

Eklutna Hydroelectric Project Year 2 Study Results

Recreation TWG Meeting
March 29, 2023



Recreation Study Team

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Recreation Study

Goals

- Quantify the current types, frequencies, and locations of recreational use in the Project area
- Areas of key interest included but were not limited to:
 - Hiking, walking, running
 - Biking
 - Horseback Riding
 - ATV/OHV use
 - Boating/kayaking
 - Fishing
 - Hunting
 - Climbing & Mountaineering
 - Camping
 - Scenic Viewing
 - Cross-country skiing
 - Dog mushing
 - Skijoring
 - Alpine/Backcountry Skiing
 - Snowmachining

Recreation Study

Key Areas

- Eklutna Tailrace Day-Use Fishing Access Site & adjacent Knik River
- Lower Eklutna River (Thunderbird Falls area west to Knik Arm)
- Chugach State Park Managed areas:
 - Thunderbird Falls Trail & trailhead parking lot
 - Campgrounds (Eklutna Lake Campground & Group side near AWWU Tunnel)
 - Public Use Cabins: Yuditnu Creek Cabin, Cokanee Cabin, Serenity Falls Hut
 - Eklutna Lake Day Use Area, boat launch, parking lots
 - Trails: Eklutna Lake Trail, Twin Peaks Trail, Bold Ridge Trail, East Fork, and & social trails that access backcountry

Recreation Study

Methods

- Chugach State Park Data: parking lot pay stations, cabin rentals, campground reservations/fees
- ADFG: harvest and fishing reports, hunting tags
- Primary Data Collection:
 - Intercept Surveys (3 sites, 4 days at each site)
 - Online Interactive Comment Map
 - Online Survey
 - Native Village of Eklutna Survey on recreation and subsistence uses in lower river
 - Calls and coordination with equipment rental, touring and guiding companies



