



# SUSITNA-WATANA HYDRO

## Meeting Notes Recreation and Aesthetic Studies Technical Meeting May 1, 2014

**LOCATION:** AEA Offices – Board Room  
813 Northern Lights Blvd  
Anchorage, AK

**TIME:** 9:00 a.m. – 12:15 p.m.

**SUBJECT:** Recreation, Aesthetics, and River Recreation Study Update

**GoTo MEETING:** <https://www4.gotomeeting.com/register/322843159>  
1-800-315-6338 Code 3957#

**Goal:** Update Licensing Participants on Study Progress, variances in 2013 and plans for the next study season

**ATTENDEES:** Mark Fink ADF&G, Julie Anderson AEA, Marty Bozeman AEA, Sandie Hayes AEA, Chris Tillman AEA, Donna Logan McDowell Group, Kirby Gilbert MWH, Heather Williams MWH, Cassie Thomas NPS, Tim Kramer URS

**ON PHONE:** David Griffin ADNR, Denton Hamby BLM Glennallen Office, Becky Long Coalition for Susitna Dam Alternatives, John Gangemi ERM, Harry Williamson NPS contractor, Whitney Wolff Talkeetna Community Council, Louise Kling URS, Chuck Sensiba Van Ness Feldman

This meeting was arranged to provide status on 2013 studies, input and discussion regarding any study plan variances and modifications that may be required given actual field conditions, and planned next steps.

The meeting agenda, documents, and supporting presentations can be found on the “previous meetings” tab at <http://www.susitna-watanahydro.org/>. These meeting notes are intended to capture the primary discussion points and consultation not included in the provided materials.

### **Project Status Overview (Kirby Gilbert MWH)**

A Revised Study Plan (RSP) was filed December 4, 2013 for all 58 studies. A draft Initial Study Report (D-ISR) was filed for all 58 studies on February 3, 2014 less Section 7 that pertains to plans for study completion that were pending legislative funding decisions at the time of submittal. The next formal reporting on all 58 studies will be June 3, 2014 with submittal of the final Initial Study Report (ISR). Sections 1 through 6 from the February 3 draft ISR will be resubmitted without change, along with a new Section 7 and any pertinent supplemental data that has become available since the draft ISR submittal.

Upcoming licensing milestones and meetings are as follows:

- May-June 2014 Information Meetings in Railbelt Communities
- 6/3/14 ISR FERC submittal
- 2014 Continuation of High Priority Studies
- 10/16/14 ISR Meetings

- 11/30/14 Deadline to submit recommendations for new and modified studies
- 1/29/15 FERC Determination on recommendations for new and modified studies
- 2015 Quarterly TWG Meetings / Second Study Season
- 2/1/16 Updated Study Report submittal
- Fall 2016 FERC license application submittal

Meeting materials and any schedule changes will be posted at <http://www.susitna-watanahydro.org/>. A detailed schedule of 2014 field activities by study will be included in Section 7 of the upcoming ISR submittal.

### **Study 12.5 Recreation (Tim Kramer URS, Donna Logan McDowell Group)**

Recreation study is proceeding as planned. Variances outlined in the ISR indicate a change in methodology or schedule (if timeline is explicitly specified as part of a particular study plan methodology), whereas data gaps tend to indicate information that remains to be gathered following the previously agreed-upon methodology. A concern was voiced regarding whether 2014 study work may be pre-decisional, given that the FERC-recognized second study year is now 2015. AEA has prioritized continuation of study work in 2014, with the intent to implement only critical components of the FERC-approved study plan. Decisions regarding extent of Lower River studies are being evaluated based on interdisciplinary analyses and a discussion will be presented in the upcoming ISR or as the information becomes available.

The trails mapping study has finished initial inventory stage and further categorizations of trail types will happen later. Trail verifications will typically be done by helicopter overflight rather than on the ground. An updated trail map, since the February 3<sup>rd</sup> draft ISR, has been provided to GINA. The 17(b) and RS2477 easement information is documented in a separate layer from the trail information so that it is apparent which easements do or do not have existing trails and whether existing trails follow the easements.

Recreational carrying capacity assessment is part of the methods outlined in the Study Plan. The study team is currently collecting baseline information with further analysis planned for 2015. The current study plans are not structured for the team to evaluate whether existing use falls within management goals for a particular area.

Recreation supply, demand and use analyses will be done in 2015. The most recent agency data and new events are being captured, including a new fat-tire bike race in Talkeetna. In 2013 the study team had to discriminate data being collected with regard to use based on references to recreation and subsistence activities. The study team noted there is a good set of terminology for these uses on the ADF&G website.

Hunting/trapping effort data is permit-based and subject to ADF&G confidentiality restrictions. The study team will work with ADF&G to determine what specifics can be documented regarding the methodology used to generalize the data. Angler effort data is survey-based, not permit-based. Mapped points indicating "reported low use" indicate a river or stream, not necessarily an exact location.

