Eklutna Hydroelectric Project

1991 Fish and Wildlife Agreement Update

Welcome

The arrival of summer means our teams are back in the field and year 2 studies have begun. This is the sixth issue of the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project newsletter, and we are pleased to be able to continue with quarterly updates on the progress of the project.

In this issue, we are highlighting the work done on year 1 study reporting and year 2 study planning, including some of the work planned for the rest of this study season. Thank you to the many stakeholders and technical experts who are supporting this effort and adding valuable insight and information to the process.

This newsletter is published quarterly to provide information and updates regarding this long-term project. If you would like to subscribe or unsubscribe, please use the Contact Us box at **www.eklutnahydro.com**.

Study reporting & planning

The draft year 1 study reports and draft year 2 study plans were distributed to the four Technical Working Groups (TWG), the parties to the 1991 Agreement, and other key stakeholders on February 11. The deadline to provide comments to the project team was March 11. We received comments from the following entities:

- Native Village of Eklutna (NVE)
- Alaska Department of Fish and Game (ADFG)
- Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC)
- ADNR Office of History and Archaeology (OHA)
- National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS)
- U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS)
- Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU)
- Trout Unlimited (TU)
- The Conservation Fund

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Study reporting & planning

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Canyon reach of the Eklutna River

The project team conducted a series of TWG meetings the week of March 21 to review the substantive comments that warranted further discussion. Many of the comments received centered around the potential for a higher calibration flow in 2022. During the TWG meetings, the project team explained that with the data collected before, during, and after the flow releases last year (with a high flow of approximately 150 cfs) the project team will be able to model potential fish habitat in the river for flows up to approximately 375 cfs with a reasonable degree of certainty. They further explained they will also be able to model the sediment transport in the river for much higher flows (with a lower degree of certainty), which will be noted in the final study reports. Because a higher calibration flow is not necessary for evaluating potential alternatives and the existing infrastructure at the dam does not allow the project owners to conduct a higher flow release under controlled conditions, the project owners have not proposed conducting a higher calibration flow as part of the year 2 study program.

After discussions with the TWGs, the project team revised the year 2 study plans and distributed the proposed final study plans to the parties for concurrence. The three state agencies (ADFG, ADNR, and ADEC) concurred with the proposed scope of work for all the proposed studies. The two federal agencies (NMFS and USFWS) concurred with the proposed scope of work for 10 of the proposed studies but have reserved their concurrence on the proposed year 2 efforts for both the instream flow study and the geomorphology and sediment transport study until modeling results are available later this year. The project team has since finalized both the year 1 study reports and the year 2 study plans which are available on the project website, **www.eklutnahydro.com**.

Community engagement

On June 1, we held our quarterly update with our larger stakeholder group. During the meeting our project team provided an update on year 1 study reporting, year 2 study planning, and early season field work this year. We also reviewed some of the upcoming next steps in the process as well as the overall schedule for development of the future fish and wildlife program. The quarterly update with the Anchorage Assembly's Enterprise & Utility Oversight Committee in May was postponed at the request of the committee chair. We look forward to providing an update in July.

Plans are moving forward for an in-person meeting with the Native Village of Eklutna Traditional Council, project owners, and board members. We are targeting June or July for this opportunity to come together to share thoughts and priorities for the project. A similar meeting was held in Sept. 2020, but the groups have been unable to gather in person since then due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

If you would like our project team to meet with or present to your organization, please contact Julie Hasquet at **Julie_Hasquet@chugachelectric.com**.

