



Bering Sea Elders Group

Spring/Summer 2026 Newsletter



BSEG ADVOCATES TO PROTECT THE BERING SEA FROM EXTRACTIVE INDUSTRIES

Since the very beginning, speaking and working together to protect the Bering Sea and our traditional ways of life have been a priority for the Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG). Currently, the Native American Rights Fund (NARF) is representing BSEG in two critical areas of concern for the Bering Sea: oil and gas leasing and sea floor mining.

The Bureau of Ocean Energy Management (known as “BOEM” but being renamed by the current administration as the “Marine Minerals Administration”) is responsible for managing energy development and natural resource extraction in the Outer Continental Shelf (OCS), which is generally underwater land 3 to 200 miles off the coast of the United States. BOEM is currently developing a national oil and gas leasing plan, which would open parts of the OCS to offshore oil and gas development. Separately, BOEM is in the early stages of gathering information about interest in leases for seafloor mining in parts of the OCS off Alaska’s coast. Both oil and gas development and seafloor mining have the potential for large impacts on the Bering Sea.

National OCS Oil and Gas Leasing Program BOEM is currently developing a schedule that will manage lease sales in the OCS for five years. This is a nation-wide effort; BOEM is examining all of the OCS, including in Alaska, for potential oil and gas lease sales.

BOEM began developing this plan in mid-2025 with a Request for Information. BSEG, alongside the Association of Village Council Presidents (AVCP) and Kawerak, submitted comments detailing the long-standing opposition Bering Sea Tribes have had to any oil and gas development in the Bering Sea.

In November 2025, BOEM released a Draft Proposed Program, which called for oil and gas leases in all but one of the 15 OCS planning areas in Alaska (the agency has not included the North Aleutian Basin, home to Bristol Bay, in its draft plan). BSEG, AVCP, and Kawerak submitted comments on this plan as well, reiterating Bering Sea Tribes’ opposition to oil and gas development.

The next step is for BOEM to release its



Photo by David Akeya.

Proposed Program, in which the agency may change the areas it is recommending opening for leasing. The Proposed Program will also have a comment period, after which

the agency will publish the Proposed Final Program. NARF will continue to support BSEG, as it—along with AVCP and Kawerak—continues to monitor the development of the OCS leasing plan and advocate to protect the Bering Sea from oil and gas development.

In January 2026, BOEM announced a Request for Information and Interest (RFI) to gauge industry interest and gather public input on the possibility of a lease sale for minerals on the OCS off of Alaska’s coast. While some underwater mining occurs in waters controlled by the State of Alaska, sea floor mining has never before occurred in any federal

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MESSAGE FROM THE BSEG CHAIR

For decades, the people of the Bering Sea and Arctic-Yukon-Kuskokwim (AYK) region have raised concerns about salmon management. Today, those concerns have become a crisis.

Our Tribes continue to bear the burden of conservation while others benefit from harvesting fish bound for our rivers. In 2026 alone, more than 20,000 king salmon have been taken while our communities face severe restrictions and, in many cases, are unable to fish at all. This is not just a regulatory issue—it directly impacts our food security, culture, and way of life.

The Bering Sea Elders Group remains concerned about the lack of meaningful action from both the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) and the Alaska Department of Fish and Game. Current management approaches have not done enough to protect salmon stocks or support the communities that depend on them.

While NPFMC recently adopted a limit on Western Alaskan chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery, the Council has far more work it must do to ensure that our communities have access to subsistence fish.

BSEG continues to call for stronger action, including consideration of a fishing moratorium in key intercept areas, if that is what is necessary to allow fish populations to recover. If our communities cannot harvest king salmon for subsistence, it raises serious questions about continued commercial harvest or bycatch of those same fish.

For decades, Tribal leaders have raised these concerns, yet the result has been a steady decline in salmon returning to our rivers. The amassed impact of large-scale commercial fishing over time has left our communities with fewer fish and fewer opportunities to maintain our way of life. This is about more than numbers—it is about people, culture, and the future of our communities.

