

# For Immediate Press Release

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## **Alaska Federation of Natives Endorses Restoration of Eklutna River**

### **Calls for Release of Water to Support Salmon and Eklutna Dena'ina**

The Alaska Federation of Natives (AFN) recently endorsed the restoration of the Eklutna River near Anchorage, Alaska. AFN, the largest Native organization in Alaska, passed a resolution at their annual gathering calling for a free-flowing Eklutna River to support the recovery of Pacific salmon and benefit Dena'ina Athabaskans from the Native Village of Eklutna (NVE).

“Alaska’s rivers and streams have provided nutritional and cultural benefit to Alaska Native people throughout time immemorial, and the Eklutna River is no exception,” said Ben Mallott, AFN vice president. “Through Resolution 20-17 AFN expresses our support of efforts to restore traditional rivers and streams for fish and wildlife habitat, traditional subsistence uses, and sustainable natural resource development, and in particular, the efforts of tribes like the Native Village of Eklutna.” The Alaska Federation of Natives represents 168 federally recognized tribes, 166 village corporations, 8 regional corporations, and 12 regional nonprofit and tribal consortiums. The annual gathering is the largest within Indian country in the United States.

“We are grateful to the Alaska Federation of Natives for their support,” said Aaron Leggett, Chief of the Native Village of Eklutna, “and to the many Alaskans and Americans from across the country who have followed this story.” The Native Village of Eklutna is the only traditional village within the Municipality of Anchorage. “We have supported the growth of Anchorage and Southcentral Alaska,” said Leggett, “but now it’s our turn. Salmon are part of our culture, they make us who we are. But without a free-flowing Eklutna River, the salmon struggle and we struggle.”

“The Eklutna River and the salmon it provides are vital to the Native Village of Eklutna. For generations, members of the Native Village have been committed stewards of this precious resource,” said Congressman Don Young. “I have been involved in this process for quite some time, and was one of the strongest proponents of removing the Lower Eklutna River dam to allow salmon to move upstream once again.”

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 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 “This is such an exciting story that everyone wants to be in on. Just as we have seen with dam removals elsewhere, like the Elwha River, when you let the river run free the fish come roaring back.”

Diane Kaplan, President and CEO of the Rasmuson Foundation, a financial supporter of the dam removal project, said “When you talk to elders and learn the historic connection between Eklutna River and the Dena’ina people, you begin to understand how important this project is. The Dena’ina people of Eklutna have never stopped fighting to have their river restored, and this dogged determination, reminiscent of the salmon they fight for, has brought them one step closer. It was an honor to support their efforts.”

Despite the success of the dam removal project, the Eklutna River is still largely devoid of water because of diversions for hydropower generation. “It’s one step at a time,” said Brad Meiklejohn of The Conservation Fund. “Now it’s all about getting water back to the fish and the fish to the Eklutna people. It’s been a long road but we are going in the right direction.”

Under an agreement signed in 1991, local electric utilities are now engaged with NVE and state and federal regulators in a mitigation process to remedy the impacts of hydropower operations on the Eklutna River. That process, begun in 2020, is slated for completion by 2027; ultimately, the Governor of Alaska will have final approval of the recovery plan. “All the talk now in the meetings is about how much, when and how to get water back into the Eklutna River to benefit salmon,” said Marc Lamoureux, Environmental Coordinator for NVE. “The salmon are still there, all five species, including the mighty King salmon, and we hope they hang on just a little longer as we work through this process.”

“The tribe is grateful to the utilities that our concerns have been recognized and that progress is being made,” said Richard Farber, Tribal Administrator for the Native Village of Eklutna. “We have a screaming need to restore the identity of our people and that begins with restoring the salmon.”

“Removing the dam was only part of the solution; we now need to secure greater water resources to bring salmon back and finish the job,” said Congressman Young. “I am pleased to see that the Native Village of Eklutna has entered a new restoration phase, and I wish them continued success as they work to improve the river’s ability to support wild salmon. I will continue working at the federal level should resources or legislation be needed, and I look forward to the day when the river is fully restored and becomes home to a healthy salmon population.”

### **Alaska Federation of Natives**

The mission of Alaska Federation of Natives is to enhance and promote the cultural, economic, and political voice of the entire Alaska Native community. The protection of Native food security

and subsistence rights and uses is one of its highest priorities of AFN. For more information: [www.nativefederation.org](http://www.nativefederation.org)

### **Native Village of Eklutna**

The Native Village of Eklutna is located on the banks of the Eklutna River in Southcentral Alaska. This federally-recognized Dena'ina tribe 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](http://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: [www.conservationfund.org](http://www.conservationfund.org)

For more information: [www.eklutnariver.org](http://www.eklutnariver.org)

**Lower Eklutna River Dam Removal Video:**

<https://m.youtube.com/watch?v=c9G06pR4WiA>

**AFN Resolution:** [https://theconservationfund-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/vkeeper\\_conservationfund\\_org/EVgrOF-KsvZLlhsLnA9yqYABz0BWV\\_i9P75eJE9DHAE0mA?e=mmfe2l](https://theconservationfund-my.sharepoint.com/:b:/g/personal/vkeeper_conservationfund_org/EVgrOF-KsvZLlhsLnA9yqYABz0BWV_i9P75eJE9DHAE0mA?e=mmfe2l)

### **Key Contacts for this release:**

**Aaron Leggett, President, Native Village of Eklutna, 907-688-6020**

**Curtis J. McQueen, Former CEO Eklutna Inc, Consultant on this project, 907-232-7527**

**Brad Meiklejohn, The Conservation Fund, 907-947-6437**