Bering Sea Elders Group  
Bethel Summit  
November 3-4, 2011  
Summary Report

Participants in the Summit

Members who attended:
Yukon – Kuskokwim Region:
Alakanuk  Lawrence Edmund  Kwigillingok  David O. David
Atmautluak  Nick Pavilla  Newtok  Joseph John
Chevakornak  Tommy Kusaiak  Nanakauyak  David Bill
Chevak  Cecelia Andrews  Nunaipitchuk  Henry Parks
Eek  William Brown  Platinum  Henry Williams
Emmonak  Peter Moore  Tununak IRA  Victor Kanrilak
Kasigluk  Gabriel Guest  Tununak Traditional Council  Dick Lincoln
Kipnuk  David Carl  Tuntutuliak  Peter Joseph
Kongiganak  John Phillip

Bering Strait Region:
Brevig Mission  Stewart Tocktoo  Shaktoolik  Michael Sookiyak
Elim  Charles Seccheus  St. Michael  Charlie Fitka
Gambell  Melvin Apassingok  Stebbins  Allen Atchak
Goilovin  Irene Aukonak  Teller  Norman Menadelook
King Island  Francis Alvanna  Unalakleet  Charles Degnan
Koyuk  Frank Kaevevlook  Wales  Faye Ongtowasruk
Savoonga  Helen Kiyuklook  White Mountain  Velma Brown

Elders Group staff: Fred Phillip, Executive Director

Summit Facilitator: Sky Starkey

Staff from Collaborating Organizations:
- Association of Village Council Presidents – Tim Andrew
- Native American Rights Fund – Natalie Landreth, Erin Dougherty
- Trustees for Alaska – Vicki Clark, Valerie Brown
- Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association, Michele Henzler
- Alaska Marine Conservation Council - Muriel Morse, Amy Snider, Dorothy Childers
- Foraker Group – Mike Walsh

Guests:
Paul John, Traditional Chief of the Yukon-Kuskokwim region
Ray Watson, AVCP chairman
Myron Naneng, AVCP president
Art Ivanoff, Native Village of Unalakleet

Simultaneous translation: Leo Moses, Chevak

Day 1
Opening prayer.

Myron Naneng, AVCP president, provided a warm welcome to the Elders Group to Bethel. He spoke strongly about the importance of tribal consultation on government decisions affecting our subsistence resources. He also announced the upcoming Salmon Summit planned for March 2012.
After everyone present introduced themselves, David Bill, Sr., Elders Group chair, urged everyone to “speak what is in your heart.”

Summit participants engaged in discussions as a full group and break-out groups to generate ideas about the purpose and role of the Elders Group and future program priorities.

**Day 2**

Opening prayer

On Day 2 the Elders Group reviewed and refined a draft resolution about the mission and future work, based on input collected the day before.

We then discussed organizational structure.

- The board voted to continue working with the Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association as the Elders Group fiscal sponsor until such time that it is advisable to form a separate non-profit organization. BSFA's services are limited to financial management and this relieves the Elders Group of considerable administrative burden.
- The board agreed to delegate certain authority for decision-making to the executive committee in between gatherings of the full board. They agreed that if a new issue affects both the Yukon-Kuskokwim and Bering Strait regions, the full board should be consulted. If an issue affects a smaller area, then the elders from that area should be consulted.

There was an executive session during which attorneys representing the Elders Group presented an update on negotiations underway between the Elders Group and the Alaska Seafood Cooperative regarding the bottom trawl boundary from Nunivak Island to Kuskokwim Bay. The Elders Group delegated authority to the Executive Committee for decisions regarding the negotiations.

At the end of the meeting, the elders approved the following resolutions. Copies of the resolutions are attached to this meeting summary.

1. Resolution Expressing Our Mission (created at the Bethel summit)
2. Resolution Expressing a Vision for the Northern Bering Sea (updated from a resolution on the same issue at the Elders Group Nome summit in January 2011)
3. Resolution Calling for Amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act (Introduced by the Native Village of Unalakleet and adopted by the Elders Group)
4. Resolution to Establish the Northern Bering Sea Reserve (Introduced by the Native Village of Unalakleet and adopted by the Elders Group)

Ray Watson, AVCP Chairman, visited the summit offering some observations. He likened the Elders Group gathering to the practice long time ago for elders to meet when an important change needed to be made. He thanked the Elders Group for working on Bering Sea fisheries issues and committed to having the AVCP board review the resolutions passed at this important meeting.

