

Eklutna F&W Agreement Quarterly Update Call Meeting Minutes

Date: 11/15/2019
Time: 10:00 AM
Location: Conference Call

Attendees: Paul Risse (Chugach Electric), Mike Brodie (Chugach Electric), Tony Zellers (MEA), Traci Bradford (MEA), Eugene Ori (ML&P), Steve Padula (Hydro Regulatory Services), Samantha Owen (McMillen Jacobs), Mike Walton (ADNR), Alex Prosak (AWWU), Kurt Hensel (State Parks), Ron Benkert (ADFG), Jon Kirsch (ADFG), Brad Meiklejohn (The Conservation Fund), Eric Booton (Trout Unlimited), Marc Lamoreaux (Native Village of Eklutna), Carrie Brophil (Native Village of Eklutna), Sean Eagan (NMFS), Sean McDermott (NMFS)

Agenda Topics and Discussion

1. Welcome and Introductions

2. Meeting Purpose

- At the meeting in July, Sean Eagan suggested quarterly update calls, and attendees agreed that was a good idea
- This call is the first of quarterly updates

3. Project Website

- The owners launched the project website in early August (www.eklutnahydro.com)
- The website provides information on the efforts being undertaken by the project owners to comply with the 1991 Agreement and to develop a Fish & Wildlife Program
- Project updates and final documents will be added to the site as they are developed
- Additions to the site since it was initially launched include:
 - New reference documents
 - Additional FAQs
 - Related Links page
- The project owners are currently developing a land ownership figure in coordination with Eklutna Inc, which will also be posted to the website
- Brad Meiklejohn raised concerns about the website, including his concern that the website was not developed collaboratively and that he thinks it's biased towards the owners' perspective
 - Paul Risse responded that the 1991 Agreement clearly outlines the responsibilities of the parties to the agreement, and that the responsibility is on the owners to conduct the studies and develop a fish and wildlife program.

Therefore, the website will continue to be managed by the owners. Paul welcomed any feedback and stated that the owners are committed to consulting with the agencies and interested parties throughout this process.

- Samantha Owen clarified that the website is meant to be more of a means for distributing documents and to provide updates on the owners' progress. An Initial Information Package (IIP) will be developed during the first quarter of 2020, which will contain a compilation of all the existing information and studies acquired to date. The agencies and interested parties will have a chance to review and comment on the draft IIP.
- It was suggested that the FAQs page of the website be removed. Samantha clarified that the FAQs are intended to provide available information on the fish and wildlife agreement, project ownership, operation, facilities, etc. that may help people interested in the fish and wildlife effort understand the context of the upcoming activity. It is not intended to pose questions for which information may be developed during the course of the investigations.

4. Site Reconnaissance

- The owners' team conducted a site reconnaissance during the last week in August (also attended by NMFS and AWWU)
- The trip report is available on the project website (Documents page under Final Documents)
- Day 1 focused on the upper river; Day 2 focused on the lower river
- Samantha reviewed some of the major observations from the site reconnaissance, which are detailed in the trip report
 - There was one area in the canyon reach with a significant increase in gradient that created a short falls due to what looked like a recent landslide. Ron Benkert clarified that it was not caused by a recent landslide and had been there since he first walked the river in 2016. ADFG considers it a fish barrier, and that juvenile salmon have recently been observed in the river up to that point. ADFG is currently working to extend the designated anadromous reach accordingly. ADFG is also working with Eklutna Inc. to possibly remove the fish barrier in order to promote fish passage further upstream.
- Sean Eagan and Kurt Hensel asked about the 30"x30" gate located in the existing Eklutna Hydro project dam structure. Samantha and Paul provided some clarifying information:
 - It is located at the base of the spillway
 - Its original purpose was to drain the "pond" created on the lake side of the dam during the winter (low water conditions)
 - Currently it is only opened once annually for maintenance purposes
 - The rated discharge of the valve is about 190 cfs when the reservoir is at the spillway crest
- Marc Lamoreaux and Carrie Brophil stated that the Native Village of Eklutna completed a habitat survey of the entire river over the summer and committed to sharing the final report as soon as they're done with the analysis.
- Eric Booton asked if there are any future site reconnaissance trips planned. Samantha responded that there are currently no additional site reconnaissance trips planned, but that some may occur as part of the study planning phase.

- Brad Meiklejohn asked if the utilities had deliberately operated the project to prevent it from spilling when the reservoir level was approaching the spillway crest in September. Paul responded that the owners operated the Eklutna Hydro project in the same prudent manner they always do, and that the owners have a responsibility to operate the project to maximize power production and prevent uncontrolled spill events.

5. Aerial imagery/videography/LiDAR

- Chugach met with Quantum Spatial to discuss potential options. This work is currently scheduled for spring 2020.
- AWWU worked with the Anchorage Police Department (APD) this fall in obtaining aerial drone footage. The drone flyover was successful; however, the final product is on hold due to problems obtaining the necessary software to complete the imagery. AWWU has no projection on when the product will be complete and able to be shared with the project team.

6. 2020 Schedule

- Rough schedule:
 - Q1 – Develop Initial Information Package (IIP) and send draft to the agencies and interested parties for review and comment
 - End of Q1 – In-person meeting with agencies and interested parties to review the IIP, start identifying information needs, establish any technical work groups
 - Q2 / Q3 – Engage with the technical work groups and develop a draft and final study plan
 - End of Q3 – Submit final study plan to the Governor
- Ron Benkert asked about conducting an alternatives analysis for potential mitigation measures. Steve responded that yes, various alternatives would be considered during the development/review of the Initial Information Package in order to guide the scope of the study program. The actual evaluation of alternatives would be based on both existing information and new information to be developed.
- Sean Eagan asked if the owners intended to have ongoing discussions regarding flow releases. Samantha responded that yes, the owners would discuss and study the potential for flow releases as part of the study planning and study execution phases.