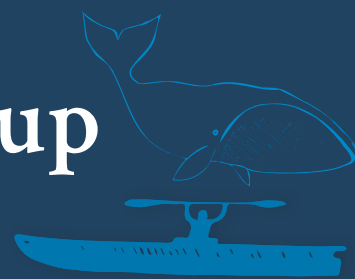


# Bering Sea Elders Group

## Fall/Winter 2023 Newsletter



### BRIDGING TRADITIONAL KNOWLEDGE AND WESTERN SCIENCE

The Bering Sea region is in the midst of experiencing rapid and unprecedented ecological and social changes. Marine resources are critical to Alaskan communities for their food security, sovereignty, economic livelihood, social cohesion, and cultural continuity. Indigenous communities in the region have enduring historical, social, and ecological ties to their environment and have extensive Indigenous Knowledge (IK) and Traditional Knowledge (TK) on the Bering Sea ecosystem. IK and TK are an important aspect of decision making as they can provide current and historically-informed information to improve management decisions.

The National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration's Alaska Fisheries Science Center in partnership with the Association of Village Council Presidents, Aleut Community of Saint Paul Island, Bering Sea Elders Group, Kawerak, Inc., Sandhill.Culture.Craft, and the St. George Traditional Council have joined together to conduct a workshop entitled, *Bridging Knowledge to Inform Bering Sea Management*.

The workshop is tentatively scheduled for January 22-25, 2024, in Anchorage, Alaska. The goal of this workshop is to



*Vera Spein hangs salmon at a fish camp near Kwethluk. The TK that Alaska Native communities have gathered over generations of living in the Bering Sea region is important to effective fishery management. Photo by Clark Mishler courtesy of Pew Charitable Trusts.*

promote partnerships and describe Indigenous ways of understanding the marine environment by bringing together Tribal knowledge holders, scientists, educators, and fisheries managers.

This workshop will contribute to an increased understanding of the Bering Sea ecosystem as a whole and is designed to support both lasting partnerships and capacity building in the Northern Bering-Chukchi Sea Region.

By building on existing relationships, the research team takes a two-pronged approach to collaboration. This includes:

1. Increasing meaningful participation in bringing together multiple ways of understanding the marine environment; and
2. Providing the opportunity for information exchange to increase access to information and support future collaborations.

Results of this project aim to improve fisheries decision-making and contribute important information on the connection between a rapidly changing marine ecosystem and human well-being.

### MESSAGE FROM THE CHAIR



The Bering Sea Elders Group (BSEG) was formed 15 years ago by regional Tribes as a result of their desire to address food security and protect the health of our traditional waters. Today, BSEG has 38 member Tribes that span across the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bering Strait regions.

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.

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 at <https://beringseaelers.org>.

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# UPDATE: BERING INTERGOVERNMENTAL TRIBAL ADVISORY COUNCIL

For decades, Tribes from the Bering Sea region have been advocating for enhanced protections for the Northern Bering Sea. These Tribes have long asserted a willingness to co-steward the region and build a co-management structure that is far more robust and collaborative than the federal government's usual consultation practices.



working on issues affecting the Northern Bering Sea which paved the way for the formation of the Bering Intergovernmental Tribal Advisory Council (TAC).

TAC members were selected by the federally recognized Tribes in the NBSCRA region for their understanding of the region's ecosystems and their knowledge of subsistence practices and

A tribes' ability to co-steward their region is centered in their unique knowledge of the area. Their right to co-steward our region is grounded in bedrock principles that predate this nation—their aboriginal title and hunting and fishing rights and the federal government's unique legal relationship with and obligation to Tribes.

In 2016, the Obama Administration responded by issuing Executive Order 13754, which established the Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area (NBSCRA) and recognized

the tribal role in managing the Northern Bering Sea.

The Trump Administration rescinded that promise, but on President Biden's first day in office, he reinstated Executive Order 13754 and reaffirmed the Federal Government's commitment to partnering with Tribes to steward the Northern Bering Sea.