Closing prayer.
Thank you’s were extended to everyone who helped make the Bethel summit possible, including:

Our funders for the summit –
- Oak Foundation
- Donlin Gold
- Norton Sound Economic Development Corporation - Straits Elders airfare
- Yukon Delta Fisheries Development Association
- Oceana

Association of Village Council Presidents – For their hospitality, ongoing cooperation and support from Tim Andrew at this meeting.

Bering Sea Fishermen’s Association – For ongoing support as the Elders Group fiscal sponsor.

Muriel Morse – For hard work on travel and meeting logistics and her dedication to the Elders Group during her employment with Alaska Marine Conservation Council.

Bering Sea Elders Group
Board of Directors and Tribal Affiliations

Participating tribes join by resolution and designate an elder to serve on the Board of Directors.

Yukon – Kuskokwim Region:

Alakanuk          Lawrence Edmund
Atmautluak        Nick Pavilla
Cheftornak        Tommy Kusaiak
Chevak            Cecelia Andrews
Eek               William Brown
Emmonak           Peter Moore
Goodnews Bay      Willie Ayoijak
Kagisgluk         Gabriel Guest
Kipnuk            David Carl
Kongiganak        John Phillip
Kotlik            Michael Hunt
Kwigillingok      David O. David
Kwinhagak         Frank Fox
Mekoryuk          Joseph David
Newtok            Moses Carl
Nightmute         Theresa George
Nanakuyak         David Bill
Nunam Iqua        Martha Owletuk
Nunapitchuk       Henry Parks
Platinum          Henry Williams
Tununak IRA       John Walter
Tununak Traditional Dick Lincoln
Tuntutuliak       Peter Joseph
Umkumiak          Andrew George

Bering Strait Region:
Brevig Mission    Rita Olaana
Diomede           Pat Omiak
Elim              Charles Seccheus
Gambell           Iver Campbell
Golovin           Irene Aukongak
King Island       Francis Alvanna
Koyuk             Kenneth Dewey
Savoonga          Perry Pungowiyi
Shaktoolik        Axel Jackson
St. Michael       Charlie Fitka
Stebbins          Allen Atchak
Teller            Norman Menadelook
Unalakleet        Kermit Ivanoff
Wales             Faye Ongtowasruk
White Mountain    Velma Brown
Resolution Expressing Our Mission

November 3, 2011

WHEREAS, our tribes along the coast have depended on the abundant resources of the Bering Sea, the land and air from time immemorial, and our spirit and ways of life are inseparable from them; and

WHEREAS, the knowledge of the Elders about how to live with the ocean and the land was given to us by our ancestors with instructions not to keep if for ourselves, but to pass it on to our children so that they may continue to prosper and continue our way of being; and

WHEREAS, the Bering Sea is a whole ecosystem, in which each part is connected to all other parts in an inter-dependent web of life; and

WHEREAS, the resources we rely on were given to us by the Creator, and we have a responsibility to care for those resources and to pass on this inheritance to our children and grandchildren; and

WHEREAS, the Elders are messengers about our traditional values and how to live on the land and ocean; and

WHEREAS, we are stronger by working together as one voice and one mind.

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT the mission of the Bering Sea Elders Group is to bring together elders as one voice to protect our traditional ways of life and the ocean web of life that supports the resources we rely on, and our children’s future.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED THAT the Bering Sea Elders Group will serve as a messenger to our children, our tribal councils and the people who make decisions that affect our marine resources, ecosystem and ways of life.

The Bering Sea Elders Group seeks to work together with:

- Youth – to support our children in retaining our Native languages, hands-on learning about plants and animals, and learning about how to protect their rich cultural and natural inheritance; and

- Our tribes – to support their strong and full engagement in the management of our marine resources and ecosystem; and

- Our Native organizations, corporations and CDQ groups – to support their understanding of and engagement in the protection of our marine resources, ecosystem and ways of life; and

- Religious organizations; and

- City and borough governments, state and federal political leaders and agencies, including Alaska’s congressional delegation.

