

Meeting Summary
Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project Licensing
Social Sciences 2012/2013-2014 Study Plan Development,
June 7, 2012
AEA Project Offices, First Floor Conference Room
411 W 4th Avenue, Anchorage, AK

Attendees:

Organization	Name
AEA	Wayne Dyok
AEA	Betsy McGregor
AEA	Bruce Tiedeman
AEA	Emily Ford
ADF&G/DOS	James Van Lanen
ADNR – OPMP	Marie Steele
Agnew::Beck	Shanna Zuspar
AHTNA	Joe Bovee
AHTNA	Bill Simeone
AHTNA	Katherine Martin
BLM	John Jangala
BLM	Dave Mushovic
BLM	Cory Larson
Charles Mobley & Associates	Chuck Mobley
DOWL HKM	Maryellen Tuttell
EPA	Jennifer Curtis
EPA	Lisa McLaughlin
FERC	Frank Winchell (by phone)
HDR Alaska	Tracie Krauthoefer
MSB	Fran Seager-Boss
MWH	Kirby Gilbert
MWH	Sarah Callaway
Natural Heritage Institute	Jan Konigsburg
NOAA Fisheries	Scott Miller
NPS	Cassie Thomas
Northern Economics	Don Schoden
Northern Economics	Patrick Burden
Stephen Braund & Associates	Stephen Braund
Stephen Braund & Associates	Paul Lawrence
Stephen Braund & Associates	Liz Sears
URS	Bridget Easley
URS	Tim Kramer
USFWS	Mike Buntjer (by Phone)
Knik	Bob Charles

After introductions, Kirby Gilbert (MWH) gave an overview of comments and study plan requests received from stakeholders, regulatory agencies, and other entities. Not all study requests were necessarily in the formal study plan request format, but all that were received are being considered during planning as the Project moves forward.

Socioeconomics

Pat Burden (Northern Economics) outlined two study plans under preparation: social conditions and public goods and services and regional economic evaluation study and discussed how the regional economic study will address potential changes in the price of electricity might affect the regional economy. Most comments received are being addressed in the study plans, but three major items not in the study plans: 1) FERC requested a survey of residents to evaluate potential changes in quality of life; 2) request to evaluate potential effects from the extension of a transmission line into the Copper River Valley – Betsy McGregor (AEA) AEA is conducting a feasibility study for this topic, but it would not be part of this Project – and; 3) request for a study of national economic evaluation for ecosystem services – however, this isn't a normal FERC practice.

Jan Konigsberg (Natural Heritage Institute) – The natural resource evaluation was put in only as a placeholder. FERC has a duty to make a licensing decision based on national economic interest, so the national interest level should be understood. Analysis of cost/benefit at the national level, not just within the Railbelt, is required under the Federal Power Act. It appears that the methods to do this type of work are feasible; it may be the scale for which the information is generated that might be the limiting factor.

Scott Miller (NOAA Fisheries) – If it moves forward, utilities will likely bear a substantial portion of the cost of developing the Project. When that cost burden is recovered through power rates, how will that offset benefits of regional reduced power rates? If utilities are expected to bear a substantial burden, rate payers can be expected to also bear that burden. Maybe a matrix could be developed showing the cost borne by utilities, and the potential rate effect on the end user. Or develop some scenarios showing a range of rates.

Cassie Thomas (NPS) – A goal is to develop PMEs and compensate for non-power values (recreation, etc.). It will be difficult for the NPS to perform its duty to come up with PMEs unless the value of recreational uses is assessed at a national level. Comments are coming in from outside of Alaska, so there is clearly a value to users outside of the railbelt.

Bob Charles (Knik Tribe) – From a financing perspective, how might other potential energy projects be affected by this project? What is the condition of the state's energy plan – is there one? If so, how does this project fit in to that plan? This starts to get in to the alternatives analysis, which are not included in the study plans. This plays into cumulative effects, so we need to be aware of what projects may be conducted in the future – the Integrated Railbelt Energy Plan as a starting point.

Jan Konigsberg (National Heritage Institute) – As supply increases, demand will as well. At what point will demand cause rates to increase to a level where it is no longer beneficial to rate payers? There is a substantial difference between the estimated cost of construction and the total cost of the Project.

Scott Miller (NOAA Fisheries) – Cost effective analysis comparing the Project to other reasonable power alternatives will be part of the NEPA process. As for EFH responsibilities, biological study plans are going to be key in determining the linkages to fish productivity. However, there didn't seem to be analysis of the impact of reductions in surplus for harvest in a 50 year timeframe. Also need to consider the uniqueness of the watershed with respect to its Chinook salmon runs. Would like to see attention paid to subsistence and personal recreation values, and potential effects the Project may have on them. Kirby Gilbert (MWH) – that is the intention, to bring interdisciplinary linkages to the study plans and the FERC licensing process.

