

**Meeting Summary**  
**Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project Licensing**  
**AEA Project Offices, First Floor Conference Room**  
**411 W 4<sup>th</sup> Avenue, Anchorage, AK**

**Recreation and Social Sciences Survey Follow Up Meeting**  
**October 3, 2012, 9:00 am – 12:30 pm**

**Attendees:**

<b>Organization</b>	<b>Name</b>
ADF&G	Joe Giefer
ADNR (State Parks)	David Griffin
AEA	Wayne Dyok
AEA	Betsy McGregor
BLM	Denton Hamby (by phone)
FERC	David Turner (by phone)
McDowell Group	Donna Logan
McDowell Group	Bob Koenitzer (by phone)
MWH	Kirby Gilbert (by phone)
Northern Economics	Pat Burden
NPS	Cassie Thomas
NPS	Harry Williamson (by phone)
URS	Bridget Easley
URS	Tim Kramer
URS	Louise Kling (by phone)
ERM	John Gangemi (by phone)
Louis Berger Group	Lisa McDonald (by phone)

**Introduction and Meeting Overview –Kirby Gilbert (MWH)**

Kirby provided an overview of the meeting objectives which were to go over the plans for Key Observation Points and process of analysis for aesthetic resources, river flow survey plan, and have an opportunity for dialog on the recreation surveys and survey instruments as a follow up to the September 20, 2012 meeting. This was followed by a brief discussion on the timing of Revised Study Plan (RSP) in terms of a draft being available for review. Cassie Thomas (NPS) asked when she might get to see a copy of the draft RSPs for recreation and aesthetics. Betsy indicated that the plan was to have the draft RSP section for Recreation and Aesthetics available toward middle-end of October but hopefully around the time of the next working group meeting (Oct. 17<sup>th</sup>).

Aesthetic Resources

Louise Kling (URS) provided an overview of the aesthetic resource study planned for the 2013/14. Two approaches will be used: 1) inventory of visual resources for the entire study area

based on BLM's VRM & landscape level regions, 2) a more focused assessment of the direct impacts to visual resources from features of the Project (reservoir, power lines, access corridors). Louise indicated that the study area for the inventory will include river segments downstream of Talkeetna.

Louise provided an overview of each visual resource landscape region within the Project area and the potential views that may be affected within each region. She stated the goal was to determine if changes will be detectable to users and to help inform the siting or design of facilities early on in the engineering process.

Wayne Dyok (AEA) noted that the Aesthetics study effort will need to coordinate with the Geomorphology study group in terms of looking at how turbidity levels might change leading to changes in water color and clarity. Louise confirmed that this would be occurring and added that further collaboration with the Geomorphology group would occur to determine if there might be any changes in moving bedload that is currently audible to boaters during certain conditions. David Griffen (ADNR) stated that the Middle Susitna river region will be a major focus for the State Parks Division because Denali State Park is in this area and they will be interested in visual analysis locations in this area. Dave noted that the Alaska Railroad would also likely be interested in understanding any potential aesthetic changes resulting from the Project also.

Louise presented an overview of "Target Analysis Locations" that would include KOPs, and discussed the different types of locations as well as the views and seasons to be assessed. Further discussion followed with respect to how each location will be initially assessed in terms of its nexus to the project and how each will be assessed by identification of the medium of change (form, line, texture) rather than making scenic determinations. There was follow on discussion of why the term KOP (Key Observation Point) was being replaced with "Target Analysis Locations". Louise stated that this was done to avoid confusion in terminology and capture locations that characterize different aesthetic types or "observation areas" that might be not really be "key" observation points. Louise explained that this is needed to capture impacts to dispersed users that are not associated with standard views.

Harry Williamson asked if the use of "Target Analysis Locations", rather than standard KOPs, would complicate the BLM's VRM process. Louise explained that this is similar to the direction BLM is taking with the VRM process since it focuses on the continuum of users' experiences, rather than a static location within the "observation area," or the area represented by the Target Analysis Locations. Harry and Cassie Thomas (NPS) confirmed their support for this approach.

For winter area, Cassie asked if the study would include the analysis of night sky conditions with respect to proposed facilities and inquired about a baseline analysis of current night sky conditions. Louise confirmed that this analysis will occur, with a focus on facilities lighting. Wayne asked for this to be referenced in the RSP.

Following a comment from Cassie about ensuring coordination with the biological and physical resource groups, Louise explained that coordination was essential and when appropriate, Target Analysis Locations will be paired with other study analysis points to take advantage of physical

and biological data being collected by other teams' work (changes in river flows, ice formation, gravel bars, etc.).

Louise summarized the process through which baseline data will be collected from users through executive interview and the rationale behind waiting until 2014 to potentially use focus groups. She emphasized that by waiting to use focus groups until project attributes are more fully laid out, she hopes to avoid clouding place based values with "for/against" comments. Cassie Thomas agreed with the concept of not using focus groups too early in the process if we could not really pin-point or clearly outline the potential changes indicating it would be better to wait until facilities are sited and likely flow regimes determined.

David Griffin asked if new recreational amenities will be provided by the Project, to possibly offset impacts. Wayne and Kirby explained that the Project will have a recreation plan and that would likely include provision for new facilities and management of recreation uses at the Project, but management related to access is also a policy item that needs to be considered at the larger State level, taking into consideration potential impacts. David Griffen mentioned that he had some historical Susitna River trip reports from the 70s and 80s that he could make available.

In conclusion, Louise emphasized that many locations will be assessed but only a small subset of points that will be simulated for future change using Project renderings. There are many factors that will be considered in evaluating key observation points including seasons, and even things like time of day issues such that points will likely be adjusted in the future.

