Death to a deadbeat dam

A 61-foot dam that helped kill off Eklutna River salmon runs will finally be removed. Will the fish return one day?

By Rick Sinnott
Native Village of Eklutna is the oldest settlement in Southcentral Alaska.

Eklutna is the largest landowner in Anchorage.
Figure 12. Upstream face of diversion dam under construction.
Source: Anchorage Daily Times, 21 Sept. 1929
Removing the Lower Eklutna River Dam

Estimated cost: $7.5 million

30 jobs created
Eklutna Construction & Maintenance, LLC
– Eklutna River Lower Dam Removal
Fixing a Broken River
Partners and Agencies

The Conservation Fund
Eklutna Inc
Eklutna Construction and Management
Native Village of Eklutna
HDR
Rasmuson Foundation
National Fish and Wildlife Foundation
Patagonia
Trout Unlimited
Resources Legacy Fund
US Army Corps of Engineers
State of Alaska Governor’s Office
State of Alaska Office of Dam Safety
State of Alaska Department of Fish and Game
State of Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation
Taking ALL the water out of a salmon river is not acceptable practice
Hydropower consumes ~90% of Eklutna water to produce ~2% of Southcentral grid power.

AWWU consumes ~10% of Eklutna water to supply ~85% of Anchorage drinking water.
August 7, 1991

Fish and Wildlife Agreement
Snettisham and Eklutna Projects

Municipality of Anchorage
d/b/a Anchorage Municipal Light and Power
Chugach Electric Association, Inc.
Matanuska Electric Association, Inc.
Alaska Energy Authority
United States Department of Commerce
National Marine Fisheries Service
United States Department of Interior
Fish and Wildlife Service
State of Alaska
“During initial reviews of the legislative proposal, one significant problem was identified; namely, loss of a Sockeye salmon run that once spawned in Eklutna Lake. The loss was caused by a small private power development constructed in 1929. This problem was not identified in pre-authorization studies for the Federal Eklutna Project and the Federal project does not include any mitigation. This specific problem and the desires of the fish and wildlife agencies to provide appropriate consideration to fish and wildlife resources over the long run led first to recommendation that the two projects be placed under FERC jurisdiction; and subsequently to the August 7, 1991 Agreement that provides a process similar to FERC’s but without a requirement for Federal regulation.”

Environmental Assessment for the Sale of the Eklutna Project, March 1992, Department of Energy
And another third reason is that he made some statements that
I do not consider to be good for this corporation. I am
especially concerned with the Indians. In this connection, I am
especially concerned with the Indians. In this connection, I am
especially concerned with the Indians. In this connection, I am
especially concerned with the Indians. In this connection, I am
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"It is necessary that Anchorage Power & Light be on friendly
terms with the Indians around Eklutna Lake. The uneducated Indian
has only the mind of a 12-year old child."
Dena’ina believe that everything in their environment serves a purpose and each has a spirit.

Eklutna’s Energy
The Eklutna River historically provided an abundance of salmon for Dena’ina. Tribal elders recall salmon so numerous, you could almost walk across the river on the backs of the fish. Over the years, the river’s energy has been harnessed by dams diverting water from the river for hydroelectricity. Low flows from the dams and overfishing have altered the spirit of the river, trading abundant fish for abundant electricity.

Measuring the Flow
The flow of a river is measured by scientists in cubic feet per second. Salmon cannot spawn in shallow water and very little water flows between the upper dam and the river’s confluence with Thunder Bird Creek. In fact, at the upper dam, zero cubic feet of water is released from Eklutna Lake into the watershed.

Solutions for the Future
How can we restore the unique qualities of this river? Some people want to remove the lower dam that has been decommissioned for decades, hoping it will increase spawning salmon in the lower river. However, a balance is desired between using the river’s spirit and energy to generate electricity and drinking water, and to reestablish salmon spawning habitat.
The Eklutna River has been broken for 88 years. Native people and salmon have been neglected. It’s time to fix this river.