Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council — AUTUMN 2026

ANCC NEWS

CULTURE ANNOUNCEMENTS UPDATES

EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OPENING LETTER – KATAK MAIJA LUKIN

Paglagivsi,
Uuvaṇa Katak, Qikiktaġruṇmiiuruṇalu Sisualigmiiuruṇa.
Aakagalu aapaga, Ahluniqlu Ukpik, Aanagalu Ataataga
Kataklu Taliiraq Upiksaun.



KATAK MAIJA LUKIN
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My name is Maija Katak Lukin, and I am honored to introduce myself as the Executive Director of Alaska Nannut Co-Management Council. I began serving in this role learning from our previous ED in November, and myself in mid-January. Although I just began this position this year, the work and responsibility to our people and subsistence resources have been part of my life for a long time.

I am Iñupiaq, born in Kotzebue and raised between Kotzebue and Sisualik. My parents are Jennie and Willie Johnson of Kotzebue and Chickaloon and my grandparents are Doc and Katak Harris from Sisualik. I grew up learning that our relationship with the land, water, animals, and one another comes with responsibility to our past and our future. Nanuq is not simply a resource to be studied or managed. Polar bears are part of our history, our stories, our food, our identity, and the knowledge passed between generations. That understanding and our Iñupiat Illitqusait are what grounds me in this work.

Before joining ANCC, I spent much of my career working in Tribal relations, co-management, natural and cultural resource stewardship, and federal Indian law and policy. I have served in local government, as Superintendent of the Western Arctic National Parklands, and as the Alaska Native Tribal Relations Program Manager for the National Park Service. In each of those roles, I learned that the best decisions are made when our Tribes and communities are involved from the beginning, not after decisions have already been made. I bring that same belief to ANCC.

I also want to recognize and thank Whitney Kellie-Szender, our previous Executive Director. Whitney helped lead ANCC through an important period of growth. Under her leadership, the organization strengthened its administrative and financial compliance, rebuilt important systems and partnerships, and

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EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR OPENING LETTER CONTINUED

reached a milestone that had been many years in the making: the signing of ANCC's first Co-Management Agreement with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. That agreement provides a stronger foundation for the work ahead and formally recognizes the role ANCC and our 15 member Tribes hold in true polar bear co-management, rooted in law. We are grateful for Whitney's hard work, persistence, and service to the organization, and we wish her and her family the very best.

Since I began in January, we have had a busy and productive several months. We held our Governance Board and Finance Committee meetings in Anchorage and continued regular coordination with our Board, member Tribes, legal counsel, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, the World Wildlife Fund, researchers, and our many other partners.

ANCC participated in the Polar Bear Range States Meeting of the Parties, where the United States assumed the chairmanship, and I co-presented on polar bear co-management and conservation. I have also continued serving with the Range States Indigenous Knowledge Working Group, helping ensure that Indigenous Knowledge and the voices of the people who live alongside polar bears are part of international conservation discussions.

In February, ANCC coordinated a Polar Bear Knowledge Exchange in Nome. The gathering brought together Indigenous Knowledge holders, hunters, polar bear patrol members, public safety representatives, and deterrence specialists from our communities. Participants shared what is working, where additional support is needed, and how we can better protect both people and polar bears. That work is continuing as we pursue additional funding for community-led deterrence, patrols, safety equipment, and training. After the training, we were able to secure multiple spotlights for several communities for to enhance their safety patrols in their towns. We are also securing sirens to warn communities when a polar bear is sighted, as well as gathering other safety supplies for those on polar bear patrol. These are direct asks from communities who participated in the Polar Bear Deterrence Workshop.

We have also remained engaged in decisions that affect subsistence and our communities. ANCC provided comments during consultations on proposed changes to the Federal Subsistence Board, participated in the development of the next federal Arctic research plan, and joined discussions related to oil and gas activities, incidental take, sea ice forecasting, Arctic fisheries, Indigenous Knowledge, and human-polar bear conflict. In every one of these spaces, our message remains the same: our Tribes, hunters, and Indigenous knowledge holders must be included early, meaningfully, and throughout the decision-making process. Within ANCC, we have been strengthening the foundation of the organization. We completed our annual budget, updated grant and financial systems, began developing the 2027–2031 Strategic Plan, and started looking for new opportunities to support community priorities. ANCC also helped support a successful five-year, $2M NASA-funded proposal that will bring together scientific information, Earth observations, harvest information, and Indigenous Knowledge to improve future Chukchi Sea polar bear harvest risk assessments.