As we move forward, BSEG will continue to advocate for meaningful change and to ensure that the voices of our tribes and elders are heard. Together, we are stronger and I encourage each of you to get involved in this important matter.

To learn more about BSEG or explore the topics featured in this newsletter, please visit: <https://beringsealders.org>



Chairman Jerry Ivanoff

911 W. 8th Avenue, Suite 101, PMB62, Anchorage, Alaska 99501

www.beringsealders.org ✉ director@beringsealders.org ☎ 907.891.1229



waters anywhere in the United States. BOEM's RFI is the first step in a lease sale that could change that, and the agency identified in the RFI that it is considering mineral leases in Norton Sound, Goodnews Bay, and the Aleutian Arc.

BSEG, again joined by AVCP and Kawerak, submitted comments to BOEM urging the agency to consult with Tribes should it decide to proceed with the lease sale process. The comments also underscore how fragile and delicate the Bering Sea environment is and asked the agency to consider that as it determines whether to proceed with a lease sale.

The Native American Rights Fund (NARF) is a national non-profit law firm dedicated to representing Tribal Nations, Tribal organizations, and Native people that has been providing advice and counsel to BSEG for over a decade.

SALMON PEOPLE WEBSITE: A COLLECTIVE VOICE FOR ALASKA'S SALMON AND COMMUNITIES



Photo courtesy of Association of Village Council Presidents.

By Samantha Watson, KYUK Public Media

Three tribal organizations from the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta have launched a new resource page for their ongoing salmon advocacy partnership.

The Association of Village Council Presidents, the Yukon River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission and the Kuskokwim River Inter-Tribal Fish Commission comprise a partnership called the Arctic Yukon Kuskokwim Tribal Consortium, or AYKTC. AYKTC was first launched in 2002 and has since had a variety of different partners over its decades of advocacy. It's current membership was solidified in 2025.

A press release from the organization says the goal is to protect the ways of life associated with salmon, by focusing on policy and advocacy rooted in science and Indigenous knowledge.

The tribal organizations have shown public support for a state Board of Fisheries proposal that would reduce salmon fishing time in Area M, and have advocated for bycatch caps and migratory corridor closures in the Bering Sea pollock trawl fishery.

Its new website, salmonpeople.org, serves as a center for testimonials and resources for salmon advocacy. It features a collection of news stories and accounts documenting the impact of Western Alaska salmon crashes on the lives of the people who live in the region. It also aims to be a landing page where people can learn about current fisheries policies and engage in advocacy.

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BERING SEA ELDER'S GROUP ANNOUNCES RECIPIENTS OF THE THIRD ANNUAL YOUNG PROVIDER & CULTURE BEARER AWARDS

The Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) is pleased to announce the recipients of BSEG's third annual Young Provider and Culture Bearer Awards. These awards were established in 2024 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.

"The Bering Sea Elders Group is proud to see young leaders who are actively living out their Native culture and values," said BSEG Chair Jerry Ivanoff. "We are honored to celebrate these two exceptional role models who represent their communities and the region."



Kellie Miller

Kellie Miller is a citizen of Nome Eskimo Community and attends Dartmouth College in Hanover, New Hampshire. She is studying Earth Sciences, Native American and Indigenous Studies, and Anthropology and is involved with the Native Americans at Dartmouth community on campus where she helps to lead the Alaska Native Cultural Committee. Kellie is interested in the intersections between systems of knowledge, and how Indigenous ways of life are leading climate change solutions.

In her role as an Arctic Youth Ambassador, Kellie has raised concerns about draft amendments to the Marine Mammal Protection Act that could increase industrial disturbances and habitat threats for key species in the Bering Strait and Arctic regions. At home, she enjoys spending time with family and friends, reading, and being out on the land. Kellie credits her grandparents, Mary and Andy Miller, Jr. and older sister, Maggie, as her biggest cultural role models. She would like to thank her family and community for shaping her with love and patience.