Transportation

Maryellen Tuttell (DOWL HKM) Most of the comments on transportation, including those relating to winter river transportation, were already incorporated into the study plan.

Katherine Martin (Ahtna) – Does the study plan include impacts to other private land owners and access routes? Land ownership maps were not sufficient in the PAD to understand the selection status. Dave Mishovik (BLM) – BLM is working with AEA to update and standardize land ownership maps. BLM is conducting an in-depth land status review (for lands under BLM administration), as well as a boundary risk assessment. A comprehensive title search GIS layer is currently being produced, and will be available on the ADNR website.

Cassie Thomas (NPS) – A recreational management plan should include plans for trespassing, a boundary risk assessment, etc. Since there is new access being created for this project, it will need to cover a large area and a large range of topics.

Joe Bovee (AHTNA) – Perhaps an integrated plan could be developed, to incorporate subsistence, cultural, etc. since they are interrelated.

Air Quality

Dave Mushovi (BLM) – Dust is the biggest issue to be addressed in the study plan, and the methodology is being decided upon. Reliable information is really only available for the upper basin. How do we quantify project emissions for 50 years from now?

With respect to dust, the study plans should clarify the intention to consider how materials will be used; not only where they are coming from, but where they will be going as well.

Recreation & Aesthetics

Bridget Easley (URS) – Most comments were already incorporated into the draft study plan. Topics that FERC recommended to split out included recreation, aesthetics, and noise. A more robust noise analysis was requested than was previously planned. There was also a study

request for river flow and access, which will be conducted. There were several comments on how recreation and tourism users could be displaced. At this point, the questions moving forward include: how to present the study plans; how will they be split out, and; how to identify the timing of information flow between the different resource studies.

Cassie Thomas (NPS) – Perhaps call it a “soundscape” analysis, rather than “noise.” Noise implies ‘unwanted sound.’ Kirby Gilbert (MWH) – the analysis is on the aesthetic experience, which includes the soundscape. Separating construction impacts, impacts to recreation specifically, and long-term impacts to recreationists should be addressed. A major task for URS is to break these study plans apart.

Cory Larson (BLM) – BLM will do the suitability determination for Wild and Scenic Rivers.

Bridget Easley (URS) – A future workgroup meeting to discuss the surveys might be necessary, since there are going to be so many potential subject areas, and since they are going to be a big part of the recreation study. There is not necessarily enough information yet to give the full methodology description in the initial Study Plan; that will come from 2012 efforts.

Bob Charles (Knik Tribe) – The cumulative impacts assessment will be very important, as Knik Tribe is commenting on multiple projects, many of which have overlapping impact areas.

Cassie Thomas (NPS) – Some survey respondents to a future survey may need more information on the impacts to natural resources in order to fully answer questions about the future in a survey. Kirby Gilbert (MWH) – baseline surveys can be conducted first as the surveys are trying to help us understand current use, use patterns and experiences. Maybe the survey instrument might not be ready by July study plan, but *how* the survey results will be utilized, and/or the goal of a survey can be described in the study plan.

Scott Miller (NOAA fisheries) – Comprehensive recreational demand model; will the survey include an angler survey for recreational demand that would allow this type of modeling to be done? And will that be available for review? Bridget Easley (URS) – Yes, we want to get at demand, but we are not at that point of knowing the survey questions, and won’t probably be there by July.

Subsistence

Tracie Krauthoefer (HDR) – Not many comments were received. Many of the comments were addressing the fact that people use subsistence resources and that those resources are important. Caribou, and hoofed animals in general, appear to be of particular concern. Steve Braund (Stephen Braund & Associates) – Need wildlife/fisheries impacts assessments in order to assess subsistence. Looking at surveying a broad range of communities.

The current ADF&G harvest survey doesn’t ask whether people are hunting under sport regulations or subsistence regulations, or federal versus state subsistence regulations.

Typically, respondents are hesitant to divulge information on hunting out of fear that the data will be used for law enforcement.

Betsy McGregor, (AEA) noted that ABR is doing a harvest survey. HDR should coordinate with them to ensure that the state-versus-federal subsistence question is being addressed.

Kirby Gilbert (MWH) – Study plan interim reports can be important for delivering data and coordination between the resource study groups.

