

FINAL RESERVOIR ACCESS CONTROL PLAN

BLUE LAKE HYDROELECTRIC PROJECT (FERC No. 2230) EXPANSION

Prepared by:

City and Borough of Sitka Electric Department

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1.0 INTRODUCTION

The City and Borough of Sitka Electric Department (“City”) is in the process of applying for an amendment to the existing FERC license for the Blue Lake hydroelectric project (“Project”, FERC No. 2230). The amendment will reflect two significant changes in Project design: 1) construction of a new powerhouse including 3 new turbine generators and decommissioning of the existing turbine generators; and 2) raising the Project dam as much as 83 feet from the existing spillway height of El (elevation in feet above mean sea level) 342 to El 425.

The City is seeking an amendment to the existing FERC license to address recent electric load forecasts in the face on increasing diesel fuel costs. Details of the proposed expansion are described in the Final Amendment Application (FAA, City, 2010), available at the City’s Project website:

www.cityofsitka.com/departments/electric/bluelakeexpansion).

The FAA and its referenced resource reports documented effects of the Expansion, including those related to increased boat access to Blue Lake reservoir and subsequent effects on general recreation use, wildlife, (specifically through goat hunting), and Blue Lake water quality. The City, throughout the amendment application period, has proposed to address these effects by limiting recreational access to Blue Lake after the Expansion is complete. This Draft Plan describes the City's proposed method for access limitation.

2.0 BACKGROUND

The City operates the Blue Lake project to produce electricity and as it's primary drinking water supply. The quality of Blue Lake water is exceptionally high, and requires no additional filtration prior to consumption as drinking water. The City and Borough of Sitka Water Department routinely monitors the quality of Blue Lake water, which, to retain the exclusion from the need for filtration or treatment, must meet certain standards imposed by the Alaska Department of Environmental Conservation (ADEC).

To assure that these standards are met, the City has developed and operates under a Watershed Management Plan, which restricts access to and recreational use of Blue Lake.

Chapter 4 of this plan "Control of Detrimental Activities and Events 4.1 Recreation, *Control Measures*", states:

- 1) Control potential expansion of recreation in the watershed; and
- 2) Limit human and domestic animal wastes from activities on the shores and slopes of the lake.

Section 4.1.a states that the City must:

"Continue to limit motorized access for recreational use to control increases in recreational pressure on the reservoir. Decisions regarding improvements to gain access to the shoreline and other recreational facilities will be made contingent upon the outcome of the SWTR decision. Guidance and agreements from various agencies will be sought. No recreational expansion will be allowed that jeopardizes a favorable SWTR decision".

ACCESS CONTROL PROPOSAL

After the dam is raised 83 feet, access to Blue Lake reservoir will be improved in that the access to the lake shore would be eased at all expected reservoir water levels. Boat access under the existing conditions is limited because it is necessary, even at high water level, to trailer the boat and motor to the water's edge via the unmaintained reservoir access road. This road is very steep with tight turns, and requires a high clearance 4-wheel drive vehicle to access the water's edge even under optimal conditions. As a result, only those with such vehicles and the skill to operate them under these conditions, are able to launch boats and motors on Blue Lake. Carrying even a modest boat and motor down and back up the access road is simply a more difficult feat than most users can accomplish. With the raised reservoir elevation and the existing road access, vehicles of any kind towing boats would be able to access the reservoir to launch and retrieve.

While it is not known exactly how much this might increase the use of motor craft on the reservoir, it is expected to be extensive because of the recreation opportunities available through boating on the reservoir. Under any circumstance, the new access availability would likely violate the Watershed Control Program criterion of not increasing reservoir use.

To comply with the Watershed Control Program the City proposes to restrict the use of the Blue Lake reservoir by installing a barrier at the beginning of the reservoir access road (Figure 1). This barrier would be designed to restrict motor vehicles from driving to the water's edge. The barrier would not restrict the access of people or watercraft that can be transported to the water level without a motor vehicle, including kayaks, rowboats and canoes. These users already use the reservoir because their craft can be carried down and back up the access road.

However, the measure would likely prohibit increased use of motorized craft because users would have to carry rather large, heavy boats and motors to the water's edge.