June 1 update with stakeholder group

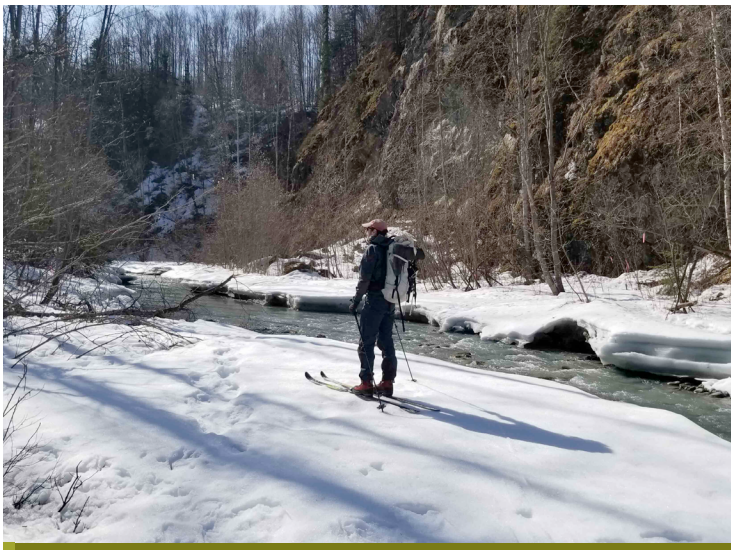
2022 studies underway

After obtaining all of the necessary permits, the project team initiated our second study year by conducting some early season study efforts this spring, including:

- Collecting new LiDAR data, aerial imagery, and geomorphology data to further assess how the flow releases last year moved sediment throughout the river,
- Downloading winter flow data from the stream gages in the river and winter temperature data from the thermistor strings in the lake,
- Deploying motion-sensitive wildlife cameras at key locations to determine what species are using the study area,
- Sampling for moose browse to help assess if moose numbers now are below the habitat carrying capacity, and
- Surveying for migratory waterfowl, shorebirds, and raptors to assess their seasonal use of wetlands and other habitat

A second year of adult salmon surveys will be initiated in late June or early July. Like last year, this effort will be closely coordinated with the Native Village of Eklutna (NVE) in order to avoid duplication of efforts, ensure that our study methods complement each other, and ultimately develop a more robust data set than either team can develop separately. Other study efforts this year that will be closely coordinated with NVE include spawning habitat surveys in the East and West Forks of Eklutna Creek to compliment NVE's planned habitat mapping, and electrofishing in the lower river to complement NVE's minnow trapping program.

Collecting water temperature data



Sampling for moose browse

The project team has also started to develop fish habitat and sediment transport models using the instream flow and geomorphology data that was collected last year. Part of this process included establishing Habitat Suitability Criteria (HSC) curves for the Eklutna River. The project team distributed a draft technical memorandum with recommended HSC curves to the Aquatics TWG in February, met with the Aquatics TWG in April to discuss further, and finalized the HSC curves in May. The project team will meet with the Aquatics TWG again in August after the fish habitat and sediment transport models have been developed to review modeling results and determine what potential mitigation alternatives should be evaluated as part of the engineering feasibility and cost assessment study later this year.

Other studies to be conducted this year include wetlands and wildlife habitat mapping, a cultural resources study looking at historic and archaeological resources in the project area, and a recreation study quantifying recreational use in the project area.

Later this year and early next year, our team will develop individual study reports as well as a comprehensive summary of study results. Using this information, the Project Owners will then draft a proposed fish and wildlife program, distribute it to stakeholders for review and comment, and hold a series of public meetings. The final proposed fish and wildlife program will be submitted to the Governor in early 2024 for review and approval.

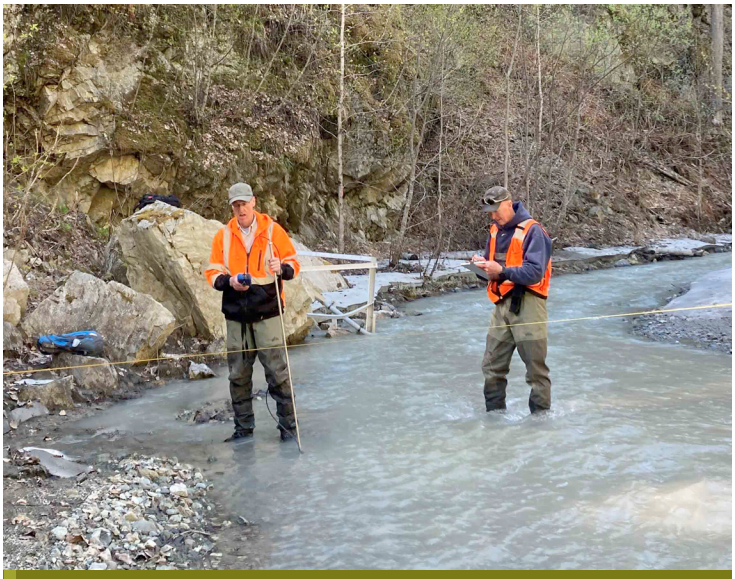
Project team

Chugach's Mike Brodie continues to lead the project on behalf of the project owners. In addition, McMillen Jacobs Associates (MJA) is contracted to assist with meeting the requirements of the 1991 Agreement. Samantha Owen with MJA is the Project Manager and main point of contact for the Project. MJA is also providing study program management, water quality expertise, engineering services, and GIS support. Subcontractors to MJA include:

