

**Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project
(FERC No. 14241)**

**Recreation and Aesthetic Resources
Study Plan Section 12 Introduction**

Final Study Plan

Alaska Energy Authority



July 2013

12. RECREATION AND AESTHETIC RESOURCES

12.1 Introduction

The Alaska Energy Authority (AEA) proposes a Recreation Resources Study, a Recreational River Flow Study, and an Aesthetic Resources Study in order to document baseline conditions and help assess potential impacts on recreation and aesthetic resources from construction and operation of the proposed Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project (Project).

The Recreation Resources Study (Section 12.5) will research, describe, and estimate recreation supply and demand (current and future projections), and assess reasonably foreseeable recreation needs associated with development of the Project. The Recreation Resources Study plan has been prepared in consultation with agencies and licensing participants.

The Aesthetic Resources Study (Section 12.6) will research, inventory, and describe visual and auditory resources in the Project area and identify potential impacts to these resources from construction and operation of the proposed Project.

River-based activities, including boating and fishing, are largely dependent on river flow levels, ice formation, river access points, and seasonal resource availability conditions. The River Recreation Flow and Access Study (Section 12.7) will identify and document flow-dependent recreational opportunities in the proposed Project area, identify flow preference curves, or ranges, for relevant river-related recreational activities, and help to identify relationships between river flow levels and river uses.

12.2 Nexus Between Project Construction / Existence / Operations and Effects on Resources to be Studied

The upper Susitna River valley is currently largely undeveloped. The Project, including a dam and associated facilities and access infrastructure, may affect recreational opportunities and uses, and the aesthetic character, of the Project area. For example, the proposed Project may affect a number of forms of ongoing recreation uses, such as fishing, boating, hiking, camping, birdwatching/wildlife viewing, hunting, all-terrain vehicle (ATV)/off-road vehicle (ORV) use, scenic touring, skiing, snowshoeing and other activities, by altering river flows and ice formation, altering wildlife habitat, and changing recreation access conditions. Construction and operation of the Project may alter visual and auditory conditions that recreationists and other users of the area now experience. More specifically, potential effects may include:

- Provision of new recreational facilities and opportunities
- Changes in public access with some new access opportunities
- Temporary and/or permanent changes levels of use
- Temporary and/or permanent disruption or displacement of current recreational activities
- Changes in visual or scenic quality
- Changes in visual or scenic attributes with some new viewpoint access opportunities

The Recreation Resources Study will identify existing and foreseeable future recreation opportunities (latent demand), levels of use, spatial use patterns, means of access, and existing

facilities capacities in the proposed Project area. The study will provide a basis for development of a Recreation Management Plan (RMP).

Operation and construction of the Project also may affect aesthetic resources, depending on the specific location of facilities, access roads and transmission routes, and the extent to which changes in river flows result in detectable changes to landscape character downriver of the proposed Project. The Aesthetic Resources Study will focus on these potential impacts, and help inform potential Project design and mitigation options.

The Recreation River Flow and Access Study analysis will describe the characteristics and attributes of river-based recreation, and inform the Recreation Resources and Aesthetic Resources Studies.

12.3 Resource Management Goals and Objectives

In addition to providing information needed to characterize the potential Project effects, the Recreation Resources and Aesthetic Resources studies will provide information to help AEA, resource agencies, Alaska Native entities, and others identify appropriate recreational measures for the Project license application. Project studies are designed not only to meet Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) licensing requirements, but also to be relevant to recent, ongoing, and/or planned resource management activities by other agencies. Part of the Project Area includes federal lands managed by the Bureau of Land Management (BLM) in accordance with the Glennallen BLM Resource Area East Alaska Resource Management Plan (EARMP). Management policies in the EARMP include those related to recreation and aesthetic resources. The Alaska Statewide Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP) (2009-2014) also provides resource management considerations for recreation providers, advisory boards, user groups, and the public to use in making outdoor recreation supply and management decisions.

12.4 Summary of Consultation with Agencies, Alaska Native Entities and Other Licensing Participants Regarding Revised Study Plan Development

The Revised Study Plan (RSP) for recreation and aesthetic resources was developed using input from these Technical Workgroup meeting and informal consultations and comments received through November 14, 2012. AEA consulted with federal and state agencies, Alaska Native entities, and other licensing participants at Project Technical Workgroup meetings held on August 8, September 20, October 3, and October 17, 2012, and used input from these meetings to develop and revise the RSP. Between July and November 2012 several federal and state agencies, interested parties, and stakeholders were contacted via telephone, e-mail, or through informal meetings. Agencies contacted include NPS, BLM, USFS, and ADFG as well as local business owners (Talkeetna Roadhouse, Mahay's River Boat Service, Maclaren River Lodge, Stephan Lake Lodge, Alpine Creek Lodge and Denali Highway Tours and Cabins). Topics included a variety of subjects concerning recreation and aesthetic resources, recreation survey development, available data resources, and information gathering for future field activities. Formal comment letters were also received from agencies and stakeholders on the PSP.

Summary tables of comments and responses from formal comment letters filed with FERC through November 14, 2012, were provided in the Revised Study Plan (RSP) Appendix 1, filed

December 14, 2012. Copies of the formal FERC-filed comment letters were included in RSP Appendix 2. In addition, a single comprehensive summary table of comments and responses from consultation, dated from Proposed Study Plan (PSP) filing (July 16, 2012) through release of Interim Draft RSPs, were provided in RSP Appendix 3. Copies of meeting summaries from release of the PSP through the interim draft RSP were included in RSP Appendix 4, organized chronologically.

Consultation subsequent to the filing of the RSP is described within each Final Study Plan (FSP).