

Donlin Subsistence Community Advisory Committee (SCAC)

February 27, 2026 Virtual Meeting Summary – Barge Communication Plan Review

Meeting Overview

When	February 27, 2026 12:00-1:00 PM
Where	Virtual via Zoom
Purpose	• Build understanding of the Barge Communication Plan. • Share subsistence and traditional knowledge and expertise to inform the Barge Communication Plan. • Learn next steps in the Barge Communication Plan update process.

INVITED PARTICIPANTS

** Participated in meeting.*

SCAC Members	SCAC Seat	DATROC and Other Attendees	Affiliation
Phyllis Evan	SCAC Member, Seat A	Rachel Klein* (TKC)	DATROC Member
William Hunter*	SCAC Member, Seat A	Thom Leonard* (Calista)	DATROC Member
Nicholas Kameroff*	SCAC Member, Seat A	Tisha Kuhns* (Calista)	DATROC Member
Joe Kameroff*	SCAC Member, Seat B	Chris Eckhart* (Donlin)	DATROC Member
Mark Leary*	SCAC Member, Seat B	Enric Fernandez* (Donlin)	DATROC Member
Denny Thomas	SCAC Member, Seat C	Rebecca Wilmarth* (Donlin)	DATROC Member
Julie Zaukar	SCAC Member, Seat D	Todd Dahlman* (presenter)	Donlin Gold
Debbie Hartman*	SCAC Member, Seat E	Colleen Laraux*	Donlin Gold
Fritz Charles*	SCAC Member, Seat F	Alba Brice*	Calista Corporation
Sam Berlin	SCAC Member, Seat G	Steve Glasman*	Calista Brice
Ralph Kiunya	SCAC Member, Seat H	Shelly Wade* (facilitator)	Agnew::Beck
Nathan Lake*	SCAC Member, Seat I	Blair Schoenborn* (facilitator)	Agnew::Beck
Wassily Alexie*	SCAC Member, Seat J		
Vicki Otte*	SCAC Member, Seat L		
Nels Alexie*	SCAC Member, Seat L		

HIGHLIGHTS

- **Participation.** Thank you, SCAC Members, for joining the meeting during a busy time! We had multiple people wearing multiple hats (meeting planes, caring for loved ones, working on the ice road) during the meeting but we were still able to have a rich discussion. We appreciate the level of preparation and coordination this required.
- **Focused recommendations.** The discussion remained focused on input and ideas that can improve communications and limit potential conflicts on the river between barges and subsistence users. SCAC Members shared key information about fish, breeding grounds, fishing practices, and other experiences that can inform successful barge operations and communications.
- **Actionable discussion.** Ideas brought forth will be considered by the DATROC for inclusion in Barge Communication Plan updates.

Meeting Notes (see also guiding slides & 2018 Barge Communication Plan)

Agenda Topic	Summary Notes
Welcome & Connecting	• Nels opened our meeting with a prayer, asking for help guiding the process and for wisdom as the project develops. • Shelly shared a land acknowledgment (see agenda). • Todd's opening remarks expressed gratitude for the SCAC coming together on this topic and for offering their input.
Barge Communication Plan Presenters: <i>Enric Fernandez</i> Materials: <i>Barge Communication Plan Overview 2-27-26 (attached)</i>	• The goals for this conversation are to listen to SCAC's input, questions, and feedback about the Barge Communication Plan as it relates to subsistence activities and traditional knowledge from the region. • Enric presented the Barge Communication Plan Overview, using the slide deck included in the meeting materials. ○ The Barge Communication Plan is a Donlin Gold plan of operations, it details how Donlin will operate when contractors are barging on the river. It was developed with technical expertise from barge operators (Brice) and with input from community meetings in Bethel and Aniak. ○ Donlin reached out to Brice to learn how to avoid potential conflicts with subsistence users and found that miscommunications or lack of communications were often the root of conflicts. ○ The Plan identifies areas of the river where conflicts may arise and offers methods to resolve conflicts that do arise. ○ Donlin will hold annual meetings in Aniak and Bethel at the beginning of the barging season and the end of the season to share updates and information and to hear feedback from the communities. Information will also be shared by social media, newsletters, website, and meetings throughout the year. ○ An app will be tracking the GPS location of barges on the river and is available for public use where internet is available. We expect that there will be three barges per day going up and down the river in a 24-hour period.

