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Draft Eklutna Fish and Wildlife Program Released ***Proposal calls for returning water, creating habitat in Eklutna River***

After more than four years of study, analysis, and stakeholder engagement, the owners of the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project have released a draft program to protect, mitigate damages to, and enhance fish and wildlife resources impacted by the hydro project, located about 30 miles northeast of downtown Anchorage.

The draft program, along with the accompanying Draft Summary of Study Results, posted at www.eklutnahydro.com, outlines using a new facility to be constructed next to the Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU) portal valve to release water, providing year-round water flows to 11 of 12 miles of the Eklutna River, and higher flows during the summer months when adult salmon are migrating to facilitate fish access into the Eklutna River. It is expected that the flow schedule will be sufficient to promote successful spawning of adult Chinook, Coho, Pink, and Chum salmon. The flow regime in the draft program was selected to achieve a significant amount of potentially available fish habitat in the Eklutna River while balancing costs and other impacts.

In 1997, Chugach Electric Association, Inc., (Chugach) Matanuska Electric Association, Inc., (MEA), and the Municipality of Anchorage (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 first time 25 years later, and then every 35 years following.

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 in 2024. 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, Eklutna, Inc., The Conservation Fund, Trout Unlimited, Alaska Pacific University, and several other stakeholders interested in the project.

Over the past four 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.

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

After an exhaustive analysis process where 36 different alternatives were examined, and 13 given final consideration, the project owners have determined that the alternative of transporting Eklutna Lake water through existing AWWU facilities into a new water release facility on the banks of the Eklutna River is their preferred draft program option. This option establishes instream flows as the foundation of the draft Fish and Wildlife Program and meets the requirements of the 1991 Agreement, while benefitting fish habitat, protecting the public water supply, minimizing impacts to electric utility ratepayers and property taxpayers, retaining carbon reduction benefits, and protecting recreational uses.

The draft program also includes periodic peak flows to maintain downstream fish habitat, construction of eight new bridges for the water supply access road, a funding commitment for monitoring studies, and an adaptive management framework which allows modifications to the instream flow schedule as appropriate.

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.

A comment period follows the release of the draft program, and the project owners will meet with the signatories of the 1991 Agreement and with the Native Village of Eklutna in December in an attempt to resolve differences. In January 2024, public meetings will be held in Anchorage and the Matanuska-Susitna Valley where members of the public can submit comments to the project owners. Recognizing the public comments and December meetings with signatories of the 1991 Agreement and NVE will lead to changes in the proposed plan, the project owners will then submit their Final Proposed Fish and Wildlife Program to the Governor in April 2024. Following another 60-day comment period and project owner responses to public comments, the Governor is expected to make a decision by October 2024.

To date, the project owners have spent approximately \$8 million on the study process required by the 1991 Agreement. The proposed draft Fish and Wildlife Program will cost an estimated \$57 million which includes all capital expense, operations and maintenance, replacement energy, and monitoring. The Eklutna project owners are committed to following through on their commitments under the 1991 Agreement, to their members, ratepayers, other Alaskans, and the fish and wildlife resources impacted by the project.

The draft program will be posted at www.eklutnahydro.com.

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