

3/8/11 TESTIMONY ON HB 103: POWER PROJECT; ALASKA ENERGY TO HOUSE SPECIAL COMMITTEE ON ENERGY BY BECKY LONG, TALKEETNA

I thought that it would be valuable for the Committee to hear a synopsis of the Alaska Energy Authority (AEA) meetings from a public viewpoint. I attended the recent AEA open house/presentations on Railbelt Large Hydro in Talkeetna, Palmer, and Anchorage and have notes from a friend from the Fairbanks meeting. The meetings focused on the comparisons between the Chakachomna and the Susitna hydro proposed projects and detailing why Susitna is the recommended choice.

There was a good turnout at the meetings showing high interest amongst the public. The Fairbanks and Talkeetna meetings each had about 150 people attending, Palmer had around 80 and Anchorage had around 120 people. The public wrote questions on AEA file cards after the presentation. There was no opportunity for the public to comment officially.

I kept track of the questions asked from the file cards. 43 questions were asked in Fairbanks, 42 in Anchorage, 43 in Palmer and 101 questions in Talkeetna. At all the meetings, there were very good questions asked. I divided the questions into subject content overall for all the meetings.

The most asked question, 17%, was why the Susitna Dam is the only alternative being offered to fulfill the 50% renewable energy mandate and why isn't AEA pursuing energy efficiency, solar and wind in future plans. The February 2010 Railbelt Electrical Efficiency Landscape in Alaska study was quoted often. The study showed that a 50% improvement in the Railbelt's electrical efficiency could generate an increase up to \$947 million in economic output, \$290 million in wages, \$53 million in business income and 9350 new jobs and would mean up to 425 megawatt reduction in electrical demand through efficiency could occur. However, AEA consistently said that Su Hydro is the only answer to 50% renewable by 2025.

The second most asked question, 12%, had to do with project funding, state financing, and ratepayers' future costs. People were very interested in the financial implications of this mega project and the state's return on such an investment. A concern was that there will be so much state financial commitment to one project and will other important renewable projects be neglected? ***Already we see that besides the \$10 million 2010 legislative appropriation, AEA wants \$65 million to pursue Susitna hydro feasibility studies and licensing application. The Governor's budget right now for other renewable energy projects is a pitiful \$41.5 million.*** Also cost overruns were a concern.

The third most asked question regarded the public process. AEA consistently replied that they would not have the authority to pursue Susitna unless HB 103 is passed. They also consistently said there will be a lot of chances for the public to comment during the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission licensing process. People were particularly concerned in Talkeetna, that the state process through the AEA and the legislature has occurred without public comment. Why has there been no public process on the state level? Yes, there is a huge federal public process on down the line, but the momentum is now to commit significant state resources to this mega project.

Fisheries questions were asked a lot along with seismic, sedimentation, dam configuration, wildlife, climate change, access, threats to human safety, studies from the 1980's, and hydrology.

I realize that there are data gaps, and AEA is studying those gaps. Some particular questions that AEA and HDA consultants could not answer were on dam failure, that is if the dam breaks how long before

the flood reaches Trapper Creek and Talkeetna. Other specific study needs are on reservoir induced seismicity for the Susitna Reservoir, genetic studies of the 100 king salmon found above the dam, sedimentation studies, spring migration of caribou, economic impact studies on Talkeetna, archaeological studies, and effects on spring ice flow.

I guess it is probably obvious that I oppose the Susitna Dam, so I won't go into that.

In conclusion, I know that AEA and its consultants have a large body of knowledge that puts a positive spin on fisheries, seismic, hydrology, and environmental impacts; but even they admit there are a lot of unanswered questions. And we, the members of the public, have a lot of our own knowledge and experience about river altering projects. **And we know there are always unforeseen consequences beyond what the scientists can predict, and we have to live with the consequences. Nothing alters a river as totally as a dam.**

Thank you for this chance to testify.