- VHF Radio and cell phone communications are available with the barge. Phone numbers will be printed on the side of the barge for people to call if they have a concern.
- Pilot vessels will travel ahead of the barge to observe river conditions, communicate with subsistence users on the river, and coordinate safe passage of the barge. Yup'ik speakers will be staffed on the barge.
- Barge operators and contractors will be held to guiding principles that emphasize respect, safety, and communication standards.
- The Plan includes a conflict resolution process and the entities responsible for the various steps in the process.
- The Plan's "adaptive management framework" allows it to be reviewed annually and adapted to improve operations based on lessons learned from stakeholders and evolving conditions.

Discussion

- Wassily: It sounds like there will be someone going ahead of the barge and communicating with the fishermen. People are going to want to get the fish rather than pull their nets to let the barge go past, especially with the limited time for fishing.
- Mark: Barging during fish openings will be the biggest issue, my recommendation would be to stand down during openings or idle down, or time barges so they're in areas of the river that are not being heavily fished. People need to fish undisturbed during the limited openings. I also like being able to track where the barges are so I can plan how and where I travel to avoid the barge wakes. The barge wake can be very long, especially with the big barges, their wakes can be miles long. I like the VHF Radio channel and telephone number on the side of the barge – it's like those bumper stickers on trucks "if you don't like my driving call..." It made me chuckle!
 - Enric: These ideas came from a meeting in Bethel – they asked for good communication with the barges and suggested putting the number on the barge and also including a Yup'ik speaker on barge.
- Nels: I don't mind the barges going up and down. First, I have to learn how I can meet a bigger boat, it cannot slow down when it's meeting a small boat. My boat has to slow down and go through the wake. Second, when I'm at the set net sites – watch and wait until waves pass. Third, If I'm drifting and I know where I want to put my net after the barge passes, I wait until it passes and quickly set the net and drift where the barge makes an eddy. That's where fish gather. Our people always highlight barge waves cutting into the banks, but the river has been cutting into the bank. I have been taught that it is my problem when meeting a barge, being in the smaller boat. I have to remember when bigger boat comes my way, I must slow down. I don't have any problems with the barges going up and down the river.
- Fritz: One of the things I want to comment on is making some kind of deal where there's subsistence fishing openings. For example, when there are openings that are six hours at a location, pause barge travel for that time at that location and maybe a few hours before opening. Just like the commercial fishing arrangements.
 - Mark: I would recommend seeing if it's economically feasible to stand down during these openings. If not, what else can we do to make this work?

	○ Enric: In addition to economic feasibility, it's also safety and navigation considerations. • Enric: We're hearing these ideas and will be thinking about them. • William: I have two things. Barge travel and speed. We park our boats down on the beach, which is rocky. We set our nets, check them in the morning and evening. Last summer we had a Brice barge go past too quickly and it caused boats to be smashed on the rocks. Brice paid me back for that, but we need them to slow down near the villages. Can we use ice road travel to limit barge travel? On the road planned all the way to Crooked Creek? ○ Enric: We have a system to make sure barges obey the rules of the river. We understand the importance of speed control. • Joe: I would like to see the spill response plan and make it available to villages. The Kuskokwim is a fast-moving river with limited species that spawn in certain areas, those need to be protected. We need to share what spots need to be protected. I would like to see spill response planning soon. • Nick: Thank you for the time and comments today. Along the middle of the Kuskokwim where I fish, the drift nets and set nets are along the shorelines, and the barges have to be on the deeper channels on the other side of the river. The fish come my way when the barges come by. I also would like to hear more about spill response planning. • Vicki: I'll hit the highlights of my marked-up copy and share my notes with the team. On page 3, are there down river tonnage reports from Nixon Fork Mine? On page 5, will there be annual meetings before and after barging seasons for 27 years? (Enric confirmed, yes.) Add communications status to Upper Kuskokwim, it would be nice to get them more included. On page 8, Emergency systems, I liked the spill response plan in there, recommend adding admiralty and good Samaritan laws to the appendix. Have there been any studies on Upper Kuskokwim impacts from barges, or monitoring of impacts on breeding grounds that we can look at? • Debbie: I am concerned with the barge waves. I have met barges between McGrath and Georgetown, and on a couple instances had to pull over and pray the boat didn't get swamped. There is no way a person can drift if a barge is in the area. • Nathan: Every time barges come by here in the bay, there are so many seagulls and they kill so many fish. I'm concerned about salmon and other fish that are coming upriver, barges kill a lot of fish with their big props. Like Mark was saying, during fishing times can we limit traffic?
Next Steps	• Share your comments and recommendations related to the Barge Communication Plan by March 27. • The Plan will be updated, considering your input and shared with the DATROC for review, from there it will be shared back with the SCAC and then posted to Let's Talk Donlin.