Moses Marr'aq Wiseman

Moses Marr'aq Wiseman is a citizen of the Chefnak Traditional Council. He attends Alaska Pacific University and is pursuing an Executive Master of Business Administration with an emphasis in Strategic Leadership. In addition to his academic pursuits, Moses serves as the Alaska Native Languages Program Director at the Alaska Institute for Justice, where he contributed to the development of a Yup'ik glossary for health care providers. Moses is the son of Victor Yuraliq & Leona Kilirnguq Wiseman, and the grandson of Charlie

Anartuq & Josephine Inarayuli Wiseman and Dennis Nakrialnguq & Adeline Kaagyugaq Panruk. Most recently, Moses was recognized as a 2026 Champion for Change by the Center for Native American Youth for his leadership and commitment to building positive outcomes in his community.

To be considered for an award, recipients had to be nominated by a family or community member, board member, or their school's teacher or administrator. They are also required to be affiliated with a BSEG Member Tribe or reside in a Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area NBSCRA community.



TRIBAL LEADERS CALL FOR ACTION ON CHUM SALMON BYCATCH

Tribal leaders from the Bering Strait region continue to call for meaningful action to reduce chum salmon bycatch in the Bering Sea pollock fishery. Despite years of advocacy, bycatch has averaged approximately 250,000 chum annually since 2011, with many of those fish bound for Western and Interior Alaska communities already facing subsistence restrictions.

At a recent North Pacific Fishery Management Council meeting, nearly 200 testifiers—primarily from Tribal communities—shared the impacts of declining salmon runs. In her testimony, Darlene Paqpaluk Trigg, Executive Vice President of Kawerak, shared the following testimony:

“In our world, salmon are not just a commodity. They are not simply a number in a harvest report, a variable in an impact analysis, or a number which affects profit/loss

statements. Salmon are a relative. They are a responsibility.

While our families face closures, restrictions, and hunger, the pollock fleet continues to waste thousands — and over decades, millions — of chum salmon through bycatch. The burden of conservation has been placed overwhelmingly on Tribal communities, while industrial fisheries continue to intercept salmon far from our rivers.

That imbalance is unjust, and it is a failure of the federal government’s trust responsibility and government-to-government obligations to Tribes. When chum salmon disappear from the rivers, it is not just a failed run. It is a break in our food system, our culture, and our responsibility to future generations.”

To view the full press release this article was adapted from, visit: <https://kawerak.org/press-release-kawerak-region-tribal-voices-call-for-meaningful-action-on-chum-bycatch/>



Photo by Kendra Takak. Used courtesy of Bering Straits Native Corporation.

BSEG VICE CHAIR FEATURED IN BSNC SHAREHOLDER SPOTLIGHT

In February, BSEG Vice Chair John Waghiyi, Jr. was featured in Bering Strait Native Corporation’s (BSNC) Shareholder Spotlight. BSNC regularly highlights its shareholders and Elders, recognizing their contributions to culture, community, and leadership. The following is adapted from that feature.

John Waghiyi, Jr. was born in Savoonga, Alaska, to Reverends John Waghiyi, Sr. and Della Waghiyi. He and his wife of 51 years, Arlene, continue to reside in Savoonga, where they raised 11 children, including seven they adopted.

Waghiyi is widely respected for his skills in carving, sewing, drumming, and dancing. Together, he and Arlene have made significant contributions to their community through cultural, subsistence, and artistic practices. To help revitalize drumming and dancing, they founded the Savoonga Youth Drummers and Dancers, sharing their traditions and strengthening cultural connections across Alaska.

A dedicated educator, Waghiyi taught Yupik Language and Cultural History in the Bering Strait School District for more than 20 years. He is also an experienced whaling captain, leading subsistence hunts and guiding his community through traditional practices. Through dance,



Photo courtesy of Bering Strait Native Corporation.

song, and storytelling, he continues to pass on knowledge that has been shared across generations.

In 2025, Waghiyi was nominated by BSNC for the Alaska Federation of Natives Culture Bearer Award and was honored as Elder of the Year by both BSNC and Sitnasuak. He has also supported community healing through his service on the board of Integrational Arctic Ministries. From 2023 to 2026, he served on the Executive Committee of the Bering Sea Elders Group.

“This is how we keep our culture alive,” Waghiyi shared. “We pass it down the way it was given to us—by showing it, living it.”