The recreation facility study captures general target dates for seasonal facility open/close, but no analysis of frequency those dates are met, as that data is not tracked by the agencies. Shoulder seasons appear to be low recreational use times. Team suggests using "representative sample of" rather than "relevant" private facilities. Facilities are sites with some sort of infrastructure and maintenance (i.e. a trail sign). Other sites (without facilities) are classified as dispersed recreation. This may be an overly conservative assumption. Dispersed recreation classifications (well-used vs. occasional) are by 5-mile segments due to quantity. GPS locations were collected for well-used sites.

Updates to recreation survey data collection will be provided in upcoming ISR. Survey analyses have been prioritized for 2014 completion since they feed multiple other studies. Incidental observation surveys are opportunistic rather than randomized. They have proved useful to other studies, including the river recreation study. Local staff at Talkeetna and Lake Louise enhanced coverage in the study areas. Initial indications are that Spring 2013 Memorial

Day facility closures (due to late snowmelt) did not lead to a significant data gap. Observational tallies were opportunistic, but have some tie to the cycle of intercept surveys. Available data regarding possible opportunity bias in the observational tally will be documented in the ISR. Mail survey response was quite good. Intentional oversampling of study area will be reweighted during analysis phase. Nonresponse bias telephone survey was delayed to avoid holiday issues. Cellphone list was purchased. Details of the cellphone pool will be provided in the ISR (i.e., 907-only, billing address). A gender bias was noticed in the landline vs. cellphone surveys and will be noted in the reporting.

### **Study 12.7 River Recreation and Flow (John Gangemi ERM)**

The Internet survey will continue into September 2014. Outreach efforts, including to outdoor forums and message boards, will be repeated this year. Tabulations of the specific outreach locations utilized are provided in the ISR. Preliminary indications from HEC-RAS open-water flow routing model v2 analyses are that the maximum load case operational alternative does not appear to change flows significantly at Sunshine Gage. Additional load-following operational cases will be analyzed, and results from other disciplines (ice, geomorph, aesthetics, etc.) will be synthesized when developing recommendations regarding downstream study extents.

### **Study 12.6 Aesthetics (Louise Kling URS)**

Aesthetics study is proceeding as planned. There were 72 unique viewer-based locations visited in 2013, including railroad-based, trail-based, and aerial-based locations. Seasonal visits to same location may appear as a cluster of points. A series of 50mm photographs were stitched into “human field” of view panoramas. BLM visual assessment methodology is being used, but BLM data is not the only data being used in the study. Sensitivity Level slide title will be corrected for clarity. Table 6.1 of the RSP contains list of target sites.

Study-related noise impacts were not as problematic as anticipated. Spider-tracking was very effective for identifying and accounting for study-related aircraft noise in the data.

There was discussion that some licensing participants recommend against comparisons with “natural range of variability” for river flows, as that range is wider than might be considered meaningful or credible. Lower River study determinations have not been made. The National Park Services noted that other resource affects need to be considered in determining possible future influences on recreation, including changes to island formation, changes to riparian vegetation, and changes to geomorphology.

### **General**

It was noted that study years refer to calendar years rather than State of Alaska fiscal years.

All three studies discussed today have outputs that feed into the socio-economic studies. Draft data has been exchanged and inter-disciplinary collaboration is regular and ongoing. Survey analyses have been prioritized for 2014 since they feed into other studies and will be useful for completing those studies in 2015.

### **Action Items (and clarifications useful in reporting)**

### **Responsibility**

Determine what level of detail can be provided regarding the methodology used to analyze and map confidential ADF&G harvest effort data. Include as much as permissible in future reports.	<b>Tim Kramer</b> URS
Clarify coverage of purchased cell phone list (i.e., 907 numbers, Alaska zipcodes in billing address) in future reports and analyze potential impact to survey samples and results.	<b>Donna Logan</b> McDowell Group
Include updated Trails Map in upcoming ISR and/or through GINA.	<b>Tim Kramer</b> URS

**Action Items (and clarifications useful in reporting)****Responsibility**

Address eligible rivers, in addition to designated wild and scenic rivers, since they have protections during the designation determination process.	<b>Tim Kramer</b> URS
Use ADF&G website as guidance for subsistence vs. recreational hunting terminology.	<b>Tim Kramer</b> , URS
Correct title of Sensitivity Rating slide in Aesthetics presentation and repost to website.	<b>Louise Kling</b> URS
Clarify that additional data is being collected and analyzed beyond the BLM visual data presented. The BLM information represents one data source and the basis of study methodology.	<b>Louise Kling</b> URS
Include updated intercept and mail survey fielding result tables in the upcoming ISR.	<b>Donna Logan</b> McDowell Group
Given that formal quarterly TWGs are not planned to resume until 2015, consider doing a check-in and possibly a meeting with licensing participants regarding focus group methodologies, maybe in the early December 2014 timeframe.	<b>AEA</b>