

# Eklutna F&W Agreement Quarterly Update Call Meeting Minutes

Date: 2/13/2020  
Time: 1:00 PM  
Location: Conference Call

**Attendees:** Paul Risse (Chugach Electric), Mike Brodie (Chugach Electric), Julie Hasquet (Chugach Electric), Tony Zellers (MEA), Traci Bradford (MEA), Steve Padula (Hydro Regulatory Services), Samantha Owen (McMillen Jacobs), Alex Prosak (AWWU), Brad Meiklejohn (The Conservation Fund), Eric Booton (Trout Unlimited), Austin Williams (Trout Unlimited), Marc Lamoreaux (Native Village of Eklutna), Carrie Brophil (Native Village of Eklutna), Sean Eagan (NMFS), Doug Cooper (USFWS), Michael Knapp (ADOT&PF), Dean Day (CIAA), Ryan Wagner (CIAA), Jenny-Marie Stryker (The Alaska Center), Sara Meitl (OHA), Ron Benkert (ADFG)

## Agenda Topics and Discussion

- 1. Overview of the Anchorage Assembly Worksession on 2/12/2020 regarding the Eklutna River**
  - The purpose of the worksession was to discuss matters related to restoring water to the Eklutna River so that the Assembly could get a comprehensive update from involved parties and better understand the efforts underway.
  - There were five speakers:
    - Aaron Leggett (Native Village of Eklutna) presented on the resolution passed by NVE in October 2019 supporting, authorizing, and advancing the restoration and enhancement and cultural value of the Eklutna River ecosystem.
    - Heather Hansen (U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service) presented on the USFWS 2019 Upper Eklutna River Preliminary Fish Habitat Flow Assessment.
    - Ron Benkert (Alaska Department of Fish and Game) presented on ADFG's recent work in the lower Eklutna River related to the lower dam removal.
    - Rick Sinnott (Watershed and Natural Resources Advisory Commission) presented on the resolution passed by the WNRAC in October 2019 regarding restoration of the Eklutna River.
    - Mike Brodie (Chugach Electric Association) presented on the 1991 Fish and Wildlife Agreement and the efforts being undertaken by the project owners to comply with the agreement.
  - A recording of the worksession is available on the municipality's website at: <http://www.muni.org/Residents/Pages/MuniMeetings.aspx>

- Jenny-Marie Stryker (The Alaska Center) noted that the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA) is also a party to the agreement and asked if they are getting updates on the project. Mike stated that Eugene Ori is representative for Municipal Light and Power (ML&P). The project owners also clarified that once Chugach acquired ML&P, MOA would retain their share of the project and appoint a new representative.
- Austin Williams (Trout Unlimited) stated that the utilities appear to be looking for reasons for why they cannot release flushing flows instead of looking for solutions. Austin expressed his frustration with this and asked what the utilities are currently doing to work towards flushing flow releases. Paul Risse (Chugach Electric) responded that the utilities are following the 1991 Fish and Wildlife Agreement which includes study planning in 2020, implementation of the study plan in 2021 (and 2022 if needed), and then development of a Fish and Wildlife Program.
- Brad Meiklejohn (The Conservation Fund) echoed Austin's frustrations with the utilities. Samantha Owen (McMillen Jacobs Associates) clarified that the utilities have been working to identify the hurdles associated with the intentional release of flows (including Section 7 of the 1991 Agreement, the current water rights, liability for potential damage to downstream infrastructure and property, potential impacts to existing fish habitat, the desired timing of flushing flows related to salmon spawning, and challenges associated with the current reservoir operations and infrastructure) so that the owners can start to work through them.
- Brad stated that many of the hurdles identified by the utilities, such as sediment transport and potential impacts to downstream infrastructure and existing fish habitat, were already overcome as part of the lower dam removal project. Samantha clarified that the sediment transport study by HDR was conducted using the existing flow regime which is what USACE and ADEC based their permit authorizations on. Changing the flow regime would require additional sediment transport analysis which is what the owners are currently working towards.
- Michael Knapp (Alaska Department of Transportation and Public Facilities) stated that during the lower dam removal project, ADOT expressed concern with potential impacts to the highway bridges as a result of the accumulated sediment behind the lower dam being flushed downstream. They had requested that the sediment be removed from the river before the lower dam was removed; however, this was not conducted. Instead, the USACE Section 404 permit requires Eklutna, Inc. to conduct sediment transport monitoring for three years post dam removal. Brad asked if there had been any sediment deposition near the bridges. Michael responded that preliminary results did not show significant deposition near the bridges. Ron Benkert (Alaska Department of Fish and Game) clarified that the preliminary results for the aquatic habitat monitoring being conducted by ADFG did not show significant accrual of sediment at the lowest cross-section below Thunderbird Creek so far. However, this site is above the Old Glenn Highway bridge and the area between the New Glenn Highway bridges and the railroad bridge which is known to be subject to increased deposition. Therefore, the cross-section information for the sediment transport monitoring being collected by Eklutna, Inc. at the bridges would be a better indication of how the channel is reacting to the increased sediment input.

## **2. Status of the Initial Information Package (IIP)**

- McMillen Jacobs is currently drafting the IIP.
- The target schedule is to distribute the Draft IIP to agencies and interested parties for review and comment by late March.
- The Draft IIP will be uploaded to the project website for easy access.
- The Reference Documents section on the project website will also be updated to include all of the reference documents that were used in development of the IIP for easy access.
- A meeting with agencies and interested parties is scheduled for April to review preliminary comments on the Draft IIP, agree on information needs, and establish one or more technical workgroups for study planning.
- Samantha stated that she would send out a doodle poll with potential dates/times and pick the date/time that works for the most people.

## **3. Review the preliminary schedule for 2020**

- The owners are moving forward with plan to acquire aerial imagery, videography, and LiDAR. This is currently scheduled to occur in May.
- A schedule for the study planning effort in 2020 will be included in Section 2 of the Draft IIP, including dates for in-person meetings so people can start to plan ahead.

## **4. Any updates on ongoing studies/information gathering by others?**

- Ron gave a brief updated on the status of the habitat monitoring effort being conducted by ADFG on behalf of Eklutna, Inc. as part of the lower dam removal project. He also stated that he had found some additional sampling data and would share it with the owners.