

VALDEZ FISHERIES DEVELOPMENT ASSOCIATION, INC.
SOLOMON GULCH HATCHERY

P.O. Box 125 Valdez, AK. 99686 1815 Mineral Creek Loop Road Valdez, AK 99686
(907) 835-4874 Fax (907) 835-4831 Mike.Wells@valdezfisheries.com



July 5, 2021

COL Damon Delarosa
U.S. Army Corps of Engineers – Alaska District
2204 3rd St.
JBER, AK 99506-1518

RE: VFDA Letter of Interest for Robe Lake Habitat Restoration

Dear Colonel Delarosa,

This Letter of Interest is to request the assistance of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (ACOE), under Section 206 of the Water Resources Development Act of 1996, *Aquatic Ecosystem Restoration*, for planning and designing of a project for the long-term improvement of salmon habitat in Robe Lake located in Valdez, Alaska.

The Valdez Fisheries Development Association, Inc. (VFDA), established in 1980, is a 501(c)3 not for profit organization formed to develop renewable fisheries resources for the benefit of sport, commercial, subsistence, and personal use fisheries in Alaska. VFDA operates the Solomon Gulch hatchery and has a long history of maintaining salmon spawning habitat in the Robe Lake watershed to protect and enhance indigenous Coho and Sockeye salmon stocks, which are harvested by local residents and are a donor stock for VFDA's hatchery programs.

Robe Lake is the largest fresh water lake in the Port Valdez area with an historic size of approximately 682 acres. It is a very shallow lake with a mean depth of just 3.12 meters and only 5 meters at its deepest point. Three tributaries feed the lake: Brownie creek, Old Corbin creek, and Deep creek. Prior to 1956, the main channel of Corbin creek, and on occasion the Valdez Glacier Stream, flowed into the lake. This cold and turbid glacial water kept the lake bottom covered in silt and prevented light from penetrating its shallow depth, keeping aquatic vegetation in check. This inflow of water was estimated to provide a complete flushing of the lake about once a month. In 1956, the main stem of Corbin creek was redirected out of the lake by the City of Valdez to protect the Richardson Highway from wash-outs; unfortunately, this action changed the lake ecology and within ten short years, the negative environmental effects of this action became apparent. By 1982, the estimated flushing rate slowed to once every five months. VFDA has observed that the aquatic plant growth is rapidly increasing. If left unchecked, this growth may greatly reduce or completely shut down the lake's ability to support the successful spawning of its indigenous species.

VFDA seeks assistance from the ACOE to find a long-term solution to reduce the growth of aquatic vegetation and return the lake to its previous condition. This could be accomplished through rechanneling some of the original inflow of Corbin Creek into the lake. Other

considerations to improve existing salmon habitat may be to improve existing stream systems through mechanical excavation and rechanneling.

Robe Lake lies within the municipality of Valdez, Alaska. As such, the lake is heavily used by the community for recreation, waterfowl hunting, fishing, and for float plane operations. In addition, the municipality has two residential housing developments in proximity to the Robe Lake flood plain that may be impacted by future changes in the lake's hydrology. Acceptability of recommended solutions will need to be carefully considered to accommodate concerns by the City of Valdez and its residents.

Finally, VFDA is aware of the requirements for nonfederal contributions of 50% to determine feasibility, and up to 35% for design and construction of any proposed solution. As a small not for profit entity, VFDA has limited funds to participate as the sponsor and because the cost of the projects next steps are not yet defined, participation beyond the Federal Interest Determination will be contingent on VFDA's ability to identify and recruit other non-federal partners to share in the Cost Shared Feasibility Study, project design and construction, costs for "Lands, Easements, Right-Of-Way, Relocations and Disposal Areas" (LERRD), costs to demonstrate ownership of such, and cost of any operation and maintenance of the project.

Your consideration of this request is greatly appreciated. We are very excited that the ACOE has taken an interest in bringing a long-term solution to help slow the decline of Robe Lake salmon habitat. Please contact me if you have further questions.

Sincerely,



Mike H. Wells,
Executive Director