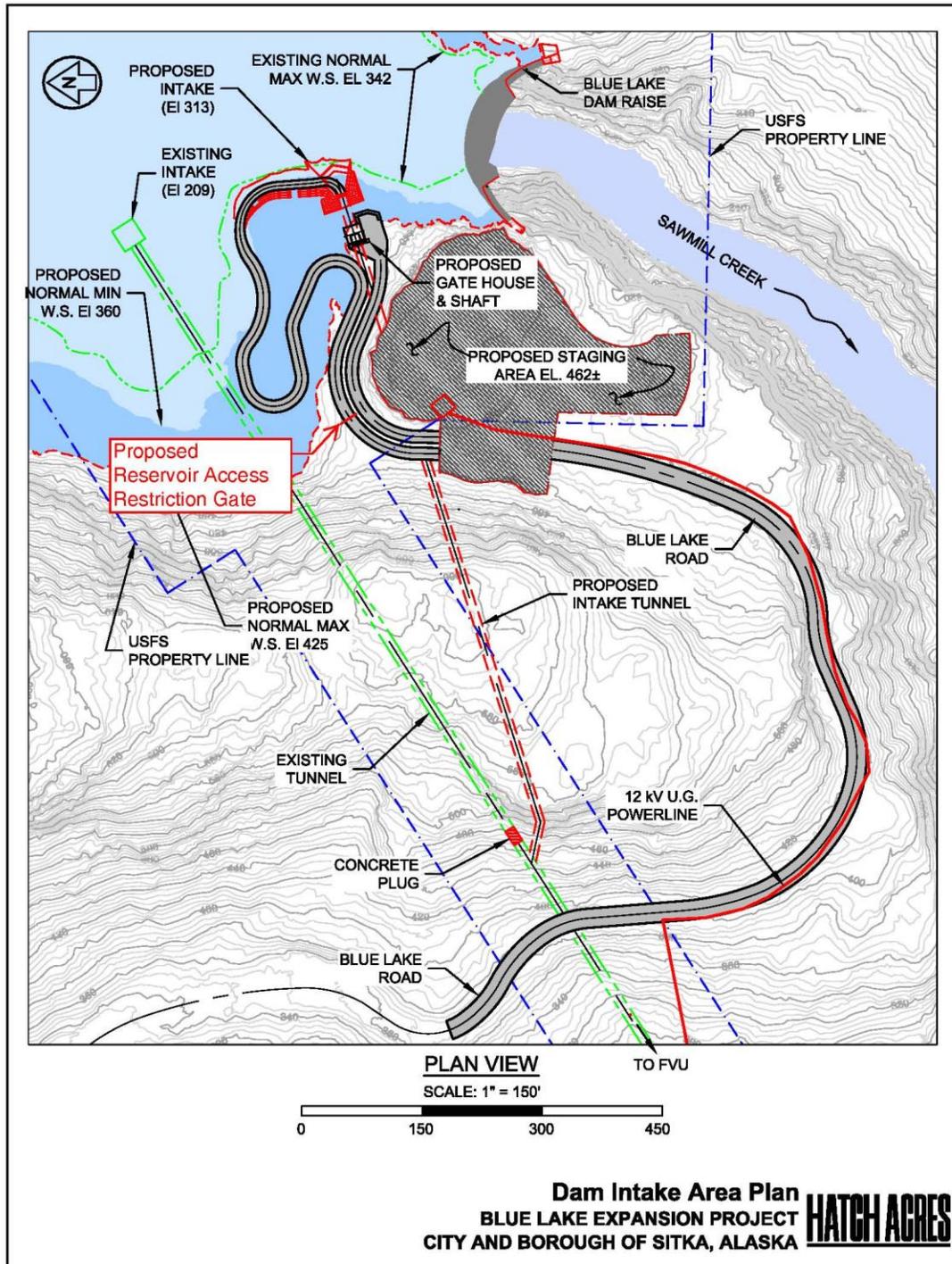


Figure 1

ATTACHMENT I

Comments From ADF&G

From: Tydingco, Troy A (DFG) [troy.tydingco@alaska.gov]
Sent: Monday, June 13, 2011 1:26 PM
To: Dean Orbison
Cc: Miller, Monte D (DFG); Chadwick, Robert E (DFG); Johnson, Shawn L (DFG); Fowler, Patrick A (DFG)
Subject: RE: Draft Reservoir Access Control Plan, Blue Lake Project ("Project", FERC No. 2230) Expansion

Hi Dean- I wanted to comment on the draft Reservoir Access Control Plan. Specifically, I wanted to encourage the city to consider other alternatives to putting up a barrier to the lake. I think that a barrier to the lake might be perceived as a loss of access. As you know, Blue Lake is the only road accessible lake in which anglers can use motor boats in Sitka. I looked up the days fished from our statewide harvest survey (a surrogate for effort and lake use) and we have data going back to 1996. In 1996 we estimated 776 angler days on the lake. I suggest that this level is already relatively low. Since 1996, and the closure of the mill, fishing effort has declined. Our response rates from the statewide harvest survey in recent years haven't been high enough to estimate effort with great certainty, but suggest that the effort is maybe only half or less of what it was 15 years ago. I assume that the city doesn't intend to further reduce access to the lake as the lake use is already relatively low. If lake use doubled or tripled effort from the last couple of years it would likely not be at the same levels it was in the early/mid 90's. Under the current plan to leave timber standing – shore access will not be increased – rather I suspect that it will be reduced. I anticipate that angling opportunities will not be increased rather possibly reduced because of the difficulty and safety issues with accessing the shoreline.

If the desire to control access to the lake is a water quality issue, how about some other alternatives such as four stroke motors, designated fueling sites or horsepower limitations? Limiting the size of vessel and appropriate hp motors could lead to some safety concerns for boaters.

Thanks for your consideration of this.

Troy Tydingco
Sitka Area Management Biologist – Sport Fish Division
907-747-5379

In response to ADF&G's comment the City believes it would be a violation of the Watershed Control Plan not to restrict access to the reservoir. Restricting motor and vessel size, and controlling refueling activities would be quite difficult to monitor and enforce. The City will add a statement to the sign at the reservoir that states that the reservoir is a public water supply, pets and swimming are prohibited, camping may be done by permit only, other recreational activities and fishing in the reservoir are not prohibited.