In addition to creating the NBSCRA, Executive Order 13754 established a first-of-its-kind federal task force made up of senior level officials. Their role is to facilitate collaboration among the numerous federal agencies

traditions. Current TAC members include: Co-Chairs Fred Phillip (Kwigillingok), Vivian Korthuis (Emmonak), and Charlie Brown (Chinik). As well as Tiffany Andrew (Alakanuk), Johnson Eningowuk (Shishmaref), Jerry Ivanoff (Unalakleet), Edward Kinagak (Chefnak), Ben Pungowiwi (Savoonga), and Richard Zacharof (St. Paul).

Over the last two years, TAC and supporting tribal entities have worked to establish a governance structure and protocols that accord with the Executive Order and tribal interests and values.







## VIVIAN KORTHUIS TESTIFIES

On June 8, 2023,  
Vivian Korthuis, President & CEO of the  
Association of Village Council Presidents  
testified to the North Pacific Fishery  
Management Council on the fisheries crisis.  
Following is her testimony:

My name is Vivian Korthuis, and I am the Chief Executive Officer for the Association of Village Council Presidents, a tribal consortium of 56 federally recognized tribes. I am Yup'ik and a member of the Emmonak Tribe. I will be speaking to agenda item D2: PSEIS, Purpose and Need.

Western Alaska is entering the third summer of the salmon crisis for villages on the Kuskokwim and the fourth summer for communities on the Yukon. Across the Yukon-Kuskokwim Delta, families are facing another year of empty smokehouses and freezers. Our Way of Life continues to be under attack. Without immediate action informed by the best available science and Indigenous knowledge, our ecosystem is in danger of being unable to recover. That's why it is absolutely necessary that the process for a new Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement begin immediately. The existing Programmatic Supplemental Environmental Impact Statement for the groundfish fisheries management plan is almost 20 years old and has not been reviewed since 2015, nearly a decade ago. This means the Council and NMFS are making fisheries management decisions on sorely outdated information.

Without an up-to-date analysis of what's happening in the ocean today, the Council and National Marine Fisheries Service cannot make informed decisions about how their fisheries management decisions cumulatively affect the ecosystem and the human environment. The law requires programmatic environmental impact statements that are more than five years old to be reviewed and updated if there have been significant changes since the statements were adopted.

Years of melting sea ice, warming ocean temperatures, sea bird and mammal die offs, and the multi-year salmon crisis we find ourselves in certainly qualify as significant. The Federal Government can no longer go on with business as usual—managing fisheries under a management plan designed for a different world. You must meet your obligations to manage these resources that belong to all of us—not just to the industry—appropriately.

Please also direct your attention to our written comments on the purpose and need for a Programmatic Environmental Impact Statement.

Thank you.



# NPFMC TAKES A NEW LOOK AT IMPACTS OF FISHING ON ECOSYSTEMS AND COMMUNITIES



Earlier this year, the North Pacific Fishery Management Council (NPFMC) voted to take a fresh look at all managed fisheries in the Bering Sea and Gulf of Alaska by re-evaluating fishery impacts in a rapidly changing environment.

The National Environmental Policy Act (NEPA) requires that environmental impacts be evaluated for any proposed major federal action. This evaluation is done via an Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). When an EIS addresses a broader federal policy, plan, or program - like federal fisheries in Alaska - it is called

