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## NATIVE VILLAGE OF EKLUTNA

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### Official Position of the Native Village of Eklutna Regarding the Eklutna Hydroelectric Dam

July 24, 2023

The Eklutna River has provided immense nutritional and cultural benefits to the Eklutna Dena'ina throughout time immemorial, but its salmon productivity has been drastically degraded in recent years. Without consulting the Native Village of Eklutna, several dams have been installed on the river since 1929. These dams blocked fish passage and diverted all downriver flow from the Eklutna Glacier and Eklutna Lake to an adjacent watershed for power generation.

To restore potential connectivity to the lake and its tributaries, a group of partners and funders removed the antiquated 1929 lower river dam in 2018. The people recognize that if adequate water is allowed to flow consistently and measures were implemented at the lake dam to allow fish passage, the dwindling stock of salmon will recover; the salmon will return. There is an opportunity here to right a wrong, to correct the injustice to the environmental ecosystem and the Eklutna people who reside downriver, who by and large have and will have borne the greatest costs. Notably, the environmental laws of today and conscientious leaders at the local, state, and federal levels would not have allowed this situation to occur in the first place. The Native Village of Eklutna (NVE) wishes to restore the Eklutna River for fish and wildlife habitat, for our people who have relied on our salmon fishery and its benefits to survive for over a millennium, and for the broader community that we are a part of, many of whom recreate, fish and hunt and travel great distances to do so.

To thrive in the river above Thunderbird Creek, salmon need sufficient water released continuously downriver from Eklutna Lake that should follow the natural hydrograph of the Eklutna River. This should include periodic larger flows to revive the river channel, redistribute sediments and rebuild salmon habitat. The largest Eklutna system fishery should be sockeye salmon that spawns in Eklutna Lake. NVE researchers have found spawning and rearing habitat for Chinook and coho in the river tributaries above the lake. These salmon all need fish passage with continuous water release, like a fish ladder, preferably a hybrid of concrete channels and a more nature-like artificial channel, to get to and from the lake. Channel modification with either a new dam structure or modifications to the existing structure is needed to achieve these objectives and balance power generation. Higher and more consistent Eklutna Lake water levels would allow sockeye to use the potentially excellent spawning habit found around the lake edges by the hydropower project owners' study contractors and allow for a shorter, shallower constructed channel at the dam. NVE's preferred specific parameters include:

- Flow levels in July and August -- 350 cfs; in September and October -- 150 cfs and in winter- 65 cfs.
- Channel Maintenance Flow should be 700 cfs every year.
- NVE prefers a replacement dam with an automated gate at Elevation 835 feet and channel excavation.
- NVE prefers a fixed wheel gate for channel maintenance flows.
- NVE prefers a replacement dam with a fish ladder that is a hybrid of concrete channels and a more nature-like artificial channel. We are willing to entertain modifying the existing structure if these modifications meet all the requirements for sufficient continuous flow and fish passage.
- Downstream fish passage would occur during spill events and during continuous water release through the fish ladder.
- NVE also advocates for constructing bridges at AWWU road crossings. This channel modification can reduce the number of bridges built by possibly diverting the channel away from the existing road and reducing the number of crossings.

- NVE recommends full Lakeside trail repairs. Using the material being excavated with the new dam option could be used to help fix or stabilize the popular Lakeside trail.
- NVE also recommends improving the physical habitat to be aligned with the future water flow regime.
- NVE should participate in all future monitoring programs and management plans.

\*These recommendations are also noted in the Alternative Analysis provided to the utilities' contractor.

NVE requests mitigation from the negative impacts of the Eklutna Hydropower Project. "Built by the federal government in 1953 and sold to the (electric) utilities in 1997, the Eklutna Project never reckoned with its effects on Alaska Natives and salmon. The intent of Congress in authorizing the sale of the Eklutna Hydropower Project was clear: (they) must mitigate for drying up the Eklutna River for the past 70 years." To compensate for NVE not being consulted on the power project development nor included as signatories to the 1991 Fish and Wildlife Mitigation Agreement, "...the final Fish and Wildlife (mitigation) Program should have consensus support from all the signatories to the 1991 Agreement and the Native Village of Eklutna." (From Alaska Congresswoman Peltola's 2023 letter to Chugach Electric, attached.)

In buying the Eklutna hydropower project from the federal government, the utilities avoided the extensive rules of the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, dodged the National Environmental Policy Act requirements, and received a 25-year waiver on the mitigation requirements. These exemptions saved the Utilities vast sums of money and gave them an exemption from rigorous environmental oversight.

NVE is committed to partnering with the utilities to assist with funding from the many grant sources available to tribes to assist with such projects. USFWS has prioritized this mitigation for such grants. Congresswoman Peltola wrote in her letter, "A wide variety of funding mechanisms exist to implement engineering solutions that meet these goals, and I stand ready to assist in securing federal funds as needed. We recognize that Eklutna Hydro is an important source of low-cost renewable energy, but it should not come at the expense of salmon, our ultimate renewable resource."

The Eklutna tribe has been very patient and proven their ability to be a good partner to the utilities through their companion Eklutna Inc, providing easements and other land that benefits our Alaskan neighbors when needed. The time has come to mitigate the loss of salmon and its habitat.

Łiq'a nagh qinqtudeł - We are hopeful the salmon will return to us.



Aaron Leggett  
Chair/President  
Native Village of Eklutna