



Copper River Watershed Project

Upriver and down, salmon are common ground

LITTLE TONSINA KICK-OFF WITH ARMY CORPS OF ENGINEERS

FEBRUARY 27, 2019

Attended by:

Maria Wessel, ADF&G
Dan Adamczak, ADOT/Maintenance & Operations
Mike Knapp, ADOT/Bridge Hydraulics
Elmer Marx, ADOT/Bridge Design
Chuck Schultz, Alyeska Pipeline Service Company
Jan Deick, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Planning
Dee Ginter, USACE H&H (standing in for Merlin Peterson)
Karl Harvey, USACE Cost Engineer
Matt Ferguson, USACE Environmental Resources
Eva Sala, USACE Economist
Eric Johnson, USACE Economist
Tim Sundlov, BLM
David Phillips, Chugach Alaska Corporation
Kristin Carpenter, CRWP
Kate Morse, CRWP

Topics of Discussion:

- Explanation of USACE feasibility process, in particular the first step which is the Federal Interest Determination (FID)
- Discussion of what information might exist and what will need to be collected by USACE for FID at Little Tonsina
- Anticipated FID timeline

Discussion Notes:

Jan (USACE): We are talking about a project that's been proposed for the CAP under the Section 206 Ecosystem Restoration program. Project is to come up with a solution at the Little Tonsina River crossing to remove an impediment to fish passage. Requested clarification on upstream habitat estimates.

Kate (CRWP): 12 miles initial estimate using aerial imagery/NHD layer (current information at time of Letter of Interest to USACE). Since then, USFWS has used GIS to analyze upstream network, estimate 45 miles of rearing habitat. Current crossing is a gradient barrier, velocity barrier.

Heather (USFWS): confirmed it's not passable for juvenile salmon.

Tim (BLM): has seen adults and juvenile upstream, so not a complete barrier.

Jan (USACE): What USACE has done so far is visited site and created a fact sheet (fact sheet shared, USACE timeline also shared on project website). They are now authorized to explore the site. Currently working with \$50K, USACE-only money, to determine federal interest in the project. Obviously have some interest, but this is the next step in documenting it. We will gather what information is available, complete a site visit, and write up a Federal Interest Determination (FID) report.

In this process USACE has to evaluate the scope of work to complete project, costs, and a schedule. Next \$50K also federal-only. If initial study goes over \$100K (which is anticipated), additional costs shared 50/50 through a formal cost share agreement. At that point, USACE will develop a detailed scope of work based on what they think needs to be completed.

Kristin (CRWP) transitioned discussion to existing data on the site. Project documents available on website <https://copperriver.org/little-tonsina-fish-passage-restoration-project-page/>:

- Process of doing topographic survey. Anticipate it will be finished soon after start of 2019 field season (June?). Could include additional points as requested by USACE if needed.
- Contracted with ADOT using support from USFWS and BLM to do geotechnical drilling, one test hole with report.
- Heather and Franklin Dekker, USFWS Hydrologist, conducted a 2017 site visit and prepared a preliminary H&H report.
- BLM gauge upstream, located 3.5 miles upstream of crossing.
- Geotech report is available from ADOT, Elmer Marx said it can be passed along. They expect competent materials based on the test holes they've seen.
- ADOT is still going to put together foundation recommendations based on this report. Elmer confirmed the intent is to confirm the optimum pile type and depth.

Jan (USACE): Part of USACE process requires them to look at various alternatives that could result in a successful stream crossing. The USACE team on this project are debating this and discussing whether they can accept partners' previous work looking at alternatives. Do partners have anything that demonstrates the bridge is the preferred option?

Elmer (ADOT): Will be looking at crossing alternatives. Bridge type selection will be analyzed once they receive survey data—look at a multi span bridge vs. longer span bridge. Will price out alternatives and then send that to Kristin (CRWP)/Heather (USFWS) and they would decide on which alternative was most satisfying, and with feedback ADOT will move forward with final design.

Heather (USFWS): Did look at a culvert scenario. Believe the culvert would not be a cost savings in the end (without doing the actual estimate) because the road elevation would have to be increased a lot and a very large culvert would be required for successful fish passage. The bank-full width is 45 feet, and to achieve stream simulation conditions we'd need a 45-foot culvert. Ultimately a culvert does not meet USFWS project goals. It is possible more work could be done to determine why we don't want culverts there.

Mike (ADOT): Brought into the project with the understanding that a bridge is the strongly preferred option, but could go back and re-visit culvert if need be.

Jan (USACE): What they are wrestling with is usually the feasibility study includes them looking at various alternatives themselves and coming up with a plan forward—in this case it sounds like the project sponsor (CRWP) has hired someone else to do part of this feasibility evaluation and USACE wants to determine if they can just use this information.

When it comes to in-kind services as part of the cost-share with USACE, there are nuances as to when it can be applied (after Cost Share Agreement is in place). Need to evaluate and discuss because there may be a benefit to not having the feasibility done until we have an agreement.

Kristin (CRWP): So far feasibility work has been federally funded, so can it even be a match?

Jan (USACE): Federal funds can be used as a match if the other federal agency provides in writing that they are okay with it.

Kristin (CRWP): Can you take what analysis has been done and review it and could that count as part of your FID?

Jan (USACE): The short answer is yes, but we still have to do our own evaluation. Still have to justify the project through cost analysis process. After FID, an agreement will be developed, and then after agreement is executed, then in-kind services can be applied/counted.

Kristin (CRWP): How long does FID take?

Jan (USACE): If the flow chart is correct, 2 - 4 months is a typical FID. The flow chart is part of the updated guidance.

Kristin (CRWP): What are main elements of FID
See project fact sheet on website.