Looking ahead, I want ANCC to be more visible and connected in our communities. We are beginning to develop educational materials for hunters, families, schools, and youth, including clearer information about harvest reporting, tagging, safety, and the co-management process. We are also exploring a Polar Bear Culture Camp program that can work alongside existing community culture camps, bringing Elders, hunters, youth, and knowledge holders together to share what nanuq means to us and the responsibilities that come with that relationship.

There is still much work ahead, including continued advancement of the Harvest Management Plan and the full implementation of our Co-Management Agreement. Co-management is more than a signed document. It has to be built through relationships, trust, accountability, and the willingness to listen to the people most directly affected. It also means making sure our children and grandchildren inherit both healthy polar bear populations and the right to continue the cultural and subsistence practices that have sustained our people for generations.

I am grateful to the ANCC Governance Board for placing their trust in me, and I am thankful to our member Tribes, hunters, Elders, staff, and partners who have welcomed me into this role. My door is always open. I want to hear what is happening in your community, what concerns you have, what is working, and where ANCC can do better.

This organization belongs to our member Tribes, and our work must always remain grounded in the people we serve.

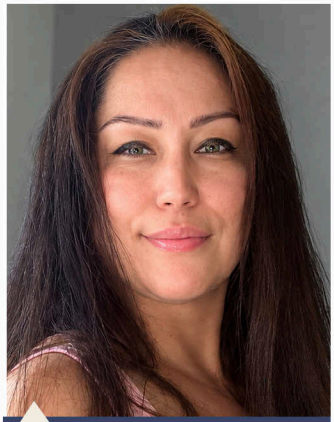
Quyaana,

Katak

Katak Maija Lukin

email

PROGRAM & ADMINISTRATION SPECIALIST REPORT



HOPE ROBERTS
hroberts@nannut.org

Hello, I am Hope 'Napataq' Roberts, I am Tlingit-Gwich'in, and Koyukon Athabascan. I just crossed the one-year mark as your P&A specialist in August. I have had an extraordinary time serving the Polar Bear communities. Advocating and learning about all of Alaska's Regional Marine Mammals has been a joy of mine. I am extremely grateful to learn about a culture that resonates with my heart as my daughter is paternally Inupiaq from Kotzebue.

Understanding that the ancestral ways of life connecting people and the Nannut is essentially making the work exhilarating. Being able to help connect the elders and youth with their Traditional ecological knowledge and points of view with government entities makes this work fulfilling.

I came from a background of construction in the Operating Engineers in Hawai'I and Fairbanks, to earning certificates and degrees in Tribal and Business Management, then owning and operating a deep-sea fishing operation out of Suacit (Valdez.)

Learning about the climate changes and the migration patterns in the Polar bears is consistently an interesting topic. I have had a wonderful experience learning from Whitney and Now Katak as Executive Directors for ANCC. I hope to only learn to excel within the Co-Management of the Nannut and their 15 communities. I hope to help learn and teach further co-existence between, the Inuit, the Nannut, the land, and seas.

Quyanaqpak, Gunalcheesh, Mahsi'i

Hope

Hope Roberts

email

CHUKCHI UPDATE



Polar bear observed during USFWS polar bear survey over the Chukchi Sea ice, March 2026. Photo credit Dan Bjornlie, USFWS.

The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) polar bear team began field work to collect data to inform a new abundance estimate for the Chukchi Sea polar bear subpopulation in spring 2026. In late March 2026, personnel from the Service polar bear program based in Kotzebue and conducted aerial surveys over the U.S. waters from the Bering Strait to Point Hope, flying 3,875 miles and covering 4,800 square miles. Buffers around coastal communities were in place to prevent disturbance to subsistence activities. Twenty-two polar bears were observed during the flights. An additional year of survey work is planned for spring 2027 to collect the data needed to obtain a robust abundance estimate. Data analysis will begin after the Spring 2027 survey with an updated abundance estimate expected in late 2027 that will inform an updated harvest risk assessment.



Chukotka coast as seen from the U.S. waters of the Chukchi Sea during USFWS polar bear surveys, March 2026. Photo credit Dan Bjornlie, USFWS.



USFWS Partenavia P68 fleet aircraft used during Chukchi Sea polar bear observation flights, March 2026. Photo credit Dan Bjornlie, USFWS.

U.S. FISH & WILDLIFE SERVICE MARKING, TAGGING, & REPORTING PROGRAM


CAM SOLANO

MEET CAM SOLANO

Cam Solano now coordinates the Marking, Tagging, & Reporting Program (MTRP), taking over after Brad Benter's retirement in April 2025. Brad dedicated more than 30 years to the program and built strong relationships with hunters, taggers, and community members. He certainly will be missed, though you may still spot him birding around Alaska!

