



Eklutna River Coalition

December 5, 2023

Anchorage Assembly
Municipality of Anchorage
632 West 6th Avenue
Anchorage, Alaska 99501

RE: Eklutna Draft Fish and Wildlife Program

Dear Members of the Assembly,

We want to take this opportunity to thank you for the chance to discuss the Draft Eklutna Fish and Wildlife Program, for your past and ongoing vocal support of the Native Village of Eklutna, and for our vision for restoring our home river.

As you are well aware, we feel that the draft plan does not uphold the legal obligations of the purchase agreement. Our coalition proposes an alternative plan: **to remove the Eklutna Dam** in the next decade when sufficient renewable energy capacity can replace the Eklutna Hydroelectric Project. The upper Eklutna dam is the single barrier preventing the restoration of the Eklutna River. Put simply, the Draft Fish and Wildlife Program perpetuates a river that cannot support thriving fish runs and is insufficient to mitigate the Project's damage to fish and wildlife. The lake and upper tributary streams *must* connect to the lower river with adequate flow for fish passage. The draft plan does not adequately protect, mitigate, and enhance fish and wildlife and their habitat, and therefore does not meet the legal requirements of the purchase agreement. The enclosed Community Plan to Bring Back the Eklutna provides more details about how we propose to move forward.

We have public support for the restoration of the Eklutna River from a broad group of organizations supported by an even more diverse group of entities and individuals. U.S. Rep. Don Young, who wrote the legislation for the original purchase agreement, came out in 2018 to support the restoration of the Eklutna River. His successor, U.S. Rep. Mary Peltola, also supports restoring the Eklutna River. In addition to the Community Alternative, we have included links to these and other letters and resolutions strongly supporting the restoration of the Eklutna River.

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to return more salmon to the Eklutna watershed, Cook Inlet, and Southcentral Alaska. Thank you again for your time, consideration, and continued support of the Eklutna People and our home river.

Sincerely,

The Eklutna River Coalition Members:



Aaron Leggett, President
Native Village of Eklutna



Nelli Williams, Alaska State Director
Trout Unlimited



Chantal de Alcuaz, Co-Executive Director
The Alaska Center



Brad Meiklejohn, Senior Alaska Representative
The Conservation Fund

A COMMUNITY PLAN TO BRING BACK THE EKLUTNA

Idlughetnu

*Returning Wild Salmon and
Restoring the Home River of the
Native Village of Eklutna*

ENDORSED BY

**NATIVE VILLAGE OF EKLUTNA
THE CONSERVATION FUND
TROUT UNLIMITED
THE ALASKA CENTER**

December 6, 2023

EklutnaRiver.org

THE EKLUNTA RIVER IS TREASURED

The Eklutna River watershed is a beloved place known for its incredible beauty and wide variety of recreation opportunities. It is also home to one of the oldest villages in Southcentral Alaska, the Native Dena'ina Village of Eklutna, which was founded on the banks of the Eklutna River because of its historic runs of Chinook, coho, and sockeye salmon. Since time immemorial, the Peoples of Eklutna were fed by the Eklutna River. Salmon returning by the thousands swam past the village, climbed the canyon, spawned and finished their lives in the lake and its tributaries, returning each year to the people and their home waters.

THE PROBLEM CURRENT PLANS DON'T BRING BACK SALMON, RESTORE THE RIVER, OR REPAIR THE HARM DONE TO INDIGENOUS PEOPLE

View downstream of the Eklutna Dam



For 73 years, the Eklutna River has not been allowed to flow out of the lake, cutting off historic salmon runs and impacting local people. The project operators are legally required to address their impacts. Their proposed plan falls short of what is necessary to fix the river.

