

Community Coastal Impact Assistance Program

Nushagak River Watershed Instream Flow Protection

Award Amount

\$78,532

Grantee

Bristol Bay Native Association

Project Contact

Susan L. Flensburg, Environmental Program Manager

Phone: (907) 842-6241

Fax: (907) 842-5932

Email Address: sflensburg@bbna.com

Location

This work will occur in the in various rivers in the Nushagak-Mulchatna River Watershed.

Project Duration

Project Start Date: 1/1/2013

Project End Date: 1/1/2015

Project Duration: 2 Years

Project Description

The Nushagak River Watershed Instream Flow Protection Project will protect key anadromous fish streams that are important for spawning and rearing salmon in the Nushagak Watershed drainages through the establishment of instream flow reservations.

Background

Sufficient amounts of water are required within lotic (flowing) and lentic (lakes) water bodies to support fish and sustain population productivity, stream habitat characteristics, and waterway connectivity. Protection of water flow rates and volumes within rivers and lakes are generally referred to as reservations under Alaska Statue and the Alaska Water Use Act. Other uses of reservations of water include protection of wildlife production and habitat, water quality and sanitation purposes, navigation, recreation, and aesthetics.

A priority use of water within a waterbody for fish is initiated with the filing of an application for an instream flow reservation with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources (ADNR). Once filed (and determined to be complete) an application has priority, but is not enforceable unless five years of flow data is provided to complete the application. Data is collected by installing a stream gauge on a water body and monitoring water levels at different times of the year. Once the data is collected the application is adjudicated and a priority appropriation of water becomes enforceable.

This instream flow program will specifically implement one of the four strategic actions recommended by the 2007 Nushagak River Traditional Use Area Conservation Plan, designed to address the potential threats to the watershed:

Reserve adequate water flow for the Nushagak River and tributaries under existing laws for in-stream flow reservation.

Maintain the vegetative complex that supports moose, fish and other species within and adjacent to the floodplain.

1. Maintain water quality standards that protect wild salmon and other fish.
2. Prevent habitat damage that could result from mining.

Several years ago Bristol Bay Native Association (BBNA) filed an instream flow reservation and installed two stream gauges on the Kuktuli River. Data collection was complete in 2011 and the two gages used on that project are available for installation on another waterbody.

In 2011 the Bureau of Indian Affairs funded a Comprehensive Water Resources Management Plan to support and guide this work. A portion of this work focused on determining which water bodies within the Bristol Bay Coastal Resource Area are priorities for instream flow reservations and the protections of the Alaska Water Act. Napotoli Creek is one of several tributaries within the Nushagak River Drainage that has been selected as a priority area due to ongoing exploration by Millrock Resources, Inc. and importance of this tributary to Koliganek and nearby villages along the Nushagak River.

The requested CIAP funding will specifically be used to:

1. Support a team of hydrologists to conduct a helicopter supported field survey of water bodies targeted by the reconnaissance effort to affirm suitability and identify specific appropriate locations for the installation of gauges.
2. Install gages and supporting instrumentation and initiate flow measurement.
3. File one or more applications to ADNDR for instream flow priority rights for selected tributaries of the Nushagak watershed.

Measurable Goals and Objectives

MEASURABLE GOAL: The protection of instream flow on key tributaries of the Nushagak watershed most likely to be affected if mining activity is permitted. The requested CIAP funding will specifically be used to:

OBJECTIVES:

1. Support a team of hydrologists to conduct a helicopter supported field survey of water bodies targeted by the reconnaissance effort to affirm suitability and identify specific appropriate locations for the installation of gauges.
2. Install 2 gages, support instrumentation of the gages, and initiate 1 year of gage

operation and flow measurement.

3. File one or more applications to ADNR for instream flow priority rights for potentially threatened stream systems of the Nushagak watershed that are within the Bristol Bay Coastal Resource Service Area.

CIAP Authorized Use

The activities outlined for this project are consistent with CIAP Authorized Use 1: Projects and activities for the conservation, protection, or restoration of coastal areas, including wetlands.

A reservation of water for instream use is a water right that protects specific instream water uses, in this case protection of wildlife and habitat. This will be accomplished by the filing a instream flow reservation applications with the Alaska Department of Natural Resources stating that instream flow is required to protection wildlife and habitat. Later users, such as future mining interests, will be prevented from appropriating water that may affect existing priority instream activity. This will ensure that adequate water flow remains in the Nushagak River and its tributaries, which will ensure the health of local fish and wildlife populations and habitat, which will benefit coastal environments.

This project will provide statutory protection for key streams that are important for spawning and rearing salmon in the Nushagak River drainage. These streams have been targeted because of their proximity to exploratory mining project on state lands in the vicinity of Kemuk Mountain.