(over)
Although issues that we face may evolve, and new issues may arise, the Bering Sea Elders Group aims to focus its support for our tribes in:

- Protecting our traditional marine hunting and fishing areas, the migration routes of the animals we rely on, and the whole ecosystem from harmful activities. This includes creating habitat conservation zones to address future concerns, and resolving conflict with the bottom trawl industry regarding the Nunivak Island-Kuskokwim Bay boundary; and

- Establishing a Northern Bering Sea reserve to protect the marine and coastal resources and our food security from future large-scale industrial activity thereby preserving the area as an inheritance for future generations; and

- Addressing threats to our salmon culture through protection of marine habitat and spawning grounds, and the reduction in salmon bycatch; and

- Addressing climate change and its effects on the ocean and the resources we rely on.

The Bering Sea Elders Group identifies the following ways, among others, to address these issues:

- Support amendments to the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act that are necessary to provide for greater protection for our marine resources and ecosystem, and to ensure a greater role for our tribes in fisheries management – options include creating a Bering Sea Fishery Management Council that represents our values, and establishing 1-2 tribal seats on North Pacific Fishery Management Council; and

- Create a management plan for our traditional marine hunting and fishing area designed to protect the resources and ecosystem and to ensure our access and continued use of the resources that our people depend on; and

- Collaborate with federal and state resource managers to apply traditional knowledge in real decisions; and

- Seek to incorporate the indigenous peoples from the Russian side of the Bering Sea because the Bering Sea is one ecosystem and the people on both sides have the same needs.

The Bering Sea Elders Group is committed to working with our tribes, including regularly sharing information about activities of the Elders Group, and supporting them on issues affecting our traditional marine territory in the Bering Sea, the ecosystem and our children’s future.


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David Bill, Sr. – Chair
Resolution Expressing a Vision for the Northern Bering Sea
November 3, 2011

PREAMBLE:

Alaska Native peoples living on the Bering Sea coast, keen observers of the world around us, are witnessing changes in seasonal patterns, sea ice and animals. In recent years Bering Sea ice has formed later in the year and melted earlier in spring. In some years, even when the ice extends far to the south, it is thin. These changes affect where different animals find food, how they survive and where they may be available to us for hunting.

While ocean temperatures and ice conditions in the Bering Sea vary greatly year-to-year, the long-term trend over time is expected to be warming. How the Northern Bering Sea ecosystem will be affected and the long-term future for our ocean resources is uncertain.

The teaching of our ancestors was based on respect for what the ocean provides. Respectful actions are rewarded by hunting success; disrespectful actions have negative consequences. We were taught never to waste what the Creator has given us, to share our food with the community and to listen to our Elders because they acquired wisdom over a long life and sharp observation. Today, while technology has changed, our traditional values and our hunting, fishing and gathering ways of life, remain the foundation of our culture. Respect for the natural world and caring for our natural resources are necessary for our people to continue thriving off the ocean and land, and providing for our children’s inheritance.

WHEREAS: The Bering Sea Elders Group is an association of Elders established to work together as one voice for the protection of our traditional ways of life, the web of life that sustains the ocean resources we rely on and our children’s future; and

WHEREAS: Federal fishery managers recognized the importance of the Northern Bering Sea by establishing a bottom trawl boundary to prevent these large-scale fishing fleets from moving into northern waters where they have not operated before; and

WHEREAS: Alaska Native tribes on the Bering Sea coast are concerned about the potential for future expansion of bottom trawl fisheries and other large-scale industries into the Northern Bering Sea because of the sensitivity of the whole ecosystem that supports our ways of life; and

WHEREAS: The Association of Village Council Presidents and Kawerak, regional tribal consortiums, support the mission of the Bering Sea Elders Group.
NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Bering Sea Elders Group:

1. Urges the federal government to undertake a rigorous tribal consultation process for all decisions affecting the Northern Bering Sea.

