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December 14, 1978

ALASKA DEPT. OF
FISH & GAME

DEC 20 1978

SPOKANE REGIONAL
FISHERY OFFICE

The Honorable Mike Gravel
United States Senate
3121 Dirksen Senate Office Bldg.
Washington, D.C. 20510

Re: Susitna Hydro Project

Dear Senator Gravel:

Thank you for your letter of October 11 requesting further information on the budgets required for fisheries investigations relative to the Susitna Hydro Project. Although you requested information related only to fisheries, I would like to take this opportunity to familiarize you with all of the biological investigations and inform you of our concerns regarding these fish and wildlife studies.

You asked: "How much money is required to conduct the required fishery impact study in the Upper and Lower Susitna River drainages?" Enclosed are the pages of the June 1978 Phase I Plan of Study (POS) prepared by the Corps of Engineers (Attachment 1) which address all proposed biological investigations. The information contained in these pages outlines the proposed biological studies which should be a part of work performed to aid in the determination of the feasibility of this Susitna Hydro Project. Studies B-2 through B-7 are required to assess the impact of the proposed project on the Susitna River's fisheries resources. Using the Corps projected cost the fisheries portion of these studies would amount to \$2,264,000. The Department estimates that \$5,158,000 would be required to adequately perform these studies.

Secondly, you requested: "Of the total amount of money that is needed, what is the breakdown on amounts and sources from which it can be obtained? Specifically how much can be made available for such a study from ADF&G, how much can be counted on from National Marine Fisheries Service, and finally,

how much must come from the Corps of Engineers?" The table in Attachment 2 shows the Phase I budgets proposed by the Corps (4.3 million dollars) and by the Department (7.9 million dollars) and the differences between the budgets in dollars and percent. As you will note, there is a 3.6 million dollar difference between the Corps and ADF&G budget proposals. A recent letter to Eric Yould, Executive Director of the Alaska Power Authority (Attachment 3), further expresses our concerns of the inadequacy of funding for the Phase I biological investigations.

We believe the money for the Phase I investigations should come from the federal government through the Corps of Engineers or through State appropriations for the full term (46 months) of the proposed studies. Funding may be available this year if the State of Alaska appropriates between 7 and 8 million dollars to initiate the first year of Phase I studies. However, there is no assurance that the remainder of the investigations will be funded.

This Department does not have the funds to divert into the study of the Susitna Hydro Project. Diversion of Federal Aid in Wildlife Restoration (P-R) or Federal Aid in Fisheries Restoration (D-J) funds and projects to study fish and wildlife impacts would result in sport hunters and fishermen subsidizing investigations of a project affecting not only these user groups but the broad spectrum of the public. Also, all of the Department's D-J and P-R funds are currently dedicated to ongoing studies.

The third question you asked: "What is the time frame involved in this type of fishery impact study?" is critical to our success in maintaining the fishery. As we stated in the attached letter to the APA, we believe a strong indication of the feasibility of this project with respect to fish and wildlife can be stated if the proposed Phase I studies in the POS are carried out. There are effectively three full field years possible in the 46 month Phase I time frame. The time frames are basically laid out in the enclosed biological investigations section of the POS (Attachment 1, pages 229-302). All salmon species have in excess of two year life cycles and certain studies, to accommodate the investigation of species with life cycles up to five years, should be extended beyond that three years to a full five year time frame. Earlier proposals by this Department for five years of study would have cost ten million dollars. Until the feasibility investigations are complete and the potential fish and wildlife impacts identified, projection on time and cost of fish and wildlife mitigation studies are not presently possible.

I hope that the material enclosed, and our discussion will point out that alternatives for providing the budgets for biological investigations must be explored. We seek your assistance in determining if the Susitna Hydro Project is feasible from a biological standpoint. If the decision is made

Mike Gravel

-3-

December 14, 1973

to proceed with construction, we also seek your assistance in seeing that the project is done in a manner which mitigates fish and wildlife resource losses. Please contact this Department if you need more information.

Sincerely,

Ronald O. Skoog
Commissioner

Attachments (4)

cc: R. Logan
T. Trent

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