Recreation Study

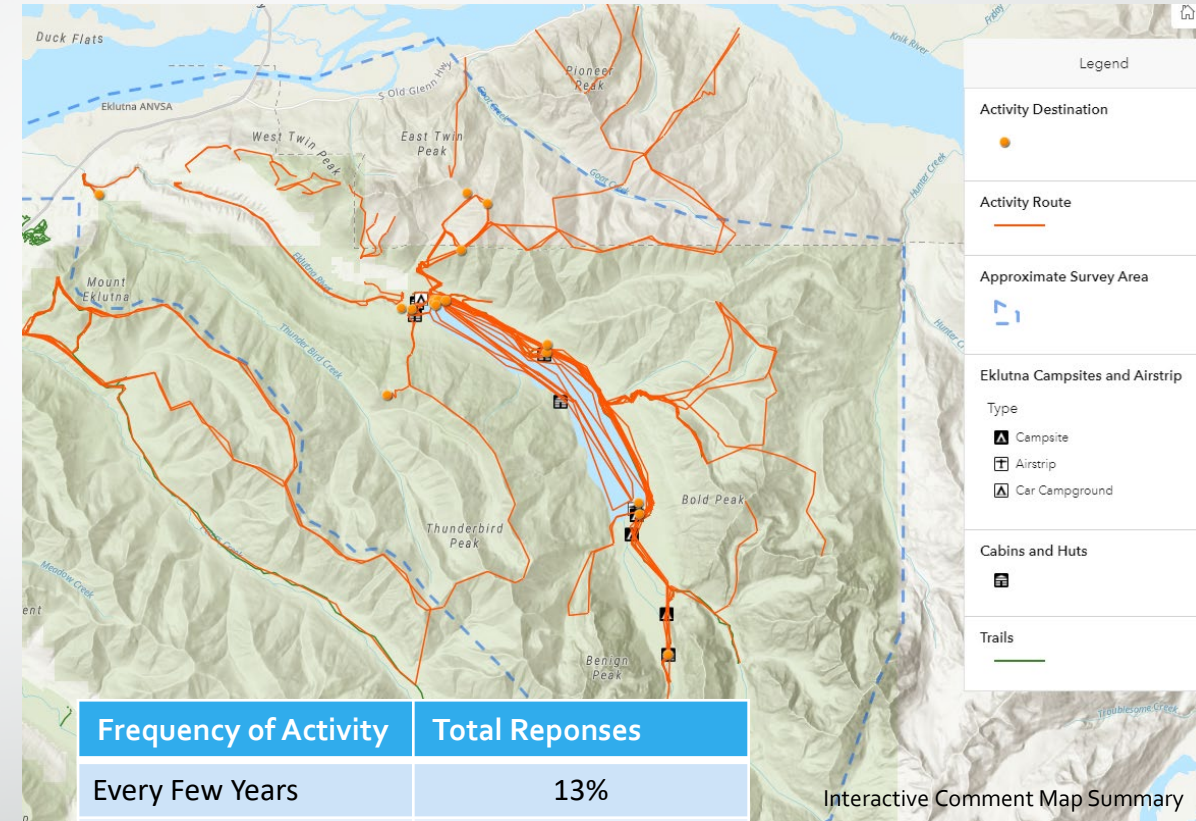
Participation

- Online Survey: 283 responses
- Interactive Map: 77 comments
- Intercept Survey: 127 participants
- Recreational Business Operations: 5 survey responses
- Traffic Counts at Tailrace, Thunderbird Falls and Eklutna Lake Recreation Area



Recreation Study Results

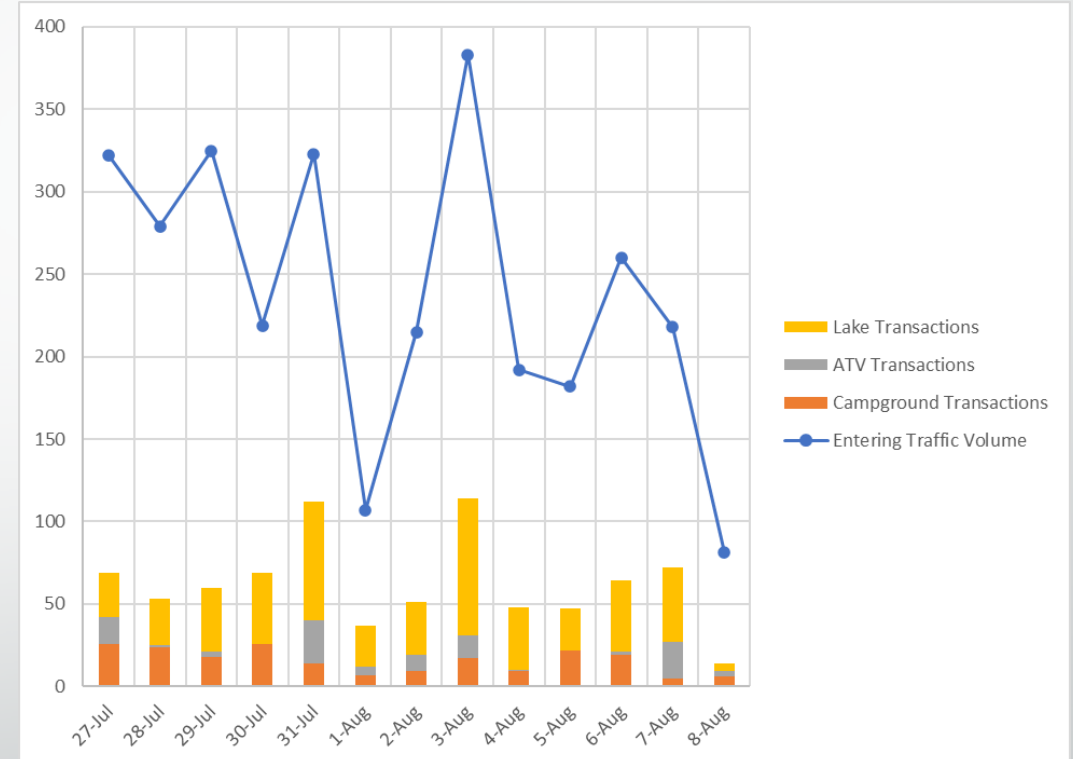
- WHERE: Eklutna Lakeside Trail was most frequently reported destination**
 - Used as primary or connection to other destinations
 - 2019 MOA Trail Traffic Counter averaged 200 pedestrians per day
 - Twin Peaks Trail, Public Use Cabins and Campgrounds were also highly reported destinations
- WHAT: Hiking, walking and/or running was most selected primary activity**
 - Biking, scenic view and leisure** were next more popular activities at Eklutna Lake Rec Area + Thunderbird Falls
 - Fishing** was the most selected primary activity at the Tailrace
- WHEN: Summer season had the most reported activity**