The Eklutna Hydroelectric Project, built in 1955, has dried up and cut off the entire Eklutna River from the lake and upper tributaries for 73 years. The Lower Eklutna dam, built in 1929, blocked water and salmon until it was removed in 2018. Despite the legal obligation to reconnect and restore the river, the project owners, Chugach Electric Association, Matanuska Electric Association and the Municipality of Anchorage, have so far refused. Their recently released plan would cost rate payers \$57 million, only release a small amount of water, and continue to leave a mile of river directly below the dam dry. Their plan would maintain a dead-end river and prevent salmon from reaching their spawning grounds in Eklutna Lake and its upper tributaries.

THE SOLUTION A COMMUNITY SUPPORTED ALTERNATIVE

REMOVE THE DAM AND RESTORE THE EKLUTNA RIVER

Instead of wasting ratepayer and taxpayer money on a mitigation plan that won't solve the problems, the Native Village of Eklutna and partner organizations propose simply removing the Eklutna Lake dam, fully reconnecting the river, and returning the water flows needed to support the river and its fisheries. We understand the reliance on this hydroelectric energy source in the near-term and propose removing the Eklutna Lake dam within the next decade, when replacement renewable energy is expected to be available. Two nonprofit partners have agreed to pay for the cost of dam removal.

THE BENEFITS

- Address a century of cultural and environmental neglect.
- Restore the Eklutna River to flow naturally out of Eklutna Lake.
- Re-connect the river to the lake, allowing for the recovery of sockeye, Chinook, and coho salmon, opening up 65% of their available habitat in Eklutna Lake and its upstream tributaries.
- Save utility ratepayers and MOA taxpayers from rate and property tax hikes to pay for a \$57 million plan with few benefits.
- Provide time to transition to new renewable energy projects.
- Ensure the Anchorage drinking water system is not jeopardized.
- Protect popular lakeside trails from erosion caused by fluctuating lake levels.



The Native Village of Eklutna's vision for the recovery of their river is clear: the river once again running free and full of abundant salmon.

The public has overwhelmingly supported recovery of the Eklutna River as an important community asset to Southcentral Alaska.

We have a once-in-a-generation opportunity to bring more salmon back to the Eklutna watershed and upper Cook Inlet.

PLEDGE YOUR SUPPORT FOR EKLUTNA WILD SALMON, LOCAL PEOPLE AND HEALTHY RIVERS.



