contains several sections that include:

- Conceptualizing Research
- Research Oversight
- Conducting Research
- Applying Research
- Information Sharing and Control

“This is important. For us to survive as Indigenous people to this land, we rely on what’s provided naturally. We need to speak as one voice to these issues for things taking place on our land. We have the authority and the skill to preserve this for those who come behind us,” says Kawerak Board Member Andy Miller in the guide.

To obtain a copy of the guide, go to <https://kawerak.org/natural-resources/social-science/>



# 2024 BSEG SUMMIT

BSEG's next Summit is scheduled for October 1-2, in Anchorage, Alaska. Member Tribes will be invited to send an Elder Representative to the Summit.

Agenda items include:

- Programmatic update
- Elder knowledge exchange
- Special presentation regarding NBSCRA

In the coming weeks, Member Tribes will receive an invitation to and more information about the Summit.

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