



MEETING RECORD

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RECORDED BY: Sarah Schoen CLIENT: KABATA
Rick Sinnott, Dave Rutz, Matt Miller, Mark Somerville ADF&G
MET WITH: (OHMP) OF ADF&G second floor conference room
MEETING LOCATION: ADF&G second floor conference room
ROUTE TO: INFORMATION ACTIONS
SUBJECT OF MEETING: Knik Arm Crossing One-on-One Agency Scoping Meeting

MEETING ATTENDEES

Rick Sinnott, ADF&G	Jim Glaspell, URS
Matt Miller, ADF&G	Robin Reich, HDR
Dave Rutz, ADF&G	Sarah Schoen, HDR
Mark Somerville, DNR (OHMP)	

ITEMS DISCUSSED:

Robin Reich (HDR) started the meeting by introducing the project and describing the current task of writing the EIS. HDR is the lead consulting company, with URS and PND doing a large amount of work. The Notice of Intent (NOI) was filed in January, and scoping is continuing from now until August. Robin said that this is the start of the official one-on-one agency scoping meetings, but agencies have been involved for a while and have helped design studies along the way. The main objective of the project is to connect Anchorage to the Matanuska-Susitna Borough (MSB). KABATA is a government agency that was brought about through legislation and funded by congress. KABATA is basically an arm of DOT. KABATA is trying to "streamline" the process by meeting with agencies early so there will not be any surprises. The Federal Highway Administration (FHWA) is the agency in charge of the project. Robin explained that a purpose and need (P&N) statement with five main intents is under development. One need is to meet the legislative intent of connecting Anchorage to the MSB by a bridge. Connecting the POA and Port MacKenzie would help alleviate some of the Port of Anchorage's (POA) congestion by allowing expansion to happen in designated industrial areas of Port MacKenzie. With the new Homeland Security concerns, a link between Elmendorf Air Force Base (EAFB) and Port MacKenzie is beneficial. The link would be an alternative escape route for the Anchorage bowl in case of an emergency. Another important need is the need for a connection to the quickly growing Mat-Su valley.

Dave Rutz (ADF&G) asked for the timeframe for finishing the EIS.

Robin answered that the draft is scheduled to be done at the end of November in this streamlined process. The intent is that the draft in November would be "impeccable", so it will move quickly to the final EIS.

Jim Glaspell (URS) added that the speed of this EIS is due in part to the fact that there was a draft EIS done for this project in 1984. Some of the data can be recycled from the old study. Fieldwork (beluga, fisheries, and hydrology) for the project was also started last year (2004), so there is a jumpstart on data collection.

Matt Miller (ADF&G) asked about the State's legislative mandate.

Dave wondered if KABATA had been talking to the Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association, the Northern District Setnetter Association and other interested parties. Robin said that they had been speaking with the Setnetters.

Robin talked about the studies that were going on for the project. The beluga study is being led by LGL. Land-based observation points around Knik Arm and summer and fall boat surveys were set up to study belugas in the Arm. The study found that there is a resident group of between 100 and 150 belugas who appear to stay within Knik Arm from when observations started in July until around December. There were a few groups spotted in February, but the group does not appear to have been in Arm since the middle of December. On a typical day the belugas ride the tide up the Arm and go out with the tide to around Eagle Bay. It is unknown why the belugas left after December.

Robin went on that there was a fisheries study in the 1980's for the previous draft EIS. The study was led by Jon Houghton, who is leading the fisheries study for the current EIS. Jon is using similar sample sites and techniques as were used in 1983. There were juvenile and adult salmon and longfin smelt caught between July and November (before the studies were aborted due to ice). More marine species were caught later in the year. A goal is to examine the connection between belugas and fish. A years worth of data will be collected.

Dave noted that Cook Inlet Aquaculture Association had stocked Eklutna River for years with primarily sockeye and chum salmon. ADF&G has been stocking Eklutna River with coho and chinook salmon for the last three years, and they may start stocking more types of salmon in the future. The natural runs of chinook salmon in the Matanuska drainage are around 800 fish. Most runs for individual streams in the area are about 100 chinook. The Knik River has about 200-300 chinook.

Matt mentioned that Eagle River only has chinook runs in the few 100s. They stopped stocking Eagle River in the 1980's or 90's.

Jim reported that multiple species of year old salmon were found staying in the Arm during the 2004 fish study. This was longer than expected.

Robin then gave a quick description of the project constraints. The POA is an industrial area that is busy and crowded, and has restrictions on traffic flow based on security concerns; Port traffic is not permitted to mix with public (through) traffic. Government Hill poses constraints based on homeowner issues. There are quality of life issues for the neighborhood. There are constraints involved with security and airspace at the Air Force Base. There are also environmental constraints such as: the deep trench through the approximate center of Knik Arm, essential fish habitat, and beluga whale habitat. Siltation of the POA is a large issue. The amount of constraints for such a small project area makes it hard to have many alternatives. Robin commented that the option of having the bridge lower in the Arm (below the Ports) was discounted in 1984 because it would be in the way of the boats headed to the ports and fishermen.

Jim mentioned that because of many reasons (depth, velocity, scour), bridge construction will likely be better farther north in the study area. The composition of the bottom is dense sand and fine materials, which are fairly solid.

Mark Somerville (DNR) asked if the crossing would be around two miles. Robin confirmed that.

Robin noted that the structure type is still in question, and that there may be embankments or island structures joining to a bridge structure over the middle of the Arm.,.

Jim said that KABATA is looking at fish and beluga migration.

Dave asked if we had consulted existing studies from British Columbia or Washington involving causeways and juvenile migration.