Mike (ADOT): When we do projects, we evaluate alternatives ourselves, and it sounds like the Corps will evaluate alternatives as well—is there collaboration to occur to make sure the alternatives considered by the Corps are okay with ADOT?

Jan (USACE): doesn't think they have to start from scratch based on what we have.

Heather (USFWS): We embarked on this process pre-USACE involvement because this is a very important crossing for fish habitat and the sort of project that USFWS works on. Talking with ADOT, they maintain this road, and they need to be comfortable with the bridge. Therefore it made the most sense to have ADOT take the lead designing. We wanted to involve ADOT in early process/data collection because they will ultimately own it.

Jan (USACE): Doesn't see conflict with how we started, it's just different from how USACE usually embarks on these sorts of project. Is ADOT end user/owner of right of way and responsible for future maintenance?

Dan (ADOT): In discussions about this, yes, ADOT would be looking at taking responsibility for maintenance—still evaluating options based on installation. The intent is for ADOT to take over maintenance and responsibility.

Ron Green (USACE Real Estate): Actual land is owned by Chugach Alaska Corporation, so would ADOT be getting a right-of-way with Chugach? Dan (ADOT) said depends on where the bridge ends up. Currently site is not Chugach Alaska Corporation land.

Ron (USACE) will be the one ultimately interested in property ownership issues, future access, and how it's going to play out. Is the Sponsor going to be in control of the property? Alyeska and a homeowner farther out road will be involved as well?

Dan (ADOT): Public ROW currently and that won't change—ADOT would be the owner of the ROW for the benefit of the traveling public.

Dave (CAC): If necessary, an agreement for access across land will be created. CAC is open to working with ADOT and Alyeska for exchanging land to support the project.

Matt (USACE): What about characterization of habitat. USACE needs to document current conditions. Kate (CRWP) will share habitat and culvert data from field surveys. CRWP methods the same as ADFG.

Tim (BLM): What is more important to Army Corps, habitat or fish species?

Matt (USACE): Will look at pre- and post-project conditions and assessments to quantify the change in the performance metrics. Should be flexibility to what criteria are included in the assessment.

Kristin (CRWP): Asked Matt if he could send us a list of questions that we could answer.

Kate (CRWP): To assist with data gap analysis, CRWP will pull together a list of references and existing data and will post on a project webpage as downloadable documents. Then all partners will have access to the documents at any time during project planning and implementation.

Heather (USFWS): USFWS could do fish passage run of Fish Xing that would show you passability of the culvert to juvenile and adult salmon.

Matt (USACE) asked about downstream analysis. Heather (USFWS) has not, already has been some headcut that has happened. Potential that additional head-cutting will happen is a concern. Grade control could help prevent head-cut from traveling upstream. The whole lower mile was channelized and turned into not that great stream habitat.

Matt (USACE): Could we do something to improve the downstream habitat as well to address velocity? Seems like if we could add a stream meander that would help.

Jan (USACE): Is this expanding the scope when looking downstream?

Heather (USFWS): my opinion is that the habitat benefit gained downstream is minor and what we're accessing upstream is in much better condition.

Matt (USACE): Corps agrees, but if it had hydraulic considerations, then it might be worthwhile to include it in considerations of alternatives. Increase the length of the river between the crossing of the confluence?

Heather (USFWS): Agreed that it would be worth considering in the economic analysis. Jan (USACE) thinks it's too risky. Makes it a bigger, more complicated project.

Matt (USACE): from a fish perspective, does changing the velocities influence fish preference on choosing Little Tonsina vs. staying in main channel? No conclusive response given.

USACE asked about Nonprofit (CRWP) as project sponsor, and Jan confirmed it has already been vetted and approved. No issue with CRWP as project sponsor (just not the usual scenario so it took some extra vetting).

Next Steps:

Website created with existing data files.

<https://copperriver.org/little-tonsina-fish-passage-restoration-project-page/>

Jan (USACE): USACE will have questions once they get the initial information evaluated—will have more “scoping meetings” moving forward to answer questions. Will use Webex at future discussions to allow for screen share.

Mike (ADOT): As you look at alternatives, heads up there are some buried utilities, including fiber optic lines that tend to be expensive to move.

Heather (USFWS): Thinks the utility will need to be re-located. On preliminary survey we already have the utility located and will share Autocad files. The final survey will not be

available until surveyor is able to get back into the field to finish the work, probably will be June.

Jan (USACE): Leif (USACE) will send along a sample agreement to get that ball rolling, too. We'll have questions on that and more questions on what will happen during FID. He invited anyone to reach out to him or Leif, or we can call a meeting if lots of people have questions.

Tim (BLM): Did USFWS get a measurement on the culverts washed out in 2006 floods during the 2017 survey? Might be a good justification for moving forward with a bridge since those culverts failed. Follow up note: prior to 2006 flood, there were two pipes, one x 10' and one x 4' (according to FH 06-II-0328, Fish Habitat Permit issued for replacing the washed out pipes, 10/15/06).

Heather (USFWS): Didn't get a measurement but it would be good background information.

Kristin (CRWP) said she has FEMA report that was prepared after it washed out and they were proposing a different kind of bridge design. Will share.

Matt (USACE): Question for sponsor (CRWP). Do we intend to restore the ecosystem to pre-2006 vs. the pre-channelization in the 40s? Kristin: we are thinking pre-2006. Matt explained that Section 206 gives them the authority to address the ecosystem, so it needs to be defined.

Mike (ADOT): Does the 206 criteria prohibit things like rip-rap or other scour protections at bridge?

Jan (USACE): Short answer "no". Right now it doesn't preclude anything—if it's necessary to put rip-rap or armour the bottom, that's what's necessary.