

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Contact:

Eric Booton, Eklutna project manager, Trout Unlimited, (303) 981-4366, Eric.Booton@tu.org

The Eklutna River Flows Again!

*Water to be Released in September 2021,
River to Flow Again After 66 years*

September 13, 2021

The restoration of the Eklutna River in Southcentral Alaska will get a big boost this fall. Water will be released down the river for the first time in decades in late September 2021. For the first time in 66 years, the Eklutna River will run uninterrupted from its headwaters to the sea.

“We have waited a long time to see this day,” said Aaron Leggett, Chief of the Native Village of Eklutna. “It’s finally happening, and it feels so good. We had gotten so used to just a trickle of mud running through our village that we forgot how beautiful the river is. Since the dam came down in 2018, the river has once again been running clear. We notice, the salmon notice, and the bears notice.” The Native Village of Eklutna is the only traditional village within the Municipality of Anchorage.

The Eklutna River was the focus of a five-year, \$7.5 million dam removal project completed in 2018 by the Native Village of Eklutna, Eklutna Inc. and The Conservation Fund. The Lower Eklutna River dam was built in 1929 to provide Anchorage with its first major power source. The lower dam never quite operated as planned since its reservoir quickly filled with sediment, and it was abandoned in the 1950’s when a larger power project at Eklutna Lake diverted all the water out of the Eklutna River.

The effort to remove the lower dam involved a vast array of funders, including the Rasmuson Foundation, Resources Legacy Fund, the National Fish and Wildlife Foundation, the Mat-Su Salmon Partnership, Orvis, Patagonia, and the Alaska Community Foundation. Curtis McQueen, former CEO of Eklutna Inc. and current board member of the Rasmuson Foundation, said “All of the hard work is finally paying off. This is the moment we’ve all be waiting for, to see this river come back to life. Once people see how beautiful the Eklutna River is, everyone will fall in love with it.”

“This is what the fish need: more water,” said Eric Booton of Trout Unlimited, which has helped raise awareness of the Eklutna River and helped support and fund some of the scientific research into how to fix the problems. “It’s almost a miracle that all five species of Alaska’s Pacific salmon

have survived in the muddy trickle after all we've put the Eklutna River through over the past 66 years."

Polly Carr, executive director of The Alaska Center, said "When you learn of the historic and on-going connection between the Eklutna River and the Dena'ina people, you begin to understand how important this project is. It has been an honor to support the beautiful vision of restoring the river and the salmon it sustains."

Despite the success of the dam removal project, the Eklutna River runs dry and devoid of water because an upstream dam at the outlet of Eklutna Lake diverts all the water out of the Eklutna River for hydropower generation. "We always knew that removing the Lower Eklutna River dam was just the first step in a very long process," said Brad Meiklejohn of The Conservation Fund. "It took a leap of faith to get to this point, but we stuck the landing."

The water releases planned for September 2021, are part of an instream flow study that will help inform how to fix the river. Under an agreement signed in 1991, local electric utilities are now engaged with NVE and state and federal regulators to remedy the impacts of hydropower operations on the Eklutna River. That process, begun in 2020, is slated for completion by 2027.

"We should give credit where credit is due. Everyone involved in this effort has worked hard and in good faith to fix the river," said Marc Lamoureaux, Environmental Coordinator for NVE. "Here comes the water that the salmon, and the people of Eklutna, need."

A public celebration with members of the Eklutna River Restoration Coalition will be held on the banks of the Eklutna River at noon on September 18th, 2021. For more details go to: www.eklutnariver.org

Native Village of Eklutna

The Native Village of Eklutna is located on the banks of the Eklutna River in Southcentral Alaska. We are a federally-recognized Dena'ina tribe that is the only Native community in the Municipality of Anchorage, Alaska. The mission of NVE is to empower Eklutna Village Dena'ina by promoting history, culture and identity of our sovereign nation, and to assist in the education and well-being of our Tribe. For more information: Eklutna-nsn.gov

Trout Unlimited

Trout Unlimited, the nation's oldest and largest coldwater 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 offices in Anchorage and Juneau. For more information: www.tu.org

The Alaska Center

We are Alaskans working to make our home the best place to live. Our future is dependent upon the health of the resources that sustain our diverse cultures and livelihoods, and the power of our people to participate in the decisions that impact our communities. For more information: www.akcenter.org

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: www.conservationfund.org

For more information: www.eklutnariver.org

Lower Eklutna River Dam Removal Video: <https://www.eklutnariver.org/film>