2. Recommends the formation of a Northern Bering Sea reserve as permanent protection from future large-scale industrial activities. The Northern Bering Sea should be reserved for traditional use and ecosystem research that brings together western science and traditional knowledge for continued understanding of climate change, and its consequences for marine life, ocean habitat, communities and cultures. This region warrants special attention because of its unique ecological and cultural characteristics:
   - The Northern Bering Sea is vulnerable to the destabilizing effects of climate change. The long-term consequences of climate change for the region are uncertain. Allowing bottom trawl fisheries or other large-scale industries into the region will add new stress to the already fragile ecosystem and the traditional resources we depend on.
   - Ocean habitat and the ice-dependent species that are listed under the Endangered Species Act, or designated as candidate species for listing, should be protected, including the critical habitat offshore in the Bering Sea pack ice established for the spectacled eider.
   - The Northern Bering Sea is already fully utilized by the tribes who have been thriving off of the ocean’s bounty since time immemorial. Our local economies and food security are based on hunting, gathering and small-scale fisheries that will be damaged by the potential introduction of bottom trawl fisheries or other large-scale industries in the future.


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David Bill, Sr. – Chair
A RESOLUTION CALLING FOR AMDENDMENTS TO THE MAGNUSON-STEVENS FISHERY CONSERVATION AND MANAGEMENT ACT

WHEREAS, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is federal legislation that governs fisheries off the coast of the United States from 3 to 200 miles; and

WHEREAS, the fisheries and marine resources off the coast and along the river systems are important for sources of nutrition, cultural heritage, food security and a small commercial economy to federally recognized tribes; and

WHEREAS, the commercial fisheries off the coast of the United States are also important by providing jobs and contributing to the economy of our region and the Nation; and

WHEREAS, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act is up for re-authorization in 2013,

BE IT THEREFORE RESOLVED THAT federal fisheries management should be restructured to:

1. Strengthen the Act to fully recognize conflicts of interest and prohibit voting on issues where a council member has a conflict; and

2. Authorize sufficient funds for the tribal consultation process for both the regional councils and National Marine Fisheries Service; and

3. Strengthen language pertaining to conservation the National Standards by removing “where practicable” and “to the extent practicable.”

4. Increase representation on Regional Councils to include voting seats for federally recognized tribes.

5. Apply the Federal Advisory Committee Act to the Regional Councils and their committees or advisory panels established under the Magnuson-Stevens Act.

Submitted by the Native Village of Unalakleet and Adopted November 3, 2011

David Bill, Sr. – Chair
RESOLUTION TO ESTABLISH THE NORTHERN BERING SEA RESERVE

WHEREAS, the Executive Order on Stewardship of the Ocean, Our Coasts, and the Great Lakes states;

Section 1. Purpose: This order establishes a national policy to ensure the protection, maintenance, and restoration of the health of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes ecosystems and resources.

Section 2. Policy states (i) protect, maintain, and restore the health and biological diversity of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes ecosystems and resources; (ii) improve the resiliency of ocean, coastal, and Great Lakes ecosystems, communities, and economies; and (iii) bolster the conservation and sustainable uses of land in ways that will improve the health of ocean, coastal, and Great Lake ecosystems; and

WHEREAS, the Northern Bering Sea is home to Alaska’s abundant marine wildlife and it is central to the health and diversity of the Alaska Native diet which consists of the five species of salmon, marine mammals, migratory birds and other resources; and

WHEREAS, the Northern Bering Sea Research Area, comprising 81,693 miles$^2$ from St. Matthew Island north into Norton Sound and the Bering Strait, was established by the North Pacific Fisheries Management Council as part of the Bering Sea Essential Fish Habitat action (BSAI FMP Amendment 89, June 2007), and included a limited exclusion around St. Lawrence Island; and

WHEREAS, the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation Management Act, including its National Standards, favor large-scale commercial fisheries; and

WHEREAS, while the National Standards recognize the importance of conservation, the language promoting conservation is inadequate. The terminology “where practicable” allows for loose interpretation and was used to justify a Chinook bycatch limit far above what was recommended by the Tribes,

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Bering Sea Elders Group calls for a Northern Bering Sea reserve to provide necessary protection for the region from potential industrial-scale fisheries in the future.

Submitted by the Native Village of Unalakleet and Adopted November 3, 2011

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David Bill, Sr.