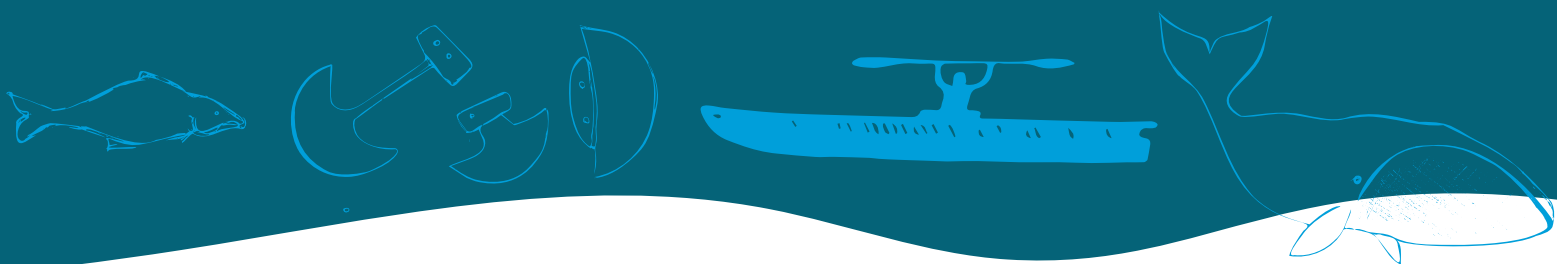
a programmatic EIS, or PEIS. A Groundfish PEIS from 2004 currently serves as the primary scientific document underpinning fisheries in Bering Sea and throughout Alaska. However, the PEIS from 2004 is outdated and does not meaningfully address important issues like climate change, bycatch, impacts to subsistence, or cumulative impacts to key ecosystem species like forage fish, seabirds and marine mammals.

So, what does this mean for Bering Sea communities? Those of us that depend on fishing—whether it be for commercial, subsistence and/or traditional ways of life—are already feeling and being impacted by the effects of climate change; and issues like bycatch, habitat destruction, and inequity in fisheries management makes these impacts even worse. A new PEIS can provide an opportunity for Tribes and Indigenous communities in the Bering Sea to have a voice in deciding what the future of fisheries looks like. It should also provide a vehicle for ensuring that traditional knowledge is incorporated into fishery management.

The PEIS process starts with “scoping”, which helps to determine what should be included in the analysis. The public, as well as Tribes and Indigenous communities, have an opportunity to provide comments. Ultimately, our hope is that an updated PEIS will change some of the key foundations that inform federal fishery management in Alaska and allow us to holistically look at the true cumulative impacts of fisheries on our environment and communities while improving fishery management’s ability to adapt to these impacts.



**NORTH PACIFIC**  
FISHERY MANAGEMENT COUNCIL



# GET INVOLVED IN THE COUNCIL PROCESS

## PUBLIC INPUT

One of the best ways to understand your engagement options is to **TALK TO PEOPLE** - introduce yourself to staff and members of the Council or advisory bodies and ask questions.

### 1. PREPARE



**VISIT** the Council website and look for your issues. The "Three Meeting outlook" offers a longterm view of what's ahead, while the posted agenda and schedule will help you prepare for an upcoming meeting.



**LEARN** the background of your issue. Review relevant documents. Contact staff or members of the Council and advisory bodies with questions.



**TALK** to other stakeholders, managers, Council and advisory body members.



**SIGN UP** for Council newsletters and read about previous Council actions on your issue.

### 2. SHOW UP



**ATTEND** a Council meeting in person or follow online.



**YOUR ISSUE** may be reviewed one to three times during a meeting: at the Scientific and Statistical Committee, the Advisory Panel, and the Council. Listening to an earlier discussion, including the staff reports and public testimony, can help you fully understand an issue.



### 3. PROVIDE COMMENTS



#### WRITTEN COMMENTS

- Address your letter to the Council Chair or Executive Director.
- Identify who you are and your interest in the issue. Then, state clearly your opinion and reasoning. Describe the next steps you'd like to see the Council take.
- Be concise and generally stick to one subject per letter.
- Submit your comment through the e-portal on the Council website or mail it in before the deadline.