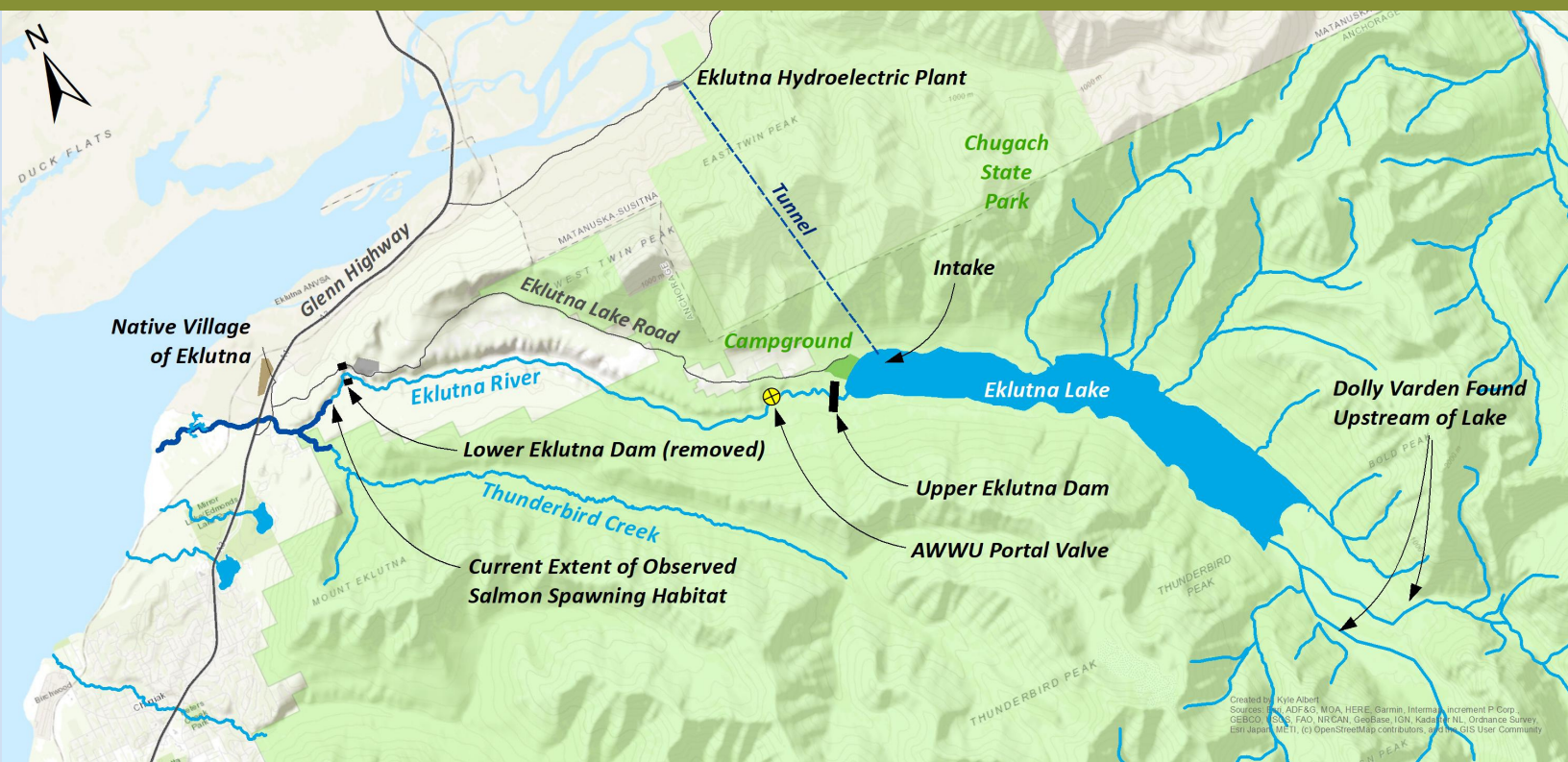
EklutnaRiver.org



“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 to sockeye salmon that gave rise this mitigation process. Rather than a short-term fix that won’t work we want the river restored to its natural condition.”

- Aaron Leggett, President, Native Village of Eklutna

THE EKLUTNA RIVER WATERSHED



The utility proposed plan will leave a portion of the Eklutna River dry and will not return salmon to the vast majority of the Eklutna Watershed, including Eklutna Lake and its tributaries. The AWWU portal one mile downstream of the lake is the proposed start of the river. The Native Village of Eklutna estimates there are over 20 miles of habitat upstream of Eklutna Lake.

History of Support for Eklutna River Restoration

US Representative Don Young letter to Matanuska Electric Association, August 6, 2018

US Representative Mary Peltola letter to Chugach Electric Association, May 12, 2023

National Marine Fisheries Service Comments to McMillen Jacobs Associates, September 11, 2023

US Fish and Wildlife Service Comments to McMillen Jacobs Associates, September 2023

Native Village of Eklutna comments on the Eklutna Hydroelectric Dam, December 4, 2023

Official Position of the Native Village of Eklutna regarding the Eklutna Hydroelectric Dam, July 24, 2023

Alaska Federation of Natives Resolution 20-17, 2020

Eklutna, Inc. Letter to Anchorage Assembly, November 21, 2023

Anchorage Assembly Resolution in support of Eklutna River Restoration, AR No. 2022-262, September 2022

Anchorage Assembly Resolution in support of efforts to restore the Eklutna River, AR No. 2017-324(S), October 2017

Native Village of Eklutna letter to Anchorage Assembly, November 10, 2023

Eklutna River Restoration Coalition to Chugach Electric Association, September 15, 2023

Anchorage Daily News Opinion by Rick Sinnott, October 4, 2023

Native Village of Eklutna Resolution 2022-04 for restoration of the Eklutna River and Lake salmon habitat, May 14, 2022

Click here to read the above materials:

