

# Eklutna Hydroelectric Project

## 1991 Fish and Wildlife Agreement Update



*Project owners and stakeholders tour the Eklutna Hydro dam in August.*

## Welcome

Three years ago we launched this newsletter to keep interested parties informed of the progress of the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project and compliance with the 1991 Fish & Wildlife Agreement. We introduced the newsletter after initially holding meetings with agencies and a wide group of stakeholders in March 2019, comparing notes and research, and conducting the first year of field work in the summer of 2020.

Each quarter we have updated you on the significant milestones of the project and shared information about studies and findings as we've worked together on this effort followed by Alaskans and interested organizations and individuals outside of the 49th state.

Since our last newsletter in May, we have completed the alternatives analysis process, met multiple times with the signatories to the 1991 Agreement, the Native Village of Eklutna, and several other organizations involved over the past several years. We also released the draft program on Oct. 27. The details of those efforts are in this edition.

For a complete record of this process, please refer to [www.eklutnahydro.com](http://www.eklutnahydro.com). To subscribe or unsubscribe to this newsletter, use the contact us box on that website.

## Alternatives analysis

In April of this year, the hydro project owners kicked off a comprehensive alternatives analysis process with all interested stakeholders, including the Alaska Department of Fish and Game, Chugach State Park, National Marine Fisheries Services, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, Native Village of Eklutna, Eklutna, Inc., Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility, Trout Unlimited, and The Conservation Fund. The purpose of this analysis was to compare the costs, benefits, and impacts of a wide range of alternatives.

Early in the alternatives analysis process, the hydro project owners made a commitment to release water into the Eklutna River as part of the future Fish and Wildlife Program. Based on this commitment, the primary considerations during the alternatives analysis were determining how to release water

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# Alternatives analysis

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into the Eklutna River and how much water to release for both year-round base flows and periodic channel maintenance flows.

Participants were invited to submit comprehensive alternatives for analysis. Alternatives varied based on the selected infrastructure and flow regime. The costs, benefits, and impacts of each alternative were then evaluated using the models that were developed during the study program. The results were presented at subsequent meetings, after which participants were allowed to revise and resubmit their alternatives.

The alternatives analysis process consisted of monthly stakeholder meetings from April through August. At the end of this process, each participant was asked to submit their preferred alternative based on the analysis results. These results are available on the project website.



*Alternatives Analysis meeting held in June at the Loussac Library.*

# Draft Fish and Wildlife Program

On October 27, 2023, the hydro project owners distributed their Draft Fish and Wildlife Program to the parties to the 1991 Agreement and the Native Village of Eklutna for review and comment. The hydro project owners have proposed what the results of the study program, consultation, and alternatives analysis support as the most cost-effective alternative to significantly improve fish habitat in the Eklutna River, which will indirectly benefit wildlife in the area, while retaining the important operational and energy benefits of the Project. The Draft Program includes the following:

- In the proposed solution, the hydro project owners would utilize the excess capacity in the existing AWWU tunnel to release year-round base flows from Eklutna Lake into Eklutna River at the AWWU portal valve location approximately one mile downstream from the dam. This will water 11 of 12 miles of the Eklutna River and will benefit all four species that currently spawn in the lower river. The year-round base flows will vary seasonally between 27 cfs in the winter and 40 cfs in the summer. Several engineering measures, including flow restrictions, will be put in place to avoid any impacts to the water supply.
- The hydro project owners will also conduct channel maintenance flows 3 out of every 10 years. Channel maintenance flows will be ramped up to 220 cfs over the first 6 hours, be held at 220 cfs for 24 hours, and then be ramped back down over 52 hours.



*Project update provided to Gov. Dunleavy staff and the Alaska Energy Authority in July.*

- The Project Owners will construct eight new bridges over the Eklutna River on the AWWU access road to replace the existing ford crossings and ensure that AWWU has reliable access to maintain their pipeline.
- A Monitoring and Adaptive Management Program will be implemented to manage the inherent uncertainty associated with modeling of complex natural systems by allowing for continued knowledge to be gained and adjustments to the proposed measures to be considered. The complete draft program document is available at: [www.eklutnahydro.com](http://www.eklutnahydro.com).



# Ongoing stakeholder engagement

It was a busy summer and fall with multiple meetings and briefings with project partners, elected representatives, and the boards of directors of both Chugach Electric Association (Chugach) and Matanuska Electric Association (MEA). In June, the Chugach Board met with the Native Village of Eklutna (NVE) Tribal Council; in July the Anchorage Assembly received its quarterly update and the project team briefed members of the Governor's staff and the Alaska Energy Authority. In August, the team had the unique opportunity to brief Rep. Mary Peltola when she was home for the congressional break; and the MEA Board met with the NVE Tribal Council, including a trip to the Eklutna dam.

Stakeholder engagement will continue to be a focus as we meet in December with signatories to the 1991 Agreement and NVE to discuss the draft program. Public meetings will be held in January in both Anchorage and the Mat-Su Valley to gather comments on the draft program. Dates, times and meeting locations are provided on the next page.



*Aug. 30 briefing in Anchorage for Rep. Mary Peltola and staff.*



*Chugach Board of Directors and Native Village of Eklutna Tribal Council met on June 29, 2023.*



*MEA's Board of Directors and the NVE Tribal Council held a joint meeting in August.*



*Project update to the Anchorage Assembly Enterprise & Utility Committee in July.*

# Next Steps

The hydro project owners will meet with the parties to the 1991 Agreement and NVE in December to discuss their comments on the Draft Program and to attempt to resolve any differences. Open house public meetings will be held in January in both Palmer and Anchorage with two meeting times at each location to accommodate different schedules for those that would like to participate. Details for each meeting are listed below.



- Tuesday, January 16 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and 6 p.m. to 8 p.m. – Palmer Community Center (Depot) **Located at: 610 S Valley Way, Palmer, AK**
- Wednesday, January 17 from 2 p.m. to 4 p.m. and 6 to 8:00 p.m. at The Arctic Rec Center in Anchorage. **Located at: 4855 Arctic Blvd, Anchorage, AK**

Members of the public can also submit comments to [info@eklutnahydro.com](mailto:info@eklutnahydro.com). After the public meetings, the hydro project owners will compile and summarize all comments received and revise the Fish and Wildlife Program as appropriate. A Final Proposed Program will be submitted to the Governor in April 2024. The parties to the 1991 Agreement will then have 60 days to submit written comments or alternative recommendations to the Governor, then the hydro project owners will have 30 days to submit written responses to the Governor.

Per the 1991 Agreement, the Governor is then required to review all available information while giving equal consideration to 1) the purposes of efficient and economical power production, 2) energy conservation, 3) the protection, mitigation of damage to, and enhancement of fish and wildlife, 4) the protection of recreation opportunities, 5) municipal water supplies, 6) the preservation of other aspects of environmental quality, 7) other beneficial public uses, and 8) requirements of State law. The schedule calls for the Governor to issue the Final Fish and Wildlife Program by October 2024.

## Project timeline - at a glance



### 2019

Initiate consultation process, develop a website, gather existing information, conduct site reconnaissance, and develop a long-term plan.

### 2020

Retain technical experts, develop study plans in consultation with state and federal agencies and any interested parties, and submit study plan schedule to the Governor for approval.

### 2021-2022

Conduct studies as described in the study plans (assuming 2 years of studies), develop a draft Summary of Results, and distribute to stakeholders for review and comment.

### 2023-2024

Develop a draft F&W Program, distribute to stakeholders for review and comment, conduct public meetings, resolve any disagreements, and submit proposal to the Governor.



