

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

November 1, 2023

Contacts:

Aaron Leggett, President, Native Village of Eklutna, 907-688-6020, aleggett@anchagemuseum.org

Curtis J. McQueen, Former CEO Eklutna, Inc., Adopted Eklutna Tribal Member, Rasmuson Foundation Board Member, and project consultant, 907-232-7527, mcqueen.curtis@yahoo.com

Austin Williams, Director of Federal Affairs, Trout Unlimited, 907-227-1590, Austin.Williams@tu.org

Brad Meiklejohn, Senior Representative, The Conservation Fund, 907-947-6437, bmeiklejohn@conservationfund.org

Chantal de Alcuaz, Co-Executive Director, The Alaska Center, 907-350-9621, chantal@akcenter.org

Proposed hydroelectric project mitigation plan fails to address harms to Eklutna River

Native Village of Eklutna and supporters propose alternative solution prioritizing salmon

ANCHORAGE, Alaska – The three owners of the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project -- Chugach Electric Association, Matanuska Electric Association and the Municipality of Anchorage -- released a draft [plan](#) on October 27 for mitigating the project's impacts on fish and wildlife in the Eklutna Valley. The Draft Fish and Wildlife Program proposes to route Eklutna Lake water through an existing Anchorage Water and Wastewater Utility (AWWU) pipeline and release it one mile downstream of the Eklutna Lake.

The proposal would return less than 3% of historic flows to the river, and result in over one mile of dry riverbed downstream of the lake, blocking salmon from accessing their spawning grounds in Eklutna Lake and its tributaries. The anticipated costs to implement the proposed draft Program are over \$57 million, paid for by utility rate increases and Anchorage municipality tax increases.

The Native Village of Eklutna and allied organizations involved in the multi-year effort to restore the Eklutna River are advocating for removing the dam at the outlet of Eklutna Lake once renewable energy alternatives are in place, allowing the river to flow naturally. This plan allows the power companies time to transition away from Eklutna hydroelectric power, saves ratepayers and taxpayers money on new infrastructure, and provides an effective and permanent solution that restores the Eklutna watershed.

Aaron Leggett, President, Native Village of Eklutna:

"Eklutna people have endured a dry river for the past 90 years. The AWWU Portal Option does not connect Eklutna Lake to the Eklutna River and does not address the impacts on sockeye salmon that we believe is an important part of the mitigation process. Rather than a short-term fix that only deals with a small part of the problem, we want the river restored to something closer to its natural condition throughout the entire length."

Austin Williams, Director of Federal Relations, Trout Unlimited Alaska:

“Chugach Electric, MEA and the Muni are trying to pull a fast one on Alaskans by claiming they can regain 99% of salmon spawning habitat by releasing just 3% of historic summer flow, which is absurd. What's worse, by leaving a mile of river dry and failing to allow salmon into Eklutna Lake, they aren't even trying to restore the river's sockeye salmon run. Any Alaskan that's fished for sockeye knows they need access to a lake, yet somehow these utilities conducted 2 years of studies and ignored that basic fact.”

Brad Meiklejohn, Senior Representative, The Conservation Fund:

“The Draft Fish and Wildlife Program is unacceptable. We need a real river not an expensive Mickey Mouse substitute. The AWWU Portal Option would be expensive, ineffective for fish and could jeopardize the drinking water system for the entire Municipality of Anchorage. The Conservation Fund and Eklutna Inc. removed the Lower Eklutna River Dam in 2018, saving the power companies and ratepayers \$8 million. Since the power companies won't do it themselves, we are prepared to pay the cost of removing the remaining Eklutna Lake dam to allow the river to flow free again after a century of hydropower abuse.”

Chantal de Alcuaz, Co-Executive Director, The Alaska Center

“The mitigation plan proposed by the utilities would devastatingly commit the Eklutna River to a fractured future. The proposal will not recover the lost sockeye salmon that used to thrive in the river. The owners need to revisit this or risk spending millions of ratepayer dollars on activities that do little to fix the river, do not benefit salmon and do not address the injustices borne by the Native Village of Eklutna. Renewable energy should not compromise wild salmon. We encourage the utilities to take another look and support an option that actually addresses their impacts.”

BACKGROUND:

For the past century, wild salmon have been blocked from accessing significant amounts of their spawning grounds by hydroelectric development on the Eklutna River. The first dam was built in 1929 on the Lower Eklutna River, followed by the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project which dried up the river in 1955. Wild salmon and the people of the Native Village of Eklutna suffered from these developments. Under the terms of their 1997 purchase agreement with the federal government the owners of the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project (Chugach Electric, Matanuska Electric, and the Municipality of Anchorage) are legally required to mitigate their impacts on fish, wildlife, and their habitats.

This press release is issued on behalf of the Eklutna River Restoration Coalition which includes the following groups & entities:

Native Village of Eklutna

The Village of Eklutna is located near the Eklutna River in Southcentral Alaska, serving less than 400 Tribal Members located throughout their traditional territory as they have for centuries, with the majority living in Anchorage. This federally recognized Dena'ina tribe is the only traditional Native village in the Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska. The mission of NVE is to empower Eklutna Village Dena'ina by promoting history, culture, and identity of their sovereign nation, and to assist in the education and well-being of their Tribe. For more information: Eklutna-nsn.gov

The Conservation Fund

The Conservation Fund is a national non-profit organization dedicated to creating solutions that make environmental and economic sense. Founded in 1985, The Conservation Fund has maintained an office in Alaska since 1994 and has worked across the entire state from Ketchikan to Barrow. For more information: conservationfund.org

Trout Unlimited

Trout Unlimited, the nation's oldest and largest cold water fisheries conservation organization, is dedicated to caring for and recovering America's rivers and streams so our children can experience the joy of wild and native trout and salmon. Across the country, TU brings to bear local, regional, and national grassroots organizing, durable partnerships, science-backed policy muscle, and legal firepower on behalf of trout and salmon fisheries, healthy waters and vibrant communities. In Alaska, we work with sportsmen and women to ensure the state's trout and salmon resources remain healthy far into the future through our local chapters and statewide program. Learn more at tu.org

The Alaska Center

The Alaska Center is a non-partisan organization that works to educate, engage, and empower Alaskan voters. At The Alaska Center, it is our belief that the more Alaskans get involved in the decisions affecting our home, the better the future will be for everyone. Learn more at akcenter.org

For more information: eklutnariver.org