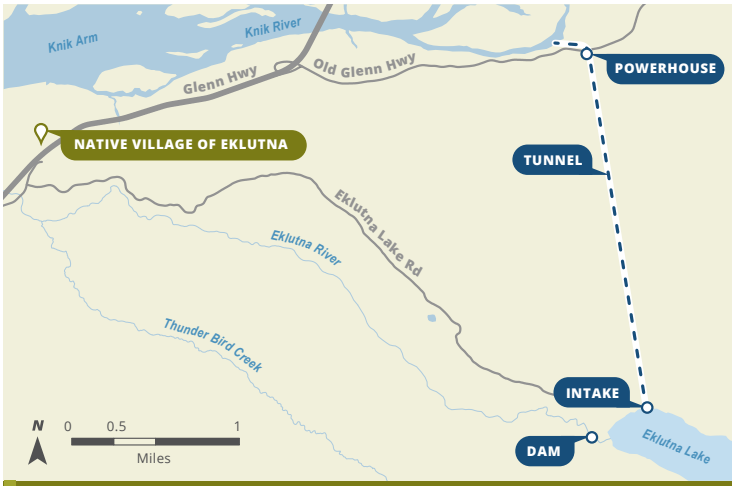
- Hydro Regulatory Services – senior advisory services
- Kleinschmidt Associates – instream flow and fisheries
- Watershed GeoDynamics* – geomorphology and sediment transport
- ABR, Inc.* – terrestrial wildlife and wetlands
- R&M Consultants, Inc.* – recreational use and facilities
- Cultural Resource Consultants* – historic and archaeological resources
- NV5 Geospatial* – aerial imagery and LiDAR data
- Information Insights* – neutral meeting facilitation

The Project Owners have also contracted Joy Huntington with Uqaqti Consulting* to provide support regarding stakeholder outreach and communication.

**Alaska based companies*



Downloading and calibrating flow data



Project Location Map

Project timeline - at a glance

2019 → **2020** → **2021-2022** → **2023-2024**

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.

Road to completion

START

1 **MARCH 2019**
Initiated the required consultation process early by identifying key stakeholders and conducting initial consultation meetings.

2 Developed the project website, conducted an initial site reconnaissance, and compiled relevant existing information.

3 **MARCH 2020**
Distributed the Draft Initial Information Package (IIP) to stakeholders for review and comment.

4 **APRIL 2020**
Stakeholder meeting to answer questions and review comments on the Draft IIP.

5 Developed an information matrix to guide study planning.

6 Established the TWG, conducted preliminary field work, and kicked-off the study planning process.

7 Developed a proposed study program framework and reviewed it with the TWG.

8 **OCTOBER 2020**
Distributed draft study plans to TWG for review and comment.

9 **NOVEMBER 2020**
TWG meeting to review comments on draft study plans

10 **April 2021**
Finalize study plans and send to governor for review.

11 Acquire any required permits for studies and confirm field logistics.

12 Conduct first year of studies and develop draft reports.

13 Review draft study reports with the TWG, then finalize reports for first year of studies.

14 **February 2022**
Study planning for second year of studies.

15 Acquire any required permits for studies and confirm field logistics.

16 Conduct second year of studies and develop draft reports.

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17 Review draft study reports with the TWG, then finalize reports for second year of studies.

18 Develop draft summary of study results and conduct alternatives analysis.

19 Develop draft fish and wildlife program and distribute to stakeholders for review and comment.

20 Conduct public meetings.

21 Review and consider all comments, develop a final proposed fish and wildlife program, and submit to the governor.

22 Parties to the 1991 Agreement have 60 days to submit comments and any alternative recommendations to the governor, then the project owners have 30 days to submit responses to the Governor.

23 **October 2024**
Deadline for governor to issue a final fish and wildlife program.

24 **2027**
Deadline to begin implementation of the final fish and wildlife program.

25 **2032**
Deadline to complete implementation of the final fish and wildlife program.

PROJECT COMPLETION

Completed Tasks