### River Flow Study

John Gangemi (ERM-Oasis) provided an overview of river recreation flow and ice processes study and outlined objectives of the study, defined reaches, and discussed approaches that will be used. He broadly summarized the goals of the study as determining: 1) who uses the river corridor and for what purposes, 2) what flow levels users need for these experiences, 3) how these users access the river. John then went over some study methods that will enable him to assess users-based considerations.

There then was some brief discussion of the different reaches that have been defined for the flow study and what attributes were used to define them. Cassie asked for more coordination with other study areas that have defined different river reaches along the river and requested a table or a figure that enabled for cross reference between other study reaches. Kirby specifically requested an overlay of John's River Flow reaches on top of the standardly defined reaches (Upper, Middle, Lower). Following this, Cassie suggested the use of water class, rather than access, could serve as a means to define reaches for the river flow study.

Joe Giefer (ADF&G) inquired why the analysis stopped at the Parks Highway Bridge, given potential flow impacts downstream. John explained that he thought sufficient baseline data on recreation flow levels would be collected below the three rivers confluence, south of Talkeetna, to extrapolate impacts downstream of the Parks Highway Bridge. He emphasized that the purpose was to determine flow levels necessary for recreational activities, not the levels of activity.

Cassie suggested John Gangemi follow up on the 60 hunters who were stranded along Cash Creek, which was recently described in an Alaska Dispatch article. Denton Hamby (BLM) indicated that the BLM had a list of user groups that based on special use permits, are active in this area and that he would make it available upon request.

There was much discussion on how the electronic survey would be utilized for different reaches of the river, with a focus on how these users could be reached and be useful to help inform the study team on how flow changes might affect their experiences. Cassie suggested that an online survey should be specifically tailored for each reach based on the likely users of each reach. This was followed by a discussion of survey methods that could be used to interview the small number of people within the white water community (30 people) who have used the Devils Canyon reach, and how their flow needs differ from other users.

Kirby requested that the online survey methodology and protocol for executive interviews be clearly laid out in the RSP and discussed by the river flow study reaches.

Cassie suggested that focus groups could serve to help acquire more detailed information from user groups; however, John recommended that the use of focus groups be reserved until 2014, after baseline data, executive interviews, and some initial flow management options have been better defined.

#### Survey Instruments – Covering NPS Written Comments

Donna Logan (McDowell Group) led a discussion of NPS comments on the proposed survey instruments and how each comment was going to be addressed. These included comments on the study area boundary, intercept points to be added and removed, the need for adjustments in survey content, definition of party size vs. group size, use of the online survey, and the reason why the voter registration list was chosen for the mail survey.

Cassie asked the team to consider and layout more defined contingency plans for lost or missing data, particularly in relation to the closure of the King salmon season and its impact on recreational users. David Turner (FERC) indicated that it was extremely difficult to assess all potential issues; however, this issue could be addressed by clearly indicating the process through which data gaps would be addressed. Kirby indicated that while 2013 would be the major focus for collecting data, additional data collection in 2014 could be used to fill in any identified gaps and many studies are trying to use past information and data to help characterize the resource conditions and trends.

In response to some discussion regarding how to introduce the Project to survey participants, Wayne indicated that AEA currently has “fact sheets” that can be handed out to survey participants and during executive interviews.

Pat Burden (NEI) discussed the recreation activities that would be the focus of a possible future RUM model (boating, hunting, fishing, and snow machining), but indicated that riding ATVs and sightseeing may also be added to the analysis. This was followed by a discussion of

displacement issues and how NEI is considering using the RUM model to address displacement potential and more refined recreation demand.

In closing, Donna brought up the need to reduce the number of questions on the current intercept survey. She emphasized that many questions will need to be dropped and shifted to the mail survey, executive interviews, or collected using other methods.

Joe Giefer expressed concern that concerns of some ADF&G staff on the Study Plan were no longer relevant based on the discussions occurring and asked if the Revised Study Plan would be available before the next technical working group. Betsy indicated that the draft RSP would be available as soon as possible around the time of the TWG meeting, along with a response table for all comments received so far.

#### Action Items:

- Distribute draft RSPs for recreation and aesthetics and comment-response tables in October
- Aesthetics study group needs to make sure inputs from geomorphology and coordination are depicted in its interdependencies chart or in the text of the study plan
- Louise to outline use of Target Analysis Locations and how KOPs fit into that plan
- Louise to make sure night sky analysis is addressed in study plan with some analysis regarding potential changes due to likely facilities lighting.
- Louise to describe how some target analysis locations will be paired with other resource study sites.
- David Griffin to provide Wayne historical trip reports which Wayne will then forward to recreation planning team.
- The river flow study plan needs to have a map that overlays the Project standard study reaches with their specific river flow study reaches (map and table formats would be useful)
- The recreation study group needs to check into the recent stranding of 60 hunters near Cash Creek to learn of current access considerations (Alaska Dispatch article)
- Denton Hamby of BLM to provide recreation study team with lists of user groups BLM has issued or considered in Special Use Permits.
- River flow study needs to create online survey for all three study reaches, not just limit it to Reach 2 (Devils Canyon). Provide specifics in how each reach will be handled differently both in questions asked and methods used to reach out to potential users who might fill out surveys.
- The recreation study should discuss how they might gather relevant information even if King salmon closures continue.
- The intercept survey needs to be looked at for number of questions and consider ways to reduce to combine questions if we are reaching a limit, based on judgment and past survey efforts, to which a survey responder will be willing to participate.