Jim said that they would look into it, and study flows, gyres, and how sediments interact.

Robin described the goal for developing a list of alternatives and developing criteria from which to analyze the alternatives (cost, impacts to fisheries, etc) with the agencies. Robin described the 1984 EIS project, which went from Anchorage all the way over to Houston. The project now is shorter, ending at Port MacKenzie.

Robin asked ADF&G if they thought that the cumulative impacts would be big. She mentioned that Gino Del Frate (ADF&G) thought that moose on the Mat-Su side would be the big issue.

Dave said that the chinook salmon fishery at the Little Susitna River is at saturation. With increased access that the bridge will supply, there will be the need for limits and restrictions on fishing. Once the crossing is in place, it will be a quick trip to the Little Su fishery, which is the biggest coho salmon producer in North Cook Inlet and West Cook Inlet. The harvest of coho is about 25,000 fish, while the chinook salmon harvest is between 2,000 and 3,000 fish. The fishery is fairly saturated at this point.

Robin asked if ADF&G would put restrictions on the fishery. Dave said that they would put restrictions in place if necessary, making it a weekend only fishery.

Robin acknowledged the economic impacts of those actions. Rabbit Slough was identified as important.

Dave said that several systems in the area produce small runs.

Robin asked if those were important locally or to outside fisherman (Anchorage folks and/or tourists coming to the Valley to fish). Dave said that the fisheries in the Mat-Su are important to both.

Jim talked about the cumulative effects, taking into account the MSB road and rail corridor project up the west side of Knik Arm and road improvements. There is and will continue to be development in the MSB. Jim said that the project will connect to roads, and all alternatives are being considered (under, over, around, or through Government Hill). Fill embankments are being considered, along with military concerns.

Dave cautioned against relying too heavily on what certain Base commanders suggest, as they are not permanent. He suggested going to a higher level.

Matt mentioned that the biggest fisheries issues would be those effecting Ship Creek (hatchery fed), the wild runs at Six Mile River, chinook salmon at Eagle River, and the fishery at Eklutna.

Dave talked about the educational (tribal) fisheries in the area, and how those were important to the local tribes.

Robin asked how those were managed. Dave said that ADF&G manages the educational fisheries. There are permits and fishing limits.

Robin asked if this went on all summer long. Dave said that it went on at certain times.

Robin asked if there were educational fisheries in other areas of the Arm. Dave said there were some, in Knik and Eklutna.

Matt said that the educational fisheries at Eklutna are important, especially at the mouth. Dave said that they are mainly a pacification fishery.

Dave said that the Fish Creek commercial fishery no longer exists, although if runs become higher they will open it again.

Robin clarified that setnetters want to be able to access Fish Creek.

Dave said that some may want to access the creek.

Rick Sinnott (ADF&G) said that belugas are a State Species of Concern and are his primary concern. Moose kills on the road will also be a concern on the Mat-Su side. This is an issue for the moose as well as for public safety. Recent studies showed around 130 moose per square mile in the Point MacKenzie area. The moose tend to move back and forth from the Susitna Flats State Game Refuge to the Palmer Hay Flats. That area is heavily hunted for moose, as well as small game. Trapping occurs in the area also.

Robin asked about bear use of the Mat-Su project area.

Rick said that there are a lot of black bears, but that no studies have been done.

Robin asked about Rick's concerns on the Anchorage side.

Rick said that he has fewer concerns with the Anchorage side, especially if the route goes through Port of Anchorage/Ship Creek/Government Hill. He said that the Anchorage side project area is a general wildlife write-off area.

Jim asked about essential fish habitat and the basis for NMFS decisions.

Dave said that there will mainly be beluga issues.

Robin said that there will be beluga and fish reports out to the agencies in about a week (via disk).

Dave said that points of interest that HDR could look at include: weir information, timing of runs, migration, and area management reports.

Robin asked if ADF&G saw the need for additional studies or information.

Rick said that there have not been any/many studies across the Arm.

Dave asked about juvenile sampling over at Point MacKenzie.

Robin said that she had heard that it is will likely a part of mitigation for the boat launch ramp project.

Dave said that there has not been much of a problem with adult salmon returns. He mentioned the need to determine the timing for when the bulk of juveniles are coming through the Arm.

Matt said, in reference to the effect of construction of water quality, that the water is so silty that dropping rocks into it will not affect anything.

Jim mentioned the idea of silt curtains, and acknowledged that it may be unnecessary for this project. He said that the fisheries study may indicate that juvenile salmon are site eating. Invertebrate information was also collected.

Robin said there was one scud found at the bottom of the Arm during oceanographic studies.

Rick suggested that we talk to Tony Kavalok (ADF&G) about doing a moose movement study. The Mat-Su would be the perfect place to do it, and it would determine where to put moose crossing structures. How to go about the study is unclear, as collaring bulls and cows is very expensive.

Robin gave a brief description of the project schedule; the draft document will come out in November. There could be workshops once a month in the summer for agencies to discuss alternatives and other items related to the project.

Matt said that there will be limited alternatives. Jim mentioned that alternatives for NEPA could include structural designs, not just corridor alternatives.

Robin said that the alternatives would be limited by cost as well as other factors.

Jim talked about the idea of an impoundment (wetland) area associated with the embankments, said that there would likely be none. Military plane activity and roads could lead to bird death and hazards to people.

Robin noted that the formal agency meeting would be at the end of March. The final document is scheduled to come out by June of next year, and will include permits.

Mark did not know what permits would be needed from DNR. It depends on where the bridge hits the shore and whether streams would be impacted.

Jim said that they were going to merge permitting with the NEPA process.