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## **Proposed Final Fish and Wildlife Program sent to Governor** ***Proposal calls for returning water, creating habitat in Eklutna River***

After five years of study, analysis, and stakeholder engagement, Chugach Electric Association, Inc. (Chugach) and Matanuska Electric Association, Inc. (MEA), two of the owners of the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project, have sent the Proposed Final Fish and Wildlife Program (proposed final program) to Governor Mike Dunleavy for his consideration and approval. The submittal follows resolutions approving the proposed final program by the boards of directors of both Chugach and MEA.

The Eklutna Hydroelectric Project is the lowest cost power in Southcentral Alaska. It produces approximately 44% of MEA's renewable generation portfolio and approximately 25% of Chugach's renewable generation portfolio, increases electric grid reliability, and offsets approximately 72,500 metric tons of CO2 equivalent each year. The reservoir also supplies about 90% of the domestic water supply for the Municipality of Anchorage (MOA).

In 1997, Chugach, MEA, and the MOA purchased the hydro project from the federal government. As part of the purchase process, the project owners entered into what's called the 1991 Agreement with the National Marine Fisheries Service, U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, and the State of Alaska to study the project's impact on fish and wildlife.

The 1991 Agreement required the project owners to initiate a consultation process with the signatories by 2022 to develop and propose to the governor a program to protect, mitigate damages to, and enhance fish and wildlife resources impacted by the project. The project owners initiated that process more than three years early in 2019, expanding the consultation process to include not only the parties to the 1991 Agreement, but also the Native Village of Eklutna (NVE), Eklutna, Inc., The Conservation Fund, Trout Unlimited, Alaska Pacific University, and several other stakeholders interested in the project.

Over the past five years, the project owners, working with stakeholders, compiled and summarized all relevant and existing information, identified information gaps, developed study plans, and conducted two years of studies in the Eklutna River basin. A total of 16 environmental and engineering studies were completed along with a comprehensive alternatives analysis to guide the project owners in the development of a draft program.

After the draft program was released on Oct. 27, 2023, the project owners met with the signatories of the 1991 Agreement and with NVE multiple times in an attempt to resolve differences. In January 2024, six public meetings were held in Anchorage, Eagle River, and

Palmer where over 200 people attended and were provided the opportunity to ask questions and submit comments.

After reviewing all of the comments received, the Project Owners made substantive revisions to the program reflecting negotiations with the parties to the 1991 Agreement and NVE, and are submitting the proposed final program to the Governor. The proposed final program includes the following:

- Construction of the Eklutna River Release Facility and establishment of year-round instream flows in the Eklutna River;
- Automation of the existing outlet gate at the dam to provide periodic channel maintenance flows in the Eklutna River;
- Construction of eight new bridges along the Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU) access road to enable AWWU's access to critical infrastructure year-round following the establishment of instream flows;
- Payment to Chugach State Park for lakeside trail repairs;
- Establishment of a Committee to oversee implementation of the Monitoring and Adaptive Management Plan;
- Funding to conduct monitoring studies in the Eklutna River throughout the 35-year program;
- Funding for physical habitat enhancement in the Eklutna River based on the monitoring results;
- Procedures for the Committee to adaptively manage the flow regime in the Eklutna River based on the monitoring results;
- Provisions for banking water in Eklutna Lake and potentially increasing the water budget for instream flows in the future;
- Potential installation of a fixed wheel gate to accommodate higher inflows in the future and/or allow higher channel maintenance flows if needed; and
- Potential installation of upstream and downstream fish passage facilities that meet specific criteria in the plan.

Approval of the Proposed Final Program will enable the Project Owners to implement these significant fish and wildlife measures at the Project, while simultaneously protecting the municipal water supply and continuing to provide firm, low cost, renewable energy to Southcentral Alaska.

The submittal of the proposed final program to Gov. Dunleavy triggers a 60-day comment period for the 1991 Agreement signatories, followed by a 30-day comment period for the owners. The 1991 Agreement, in giving final authority for the mitigation program to the governor, calls for equal consideration to be given to:

- Efficient and economical power production
- Energy conservation
- Fish and wildlife
- The protection of recreational opportunities

- Municipal water supplies
- The protections of other aspects of environmental quality
- Other beneficial public uses
- The requirements of State law

Although representatives of the MOA, through Anchorage Hydropower, have participated at every step in the process required by the 1991 Agreement for the past five years, the MOA is not participating in the submittal to the Governor. In October 2020, as part of the acquisition of Municipal Light & Power by Chugach, the MOA surrendered its voting rights on the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project and the 1991 Agreement matters until the MOA acquires necessary utility managerial and technical expertise that is approved by the Regulatory Commission of Alaska (RCA). That process has not yet occurred, so according to RCA's orders, the Municipality continues to have no voting rights and cannot participate in or delay decisions related to implementation of the 1991 Agreement at this time.

The final program is posted at [www.eklutnahydro.com](http://www.eklutnahydro.com).

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