

Eklutna Hydroelectric Project

1991 Fish and Wildlife Agreement Update



Welcome

While Southcentral Alaska was getting buried in snow this past winter, our project team was busy analyzing data. Wrapping up the two-year field study program, there was a lot of work to do drafting the Year 2 study reports which included terrestrial wildlife studies, a recreation study, and a cultural resources study just to name a few. Additionally, there was some winter field work including winter flow analysis and ice thickness studies.

As we move through the next phase of alternatives analysis and, later this year, drafting a proposed fish and wildlife program, we continue to keep all of the latest information and documents on our website. To those new to this discussion, or those just needing a refresher on what has been done over the past four years, please check out the project website at www.eklutnahydro.com.

This newsletter is published quarterly to provide information and updates regarding the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project and the owners' compliance with the 1991 Fish & Wildlife Agreement. You can subscribe or unsubscribe using the Contact Us box at www.eklutnahydro.com.

Winter field work and study reporting

Based on the study results, the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project owners have committed to returning water to the Eklutna River. When developing a future flow regime for the river, several things need to be considered including winter rearing habitat for juvenile salmon. To help determine the right winter flow levels that will promote favorable ice conditions, the project team conducted some additional field work this winter measuring surface ice thickness at specific points in the river. This data was used to calibrate a model that can predict ice conditions in the river at various flow levels.

In addition to winter rearing habitat, the project team is also evaluating summer rearing habitat for juvenile salmon in the Eklutna River using the 1D fish habitat model that was developed

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Winter field work and study reporting

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last year. However, specific reaches of the Eklutna River could not be evaluated as part of the 1D fish habitat modeling effort due to hydraulic complexity, channel instability, and access issues. To fill these information gaps, the project team collected new LiDAR data and developed 2D fish habitat models for those reaches of the river. The preliminary 2D modeling results were presented to the Aquatics Technical Work Group (TWG) on February 13, and a draft tech memo was distributed to the Aquatics Technical Work Group (TWG) for review and comment.

The project team also spent the winter drafting study reports for all the other studies that were conducted last year, including sediment transport modeling, fish habitat surveys, stream gaging, water quality sampling, wetlands mapping, wildlife surveys, recreational use surveys, and cultural resource surveys. The draft Year 2 study reports were distributed to all four TWGs on March 24 for review and comment. During the week of March 27, the project owners held a series of TWG meetings to provide a broad overview of the study results, answer questions, and review next steps.



Measuring ice thickness



The Eklutna Dam

Alternatives analysis underway

Now that the two-year study program is coming to an end, the final study results will be utilized to develop a program that protects, mitigates damages to, and enhances fish and wildlife habitat. The hydro project owners are working closely with stakeholders to conduct a comprehensive analysis comparing the benefits, costs, and impacts of a wide range of alternatives.

The first alternatives analysis meeting was held on April 6 with the hydro project owners, members of all four TWGs, and parties to the 1991 Fish and Wildlife Agreement in attendance. At the meeting, the project team presented the potential flow regimes and reviewed how the Cost Effectiveness and Incremental Cost Analysis model works. Attendees were then invited to submit comprehensive alternatives for analysis. The Native Village of Eklutna, Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Chugach State Park, National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Trout Unlimited, Hydro Project Owners, and The Conservation Fund all submitted comprehensive alternatives for evaluation.

The project team has since evaluated each alternative utilizing the models that were developed during the study program. The first round of results was presented and discussed at the second alternatives analysis meeting held on May 17.



April 6 Alternatives Analysis meeting at the Loussac Library

Ongoing stakeholder engagement

Stakeholder engagement continues to be a key to the success of this project. Members of our project team gave an update to the American Water Resources Association conference in Anchorage in March. Samantha Owen, of McMillen, presented on implementation of the 1991 Fish & Wildlife Agreement, and Kathy Dube, the Geomorphology and Sediment Transport Study Lead, talked about geomorphology and sediment transport in the Eklutna River. Carrie Ann Brophil, of the Native Village of Eklutna, gave a presentation on restoration of the Eklutna River.

On March 16, an update was given to the Anchorage Assembly's Utility & Enterprise Committee as part of the quarterly updates schedule. The committee heard about the process for draft Year 2 study reports, winter field work, and the alternatives analysis process launching in April.



American Water Resources Association conference

Website revamp

After four years of work and study, it's time to refresh our project website. In the coming months, look for updated features including more user-friendly buttons highlighting the latest news or announcements, availability of new documents, a new project logo, public meeting notices, and more. We will keep all of the material already uploaded as there is a wealth of information for stakeholders, while welcoming new users and those interested in the project.



March 16 update to the Anchorage Assembly

Next steps

After the second alternatives analysis meeting, stakeholders have the opportunity to revise and resubmit their alternatives based on the first round of results. The project team will then evaluate the revised alternatives and present the second round of results at the third alternatives analysis meeting on June 14. Subsequent meetings will be held in both July and August to continue the alternatives analysis. The project team will then draft a proposed fish and wildlife program and distribute it to stakeholders for review and comment in October 2023. Public meetings will be held in January 2024. The final proposed fish and wildlife program will be submitted to the Governor in April 2024 for review and approval.

Project timeline - at a glance