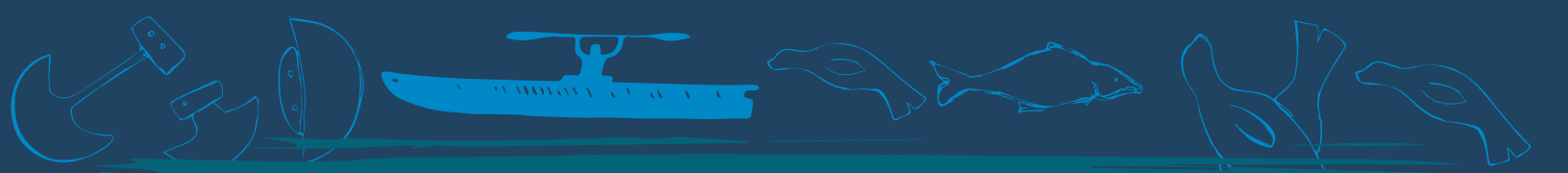
#### TESTIMONY AT THE MEETING

- Plan your testimony ahead of time (individuals or companies get three minutes, organizations or associations get six minutes).
- Start your testimony with your name and affiliation if you have one and how you are impacted by the issue.
- Know what stage the Council is at on this issue and comment on their next steps. Give a clear and informed opinion.
- You may provide handouts or a PowerPoint to support your testimony (coordinate with staff).

## OTHER WAYS TO PARTICIPATE

- » **APPLY FOR SEATS** on committees or advisory body. Vacancies are announced in the Council newsletter.
- » **FOLLOW UP** with your issue. Find out what the Council did or what action they took.





# INDIGENOUS SENTINELS NETWORK UPDATE

*Aang, aang!* Greetings from the Indigenous Sentinels Network (ISN), an observing network operated by the Tribal Government of St. Paul Island. For more than 20 years, the ISN has helped communities maintain robust records of environmental data, including rates of coastal erosion, invasive species, subsistence harvest information, improved co-management partnerships, and more. ISN uses methods for documenting Indigenous, Traditional, and local knowledge alongside scientific data. Through a suite of low and high-tech tools, including smartphone apps and a secure community-owned online database, ISN helps communities collect and protect data for community-driven research.

ISN is proud to be developing new partnerships in the Bering Strait, Western Alaska, and the Northern Bering Sea. In early 2024, we will have a new and improved version of our ISN platform and look forward to sharing that with Bering Sea area environmental and subsistence monitoring programs. The ISN upgrades will integrate



community feedback received in recent years and provide increased ease of use and flexibility, like form builders, enhanced mapping capabilities, and enhanced data sovereignty principles.

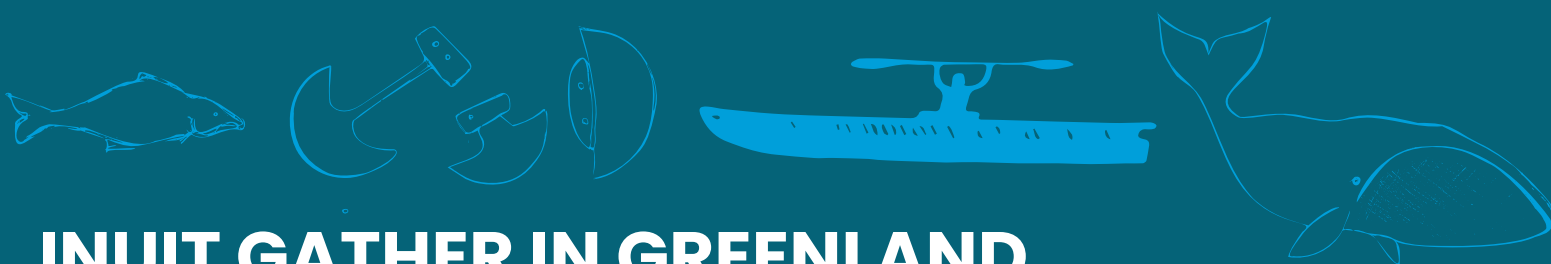
Interested in learning more about our Indigenous-led monitoring program? Visit the ISN website at <https://sentinelsnetwork.org> or contact Hannah-Marie Garcia via email [hgarcia@aleut.com](mailto:hgarcia@aleut.com).