Dave Mushovic (BLM) – With subsistence, we are thinking about the EIS. BLM also has to do an ANICLA 810 evaluation, and then make a determination on whether or not public hearings will need to be held (which are likely). We need to be sure that there is enough information for the 810 evaluation. BLM would like to have the preliminary 810 evaluation done before the draft EIS. This goes into 2014-15 timeframe.

Tracie Krauthoefer (HDR) noted that subsistence includes not only fish, waterfowl, mammals, etc. but also berries, trees, (traditional knowledge) etc. The study plan includes the list of communities and also will include a traditional knowledge survey.

Bob Charles (Knik Tribe) - Can the information be specified/organized by other stakeholders, entities, and tribes? Tracie Krauthoefer (HDR) – surveys are designed by community.

Cultural Resources

Kirby – TCP (traditional cultural properties) program needs to be included in the cultural resources study plan.

Chuck Mobley (Charles Mobley & Associates) – TCP study will incorporate information from other areas (e.g. subsistence).

Many comments were received. In 2012, field work to investigate geotech boreholes at the site was initiated. The inventory effort for 2012 is modest, four people for about four weeks. A curation agreement is in place that addresses what happens to any artifacts collected in 2012 (but collection is not anticipated). More extensive curation agreements are likely for 2013-14. Development of an ‘unanticipated discoveries’ document was done – for human remains in the study area. A second track, for inadvertent discovery of cultural resources, has also been developed. This document will be circulated to native groups and other entities. There are 200 already-recorded sites, so a way to discriminate from those sites was necessary. Cultural sites are handled differently from human remains. Cultural resources finds can have a few days lag, and allows for verification of whether or not it is a new or previously-recorded site. Human remains require immediate reporting. A one-page field sheet was developed for crews in the field.

Comments on the 2013-14 plan primarily addressed details of the cultural resource investigations. Some resource study approaches were lacking in the original study plan.

Another noted element was about where the study area itself is – better definition of the APE. More specificity on methods was also requested. Also to include ANCSA 14-H (1) sites. A comprehensive document of all sites was requested. Paleontological studies were deemed insufficient, and will be included, but kept as a separate section. The Traditional Cultural Properties (TCP) study will be somewhat delayed probably, because the place name study (to be done by Dr. Jim Carrey and AHTNA) needs to be completed first.

Bill Simeone (AHTNA) – Ethnographic interviews and also analysis of existing tapes and linguistic information will be conducted.

Chuck Mobley (Charles Mobley & Associates) – Regarding the question of study area, FERC requested a complete APE for both direct and indirect effects. The direction from AEA has been to focus on the direct impact area (Watana) and the three potential transmission/access corridors. Definition of an APE for indirect impacts may need to wait until some of the work is done. APEs will be resource specific.

Wayne Dyok (AEA) – Indirect impacts (or APE) may be different, depending on the access plans for the impact corridor. If public access is restricted, the indirect impact area may be smaller.

Kirby Gilbert (MWH) – Based on other recent hydroelectric projects, the indirect effects assessment will likely happen later after some impacts are assessed for some of the other resource areas. Additionally, there is more information currently available for some areas over others.

Dave Mushovic (BLM) – How much impact does dispersed recreational use have on cultural sites, and what is the risk to the resource? What is the high risk area? Talkeetna has an historic district (some buildings and the airstrip) which may be an indirect impact area, even though it is located well away from any corridors.

Frank Winchell (FERC) – For indirect effects, FERC is looking for auditory and visual effects.
Kirby Gilbert (MWH) – This encourages a direct impact APE that includes areas of likely induced recreation use.

Chuck Mobley (Charles Mobley & Associates) – A number of native groups commented with three points of emphasis: 1) concern for preservation of cultural resources; 2) desire to participate in studies, and; 3) desire for government-to-government relationship as the project moves forward.

Bruce Tiedeman (AEA) – Definitions of all the resources, particularly when it comes to “cultural resources” and “subsistence” should be very clearly defined. “Resources” can mean different things to different people.

ADDITIONAL DISCUSSION – SITE VISIT

Two site visits have been proposed. July 23/24th were the originally proposed dates, but may be moved closer to the 27th. Planning is underway, input is being solicited, and information to be forthcoming. Email Betsy McGregor and/or Emily Ford. Contractors should look at the SharePoint site, the helicopter site is posted there.

ACTION ITEMS:

- Betsy McGregor – timeline for the AEA feasibility study regarding possible transmission line to the Copper River Valley
- Workgroup meeting(s) for survey instrument discussion – multi disciplinary discussion to be scheduled for mid-August with workgroup participants. Need to propose date in study plan.