

Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project

Winter Recreation on Susitna River

2013 Executive Interview Protocol (revised DRAFT 02/04/2013)

Introduction:

Hi I'm _____ with ERM Alaska, a consulting firm located in Anchorage.

We are working for the Alaska Energy Authority on the Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project studying recreation resources in the Susitna River area. We are contacting agencies, commercial providers, organizations, and individual users to get a better sense of winter recreation activities on the frozen Susitna River. We would like to conduct a brief interview with you. Is now a good time or can I schedule a time that is more convenient?

Before we start I would like to read you a brief description of the project.

This survey is part of a study to determine river recreation use patterns, access and flow preferences for three river reaches on the Susitna River. The Alaska Energy Authority is studying the feasibility of building the Susitna-Watana Hydroelectric Project. The proposed Project would be located on the Susitna River roughly 86 river miles upstream from Talkeetna. As currently envisioned, the project would include a roughly 750-foot tall dam located below Watana Creek and would result in a 23,546 acre, 42.5-mile long reservoir. Project construction and operation will alter river flows in the Susitna downstream. The dam and reservoir could alter downstream navigation and access. When completed, the project would produce nearly 50 percent of the Railbelt's electrical demand, or an annual average of 2,800,000 Megawatt Hours (MWh) of renewable energy generation.

This survey is designed to collect information on existing motorized and non-motorized recreation opportunities on the river corridor during the winter ice period. The river has been divided into three distinct reaches: Reach 1, Denali Highway bridge to Fog Creek (RM 290 to 177); Reach 2, Fog Creek to Portage including Devils Canyon (RM 177 to 149); and Reach 3, Portage Creek to the George Parks Highway Bridge (RM 149 to 86).

River ice dependent winter recreation and transportation information obtained through the interviews will be summarized for respective recreation opportunities including primary purpose, secondary activities, ice thickness required, need for ice bridges verses longitudinal ice cover, seasonal use patterns, frequency of use, access points, duration of trip (days), campsites, trip length, comparisons with winter recreation opportunities on other frozen Alaska rivers and winter recreation quality on the Susitna.

1. First of all, do you use the river in the capacity as a commercial operator, organization, event, agency or non-commercial user?
Indicate all that apply.

2. For [*commercial operator, organization, event, agency*] please describe your [*business/organization/ event/agency*]
 - a) Areas of operation
 - b) Years in operation
 - c) Services/tours provided
 - d) Membership
 - e) Event type and dates
 - f) Other information

3. Do you or your [*business/organization/ event/agency/individual*] have any [knowledge/or use] of the three winter recreation reaches on the Susitna River?

4. Can you please provide me with some background on this?
 - a) Type of activity
 1. Snow machining
 2. Skiing— ungroomed vs groomed surface/marked trail
 3. Dog mushing
 4. Trapping
 5. Snowshoeing
 6. Aviation
 7. Walking or other (Recreational cabin access and re-supply)
 8. Other?

 - b) Time of winter—specific months and level of use (ex. heavy, light, etc.) [look for hard numbers]

 - c) Client/membership base—
 1. Local area resident?
 2. Anchorage?
 3. Fairbanks?
 4. Non-resident?

5. Please describe the timing of winter recreation activities and your preferences for winter recreation and travel for each river reach where you have experience along the river corridor:
 - a) Do you consider your activities to be transportation, winter recreation or both?

Transportation

- b) What areas of the Susitna River corridor do you use for winter transportation?
- c) Why do you use the river corridor in winter for transportation?
- d) From a **transportation perspective**, do you use the river ice to cross the river from one side to the other or travel longitudinally up and down the river corridor?
- e) What type of **ice conditions do you require** to safely travel the river during the winter?
- f) What is the earliest and the latest month to safely travel the river during the winter?

- g) In what month is your highest frequency of winter transportation activity on the river corridor.

Recreation (follow up questions if not answered above)

- h) What recreation activities are you pursuing during the winter on or near the Susitna?
i) What areas of the Susitna River corridor do you use for these winter recreation activities?
j) For these recreation activities, do you recreate on the river corridor specifically or use ice bridges to cross the river to pursue your desired recreation activity?
k) What is the earliest month you typically engage in these recreation activities on the river corridor?
l) What is the latest month for these winter recreation activities on the river corridor?
m) In what month is your highest period of winter recreation activity?

Winter Recreation Events

- n) Are there any special events during the winter that are dependent on safe ice conditions? If so, what month of the winter does this event(s) occur?
6. Are you noticing any trends in recreational use of the area?
a) Seasonal Changes during the winter (month to month)?
b) Is use and interest growing for winter recreation?
c) Lessening?
d) About the same?
e) Is the mix of recreational use changing?
7. What types of provisions might help improve winter access to the river? (i.e. informational signs, postings, public access points, developed facilities)
Would you prefer access not be improved? [If yes] Why?
8. Are there any other issues regarding winter recreation use on the river corridor or access that we should be aware of?
9. Would you consider this area a unique setting for winter recreation use in Alaska? Why or why not?
10. What other areas with winter recreation opportunities similar to the Susitna do you use for recreational outings?.
11. Are there any specific people that you think it would be important for us to include in our interview research?