BSEG's next Summit is tentatively scheduled for

**OCTOBER 8-9, 2024**  
**ANCHORAGE, AK**

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



# INUIT GATHER IN GREENLAND

In July, Inuit Circumpolar Council (ICC) delegates from Alaska, Canada, Greenland, and Chukotka (Russia) gathered in the community of Ilulissat in Western Greenland for ICC's first in-person meeting in five years. Delegates who were not able to attend in-person participated virtually. The meeting's central theme focused on asserting Inuit rights at the international level as a unified circumpolar people.

This year marked the 40th anniversary since ICC secured consultative status at the United Nations under the Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC). "The original vision to unite as a people across imposed circumpolar boundaries has been achieved," said ICC Chair Sara Olsvig. "Another important goal, stated in 1977, was to bring the Inuit voice to the United Nations. We achieved that within six years. Now our vision is to strengthen our Inuit voice at the UN, and other international bodies such as the Arctic Council, which we helped create in 1996."

The goal of the meeting was to reflect on ICC's progress, take note of recent developments, further advance ICC work plans, as well as celebrate unity and culture. The meeting was also shaped to inform the ICC leadership on how to implement and advance the goals of the 2022 ICC General Assembly Declaration, which was renamed the "ICC 2022 Ilulissat Declaration".

Over the course of 39 clauses, the Declaration included seven priority areas that ICC will focus on through 2026. They include:

- Good Governance
- Security
- Inuit Nunaat, Health, and Wellness
- Language and Culture
- Hunting and Food Security
- Arctic Ocean and the Marine Environment

"Engaging in dialogue and learning from and with each other is key for our Inuit unity. Our in-person gatherings are therefore crucial to the work that we do on the international level. We bring the Inuit voice from each region and community through listening to our delegates. Through addressing many specific themes, we gain better understanding of the challenges we share as well as the successes we can build upon. That is why our gatherings are so important" said Olsvig.

ICC conferences combine ceremony, discussion, debate, traditions, and a proud celebration of Inuit culture. The gathering brings together Inuit leaders and onlookers spanning generations from children and youth to elders.

The 15th ICC General Assembly is scheduled to take place in Iqaluit, Nunavut, Canada in 2026.





## NOMINATIONS ARE NOW OPEN FOR YOUNG PROVIDER & CULTURE BEARER AWARDS

BSEG is pleased to announce the Young Provider and Young Culture Bearer Awards. This year, two young people who serve as positive examples and contribute to the health and well-being of their community will be recognized. To be considered for an award, a young person must perpetuate his/her Alaska Native culture in one or more of the following ways:

1. Engaging in activities that are grounded in Indigenous Knowledge and responsible stewardship of traditional lands and waters.
2. Caring for Elders, family and young people through participation in subsistence activities.
3. Being involved in activities that benefit and promote community health and well-being.

Each recipient will receive an award of \$500. The deadline for nominations is Monday, November 20,



2023. Nominations can be provided by a family member, community member, Tribal and corporation board member, school teacher or administrator.

Nominees must be affiliated with a BSEG Member Tribe or reside in a Northern Bering Sea Climate Resilience Area community. If you'd like to nominate a young person (up to age 25), please prepare a short statement about him/her (one page or less) and submit that to BSEG's Executive Director Jaylene Wheeler via fax (907) 276-2466 or email [director@beringseaelders.org](mailto:director@beringseaelders.org).

For questions, call (907) 891-1229.

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### OUR WAY OF LIFE

*Yuungnaqsaraq* – our way of being (Central Yup'ik)

*Kiyaghneq* – way of life (St. Lawrence Island Yupik)

*Inuuniagniqput* – the way we live as people (Inupiaq)