Frequency of Activity	Total Responses
Every Few Years	13%
Once a Year	11%
A Few Times Per Year	46%
Monthly	10%
Other	20%

Recreation Study Results

- CSP Fee Station Transactions & Traffic Counts:
 - 26% of Total Traffic in Eklutna Lake Recreation Area paid at a fee station
 - Thunderbird Falls: 22.3% of total traffic paid at the fee station
 - **97,254** estimated vehicles visiting **CSP Eklutna Lake Rec Area + Thunderbird Falls** in FY 2022
 - **23,823** estimated vehicles visit **Tailrace** from June 8 through August 23, 2022



Comparison of CSP Eklutna Lake Recreation Area Fee Station Transactions and Traffic Counts, 7/27/22 – 8/8/22

Recreation Study Results

- MOA Traffic Engineering Trail Counts
 - 2019 Counts at **Eklutna Lakeside Trail**: annual average daily traffic of **200 peds per day**
 - Summer: 407 peds/day, 230 AADT
 - Winter: 22 peds/day, 160 AADT
 - 2020 Counts at **Thunderbird Falls Trail**: annual average daily traffic of **370 peds per day**
 - Summer: 888 peds/day, 670 AADT
 - Winter: 115 peds/day, 60 AADT



Recreation Study

Results

- Recreational Business Operators
 - 5 Businesses provided data as requested:
 - two guiding companies, one photo tour company, Outdoor Adventure Program (JBER), and Premier Alaska Tours
 - Premier Alaska Tours partners with Lifetime Adventures, almost all Premier customers who go to Eklutna Lake use guiding services or equipment rentals from Lifetime Adventures

Company	Estimated Total Customers per year
Alaska Guide Collective (Ice Climbing)	5 to 15
Alaska Photo Treks (photography day tours w/ aurora focus)	NA (do not keep records for this area specifically)
Outdoor Adventure Program (guided trips for military service members + families)	50 to 150 (49 in 2022, 159 in 2021)
Premier Alaska Tours (transportation for ship/tour travelers)	500
Vast Alaska (archery sheep hunting guides)	1 every few years

