



Hydro's Star Rises in D.C.

The drumbeat for renewable hydropower is growing louder. The Administration has directed the Corps of Engineers and the Energy and Interior departments to work together to facilitate its development. Bipartisan legislation promoting hydro has been introduced in the Senate and hearings are now being held. Hydro is finally getting its due!

In March, Secretary of Energy Steven Chu said, "I'm for hydropower because I'm an environmentalist." Administration officials are aiming "to meet the nation's needs for reliable, affordable, and environmentally sustainable hydropower" by joining forces and giving priority to increasing hydro generation. The Administration isn't launching a drive for a lot of new large dams, but it clearly understands the value of this sustainable resource.



Members of Congress also are rolling out proposals to beef up federal support for hydropower. Senator Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), ranking member of the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, showed great leadership in introducing two bills this month that won our enthusiasm.

The Hydropower Improvement Act (S. 3570) says the United States should "substantially" increase the capacity and generation of clean, renewable hydropower. Among other things, it directs the Department of Energy to make competitive grants for efficiency and capacity improvements at existing hydro facilities, and to add generation at dams that currently do not have it. It also gets on the bandwagon for pumped storage and developing hydropower in existing conduits, like irrigation channels.

A second bill, the Hydropower Renewable Energy Development Act of 2010 (S. 3571), expands the definition of renewable energy to include hydropower, including conventional hydro like our dams in the Northwest. Both of these bills have bipartisan support. Senators Murray and Cantwell of Washington, and Senators Crapo and Risch of Idaho cosponsored S. 3570.

There is other evidence that Congress is serious about hydropower. The House Natural Resources Water and Power Subcommittee held a hearing last March where members emphasized the need to maintain our hydropower infrastructure as a key element of the country's clean and renewable electricity supply. Representative Doc Hastings (R-WA), ranking member, has long championed hydropower, fighting along-side others in the Northwest Delegation to protect and promote it.

Yet another hydro hearing is scheduled this week in the Water and Power subcommittee regarding further development of existing and new hydropower. John Prescott, CEO of PNGC Power and RiverPartners board member, will be testifying, along with representatives from BPA, the Corps of Engineers, and the Bureau of Reclamation.

The value of hydropower has been apparent to people in the Northwest for decades. Our public opinion polling consistently bears this out. It is the engine of our economy, and abundant and reliable hydropower is still bringing businesses (and jobs) to the Northwest. Take, for example, BMW 's announcement of Moses Lake as the site for an electricity-intensive manufacturing plant for components of its new electric car.

RiverPartners and its members support the Murkowski bills, and we appreciate the leadership shown by Northwest senators for this hydro-friendly legislation. We hope to see support for hydropower continue to grow in Congress and the Administration.

Hydropower is the original renewable. With our carbon footprint at less than half that of the rest of the country and hydro fueling our economy, we can certainly attest to the rest of nation that it is clean, green, and the right fit in an energy and climate-conscious era.



Terry Flores is Executive Director of Northwest River Partners, an alliance of farmers, utilities, ports and businesses that promote the economic and environmental benefits of the Columbia and Snake Rivers and salmon recovery policies based on sound science.

For more information, please visit www.nwriverpartners.org.