Opening Statement of Chairman Greg Walden
Subcommittee on Energy
Hearing On "Modernizing Energy Infrastructure: Challenges and Opportunities to Expanding Hydropower Generation"
March 15, 2017

(As prepared for delivery)

One of the many advantages of living in Oregon is the plentiful supply of affordable, reliable, and clean hydropower. Hydropower is great for homeowners as well as job-creating businesses. However, even in the Pacific Northwest we have additional opportunities—as we do across the country to take greater advantage of this valuable resource.

This hearing is a crucial step in the energy subcommittee's efforts to modernize our nation's energy infrastructure, and today we will focus on the challenges and opportunities in expanding hydropower generation.

For over a century, hydropower has provided electricity to millions of Americans across our nation. The United States and Canada led the way in hydropower engineering for the first half of the 20th century. In 1936, the Hoover Dam became the world's largest hydroelectric plant generating 1,345 megawatts. Six years later in 1942, the Grand Coulee Dam in Washington State surpassed the Hoover Dam in electricity generation capacity. In my home state of Oregon, hydropower is the largest source of electricity generation and provides over half of Oregon's electricity generation needs. In fact, one of our witnesses here today, Mr. Connolly, is representing the Bonneville Power Administration, the nonprofit federal organization responsible for marketing the Northwest's wholesale electrical hydropower. I look forward to hearing how Bonneville Power balances multiple objectives while carrying out its mission of producing and delivering reliable power to customers across the Pacific Northwest.

The electricity generated from hydropower allows for a diverse energy mix, which in turn increases our nation's energy security and reliability. A recent DOE report found that U.S. hydropower production could grow by almost 50% by year 2050. This potential increase in hydropower production would boost job growth, increase economic investment, facilitate the use of wind and other intermittent renewables, and avoid harmful emissions from the electric power sector.

Despite the numerous benefits of hydropower, the greatest impediment facing its growth is the regulatory process. Take the Bowman Dam in Crook County Oregon, for example. For many years, I worked to pass legislation to help pave the way for future hydropower and jobs in Central Oregon. Even after the bill was passed unanimously and signed into law in 2014, it took more than a year for that new law

to be implemented. But it's not just bureaucratic delays. The licensing of new hydropower facilities and the relicensing of existing facilities is costly and time consuming. The process often requires seven to ten years to complete and costs tens of millions of dollars.

As I've stated before, my objectives at the committee are to put consumers first in all that we do. A diverse energy mix empowers consumers by giving them choices in different energy sources. The electricity generated by hydropower is as clean and renewable as its gets. When it comes to improving our nation's laws regarding hydropower development, we in Congress have the opportunity to reach across the aisle and get good things done for the environment, for reduction of carbon emissions and for the economy. As this subcommittee continues its efforts to modernize our nation's energy infrastructure through technology-neutral improvement and expansion, we must bring greater transparency, efficiency and accountability to the regulatory processes affecting hydropower.