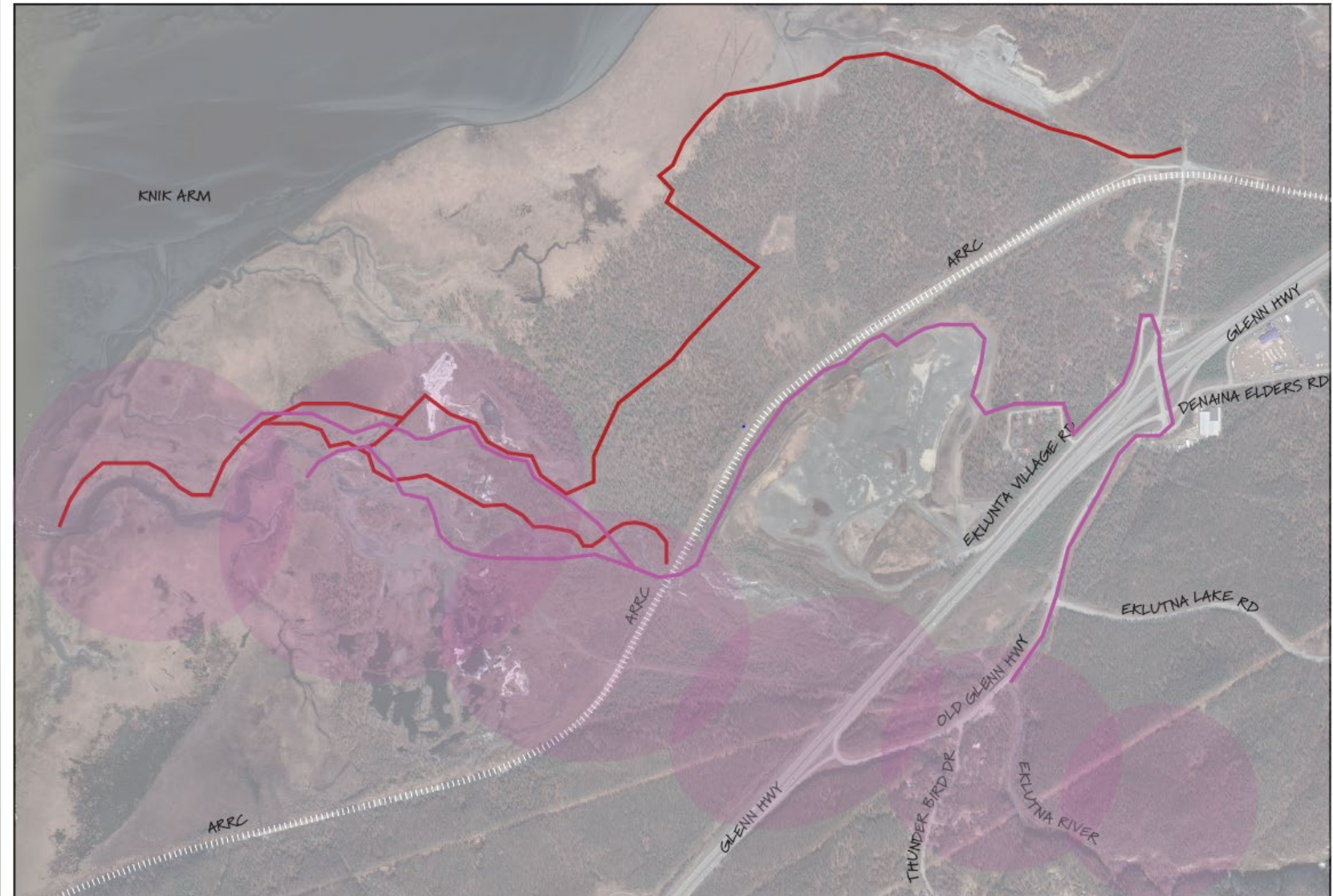
Recreation Study

EKLUTNA RECREATION STUDY 

Subsistence Activities

Recreation Activities

- NVE Survey: hard copies with prepaid envelopes distributed via NVE at Village Council
- 1 response received



Recreation Study

Results

- Conservative assumptions were used for projections.
- Generalized carpool rate of 50% across study methods and assumed only 2 people per carpooling vehicle for total estimates:
 - **Minimum of 145,881 recreators** partook in activities within **CSP fee areas in FY 2022** and drove a personal or rental vehicle to get there.
 - **Minimum of 31,447 recreators** partook in activities at the **Tailrace between June 8 and August 23, 2022**
 - ADF&G estimates 13,485 angler days at Tailrace in 2018
- Businesses Operating in Project Area overwhelmingly provide services to Out-of-Town/Non-Residents visitors
- Accessibility + variety of activities are key reasons the Project Area is a significant recreation destination





Questions?