

**Republican Leader Cathy McMorris Rodgers  
Hearing on “Modernizing Hydropower:  
Licensing and Reforms for a Clean Energy Future”**

May 12, 2022

*As Prepared for Delivery*

## **HYDROPOWER IS VITAL FOR A SECURE ENERGY FUTURE**

In the Pacific Northwest, we are blessed with abundant, affordable, and clean hydroelectric power.

Hydropower has served our industrial backbone in Washington state for 80 years and now promises to serve an innovative future.....ensuring a reliable, secure energy system for many decades to come.

I have heard from companies like Diamond Foundry and Sila, who are locating their facilities in Washington state – and a big reason why is our affordable, reliable hydropower.

This is all possible because unlike weather-dependent wind and solar sources, hydropower provides the firm and dispatchable energy that is vital for a reliable, resilient electric supply.

## **UNDERUTILIZED POTENTIAL OF HYDROPOWER**

At present, [hydropower generation accounts](#) for over 6% of U.S. electricity generation, and almost 40% of the nation’s renewable generation.

A Department of Energy report found that U.S. hydropower production could increase 50 percent above current levels by

2050 from upgrading existing hydropower facilities and adding generation capacity to non-powered dams. Only 3 percent of the 90,000 dams in the United States produce electricity.

There is great potential for new hydropower generation.

## **THREATS TO HYDROPOWER FROM RADICAL AGENDAS**

Yet we must confront challenges. For example, many federal dams in my state and around the country have been in service for decades, and while they can safely operate for many years to come, radical environmental activists are calling for dam removal.

Communities with critical energy resources, like the Lower Snake River Dams operated by the Army Corps of Engineers, face calls to dismantle these clean energy sources for the sake of agendas that fail to prioritize reliable delivery of power for people.

When these agendas undermine affordable, reliable delivery of energy and power, serious harms to public health and safety can follow.

## **UPDATE AND STRENGTHEN HYDROPOWER LICENSING**

The first step involves continued Committee oversight and work to update the licensing and relicensing process overseen by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission, under the Federal Power Act.

FERC regulates non-federal hydropower projects, which include about 2,500 dams and account for about one half the hydropower generation in the nation.

Previous work by Energy and Commerce led to the enactment of some bipartisan reforms into law in 2018.

These included provisions to modernize hydropower development at existing nonpowered dams and to expedite licensing for pumped storage and other innovative technologies.

More work is needed. The licensing process for traditional hydropower continues to take considerable time and expense.

A recent DOE report found it takes an average of 5 years to obtain an original license, 7.6 years for relicensing, and some complex projects can take more than a decade.

At the same time, the number of existing hydropower projects that will require Federal relicensing is set to double in the coming decade.

## **ADVANCE COMMITTEE'S BIPARTISAN RECORD OF REFORMS**

In 2017, the House came together and passed [my legislation](#) to improve the process with strong bipartisan support. While we made good progress with the Senate, we didn't get it across the finish line.

We should conduct oversight of recent reforms and continue our work to strengthen licensing and remove unnecessary barriers to hydropower technologies.

My updated Hydropower Clean Energy Future Act ([HR 1588](#)) provides the path to continued reforms and I look forward to working with my colleagues to advance this through Committee.

In the meantime, any discussion of licensing reform is a step in the right direction, so I welcome today's hearing to review the Uncommon Dialogue proposal...

... and applaud the participants' desire to work on hydropower licensing reforms.

However, we should proceed carefully, deliberately.

The Uncommon Dialogue proposal includes new requirements for climate modeling, expanded environmental reviews, embracing off-site environmental mitigation, and dam removal.

It includes changes in the statutory relationship, with far reaching implications, between the Department of the Interior and the Tribes concerning mandatory conditions for licensing.

It includes new licensing terms which could have broad unintended impacts across all types of infrastructure permitting and spurn litigation.

We need to hear from FERC and the resource agencies, to understand the impacts of these proposals.

We in Congress must be careful not to attempt to fix problems by layering on more bureaucracy or by encouraging more lawsuits.

I would like to welcome our witnesses. I'm particularly happy to have Rich Wallen from Washington state, testifying on behalf of the Grant Public Utility District.

Thank you, and I yield back.