Cam plans to travel to hunting communities for outreach and to meet hunters and community members. Keep an eye out for travel-notice flyers!

WHAT IS THE MTRP?

The MTRP monitors subsistence and handicraft harvest of polar bears, sea otters, and walruses. Through harvest reporting, the program gathers essential biological data to help manage species and stocks. Tagging and reporting also prevents illegal take, trade, and transport of marine mammal parts.



Did you recently harvest a polar bear, sea otter, or walrus and need your parts tagged?

TAGGING REQUIREMENTS

- Parts must be tagged **within 30 days of harvest.**
- Polar bear hides and skulls
- Walrus ivory
- Sea otter hides

WHY IS THIS IMPORTANT?

The information reported is vital for the biology, management, and conservation of polar bears, sea otters, and walruses.

HOW TO GET ITEMS TAGGED

Your community should have a local tagger.
Not sure who yours is?

Visit:
https://www.fws.gov/alaska-MTRP-tagger-list
or call (907) 538-6097



INTERESTED IN BECOMING A BEAR/WALRUS TAGGER?

This is a paid position. For more information, contact **Cam Solano at (907) 538-6097.**

DIVERSE RESEARCH APPROACHES

Source: Ikaaġvik Sikukun, Spring 2019 Newsletter, "Diverse research approaches." ikaagviksikukun.org



LOCAL INDIGENOUS KNOWLEDGE

The advisory council of Elders is involved in all aspects of research from deciding research questions, collecting data, guiding how and when to make observations, to interpreting the significance of results.



UNMANNED AERIAL SYSTEMS

Ikaaġvik Sikukun combines long-range unmanned aerial systems with an Indigenous way of looking at the ice to observe sea ice during critical periods for marine mammals and subsistence hunting.



ON ICE MEASUREMENTS

Responding to recent sea ice thinning, Ikaaġvik Sikukun measures sea ice growth and melt over the winter and spring, and tracks snow depth–which insulates the ice keeping it warmer in winter (less sea ice growth) and cooler in spring (less ice melt).



MEASURING SEAL HABITAT

Ringed seals rely on specific snow and ice characteristics that are disappearing with changing ice conditions. In spring Ikaaġvik Sikukun surveys the snow roughness and depth to see how much habitat is available and if there are any used denning sites.



FILMING THE DOCUMENTARY

Ikaaġvik Sikukun's filmmaker is documenting the project from start to finish. The final community-based film will bridge communication between local Indigenous knowledge and western science.



OCEANOGRAPHIC MOORING

Ikaaġvik Sikukun's ocean mooring measures how heat enters and leaves Kotzebue Sound. The mooring, which sits on the sea floor, also captures biological processes at the base of the ocean's food chain.

MESSAGES FROM THE ELDERS

Source: Ikaaġvik Sikukun, Spring 2020 Newsletter, Messages from Elders." ikaagviksikukun.org

CLIMATE CHANGE

When humans burn fossil fuels like coal, natural gas and oil, they release high concentrations of carbon dioxide into the air. These emissions heat the atmosphere and are the leading cause of global climate change. The Arctic is impacted more than any place on Earth. Several processes in the Arctic accelerate climate change. Thawing permafrost releases methane gas which further warms the atmosphere. As sea ice melts, the darker open ocean absorbs more heat, causing additional warming. The Elders stressed that overcoming climate change will take action and national leaders, scientists and Indigenous communities working together.

> **Roswell Schaeffer Sr. said:** "There are a lot of us that felt that our country [around Kotzebue Sound] is changing too fast. We have to understand these problems and these changes...To help our people be ready for it, it is really important that they support this kind of science and Native knowledge working together."

> **Bobby Schaeffer said:** "We can't shut our eyes [to climate change], it's not going to go away... We have to change what we are doing, we have to quit burning fossil fuels otherwise there is no hope. We are on a very fine line right now. If we continue with our habits we're going to go over that hump."

THE PAST FIVE YEARS

According to the Elders, the past five years differed notably from what had been the norm for decades. Recent observations include thin, dangerous ice, shorter winters, thawing permafrost, and changing animal, fish and bird movements.

> **Roswell Schaeffer Sr. said:** "Yesterday [October 2, 2020] it was 51°F above which is unheard of in the Arctic in October. It should be freezing. The bay should be frozen, or at least partially frozen. The ducks are still here, the geese are still here."

> "Since about five years ago it started doing this, getting warmer and warmer each year. We're getting longer falls. Falls are all the way toward November. Our spring is occurring in March or April, rather than May or June. So our winters are becoming very very short. It causes so much changes for all animals, including us humans."

WHY INVEST IN SCIENCE?

Over the years, the four Elders have participated in a variety of roles related to the environment, fish and wildlife monitoring, and science research projects. When asked why they invest so much time on science, observing and sharing their knowledge, they focused on future generations.

> **Roswell Schaeffer Sr. said:** "I do this because I want my grandkids and my great-grandkids to have this knowledge after I'm gone. That way the kids in the future will be able to understand our culture right now and why it is important to continue this way of life and not lose it."

> **Cyrus Harris said:** "Indigenous Knowledge is through memory and passing down that information through voice. Putting this [findings from Ikaaġvik Sikukun] together in written form will help the younger generation catch up."

OBSERVATIONS CAN'T STOP HERE

Efforts to respond and adapt to climate change in the Arctic must be guided by long-term environmental monitoring. For this reason, the Elders emphasized the importance of continuous and unbroken data gathering in Kotzebue Sound. Many science projects are funded for relatively short periods. For example, Ikaaġvik Sikukun is only a five year project, but the changes documented will continue into the future. This is one of the many reasons why strong partnerships between scientists and Indigenous communities are so critical.

> **Bobby Schaeffer said:** "The information we're gathering should be continuous, it shouldn't end, in order to use data it has to be done on a continuous basis."

To carry on the important science started during Ikaaġvik Sikukun, the Alaska Arctic Observatory and Knowledge Hub will continue local efforts to gather sea ice measurements and observations of wildlife and coastal waters.



A Taste of Tradition

MAASUGRUK'S AKPIK JELL-O PIE

Yields 4 Pies

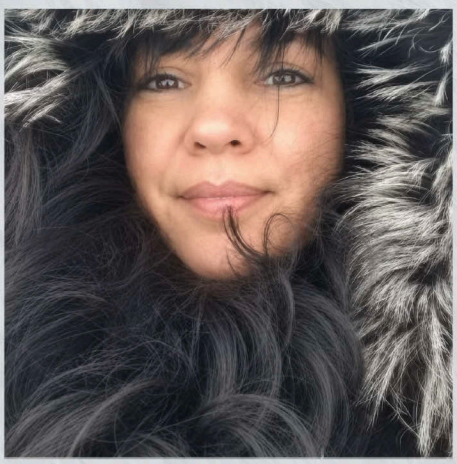
Ingredients

- 2 cups hot water
- 1 large box orange Jell-O
- 2 cups berries or mandarin oranges
- 2 cups vanilla ice cream
- 1 (8-ounce) tub Cool Whip
- 4 (6-ounce) graham cracker pie crusts

Directions

1. Place the ice cream and Cool Whip in a bowl and allow them to soften slightly.
2. Bring the water to a boil. Remove from heat, add the Jell-O mix, and stir until completely dissolved.
3. Pour the dissolved Jell-O into the ice cream and Cool Whip mixture. Let it sit while you arrange the berries or mandarin oranges in the bottoms of the four pie crusts.
4. Stir the Jell-O mixture until well blended, then pour evenly into each pie crust.

Refrigerate for at least 1 hour before serving. *Enjoy!*



We would Like to express sincere condolences to Maasugruks loss of her mother September 22, 2026

CUBS' CORNER



Word Search

V D G R K I S G Q J D I Q I D
I R E O I K T N K A Ñ R L R I
N A C C L Q V M O U I A Q X M
G H M K A V X W P W N N W V A
A M L D Ğ G M I L E D T N K Z
P W Q T U E A V D L A R S A O
I A F Y Y T K Z M Q P C I D N
T K U Z A Q A T Q I T A T F I
C S C Q ŋ C R U D N T P U O T
H A V G I O Y E J P R N O M S
I L Q W P A P O L A R B E A R
Q A A K ŋ A H D W J K S S O B
L S Z I Q L T A O U Q V Y K S
H Q P E F L G L I T U O Y D G
N A N U Q V I R R P M H D Q Z

APITCHIQ
ATIQTAQ
ÎÑUPIAT
NANNIAQ
NANUQ
PIJAYUĞALIK
PIŊAYUQQAT
POLAR BEAR
SNOWDRIFT

Vocabulary Lesson

Words and definitions from Iñupiat Word Finder App - North Slope dialect

APITCHIQ – snowdrift; female polar bear with young bears in a hollow snowdrift

ATIQTAQ – polar bear cub in its first year (so named because the mother takes it immediately out on the sea ice from the place where it was born)

NANIAQ/NANNUK – to kill a polar bear

NANNIAQ – to go polar bear hunting

NANUQ – polar bear (Ursus maritimus)

PINAYUGALIK – polar bear with three cubs

PINAYUQQAT – three polar bears in a group; female polar bear with three cubs; a group of three