

# OUTDOOR ALLIANCE

March 14, 2017

Rep. Fred Upton  
Chair, Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy  
2183 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

Rep. Bobby Rush  
Ranking Member, Energy and Commerce Subcommittee on Energy  
2188 Rayburn House Office Building  
Washington, DC 20515

## **Re: Hearing, Modernizing Energy Infrastructure: Challenges and Opportunities to Expanding Hydropower Generation**

Dear Chair Upton and Ranking Member Rush:

Thank you for the opportunity to submit testimony regarding hydropower generation and operation in the United States. As the Committee considers opportunities and challenges to expanding hydropower, we request that you consider the impact of hydropower on public waterways and adjoining lands. Hydropower development affects opportunities for outdoor recreation and local communities adjacent to existing or potential projects that have an outdoor recreation economy.

Outdoor Alliance is a coalition of eight member-based organizations representing the human powered outdoor recreation community. The coalition includes Access Fund, American Canoe Association, American Whitewater, International Mountain Bicycling Association, Winter Wildlands Alliance, The Mountaineers, American Alpine Club, and Mazamas and represents the interests of the millions of Americans who hike, climb, paddle, mountain bike, and backcountry ski and snowshoe on our nation's public lands, waters, and snowscapes.

### **Interest of our Organization in Hydropower Licensing**

Our members directly participate in license proceedings for hydropower projects in partnership with federal land managers, including in particular the Forest Service and Bureau of Land Management. The authorities granted to federal agencies by section 4(e) of the Federal Power Act that require equal consideration of the "protection of recreational opportunities"<sup>1</sup> have helped ensure that hydropower operations balance our

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<sup>1</sup> 16 U.S. Code § 797(e).



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society's need for power with the benefits of flowing rivers, including important economic benefits generated through the outdoor recreation economy. Outdoor recreation can be a benefit of hydropower under certain circumstances. On the section of their website promoting the benefits of hydropower, the National Hydropower Association states that "swimming, boating, fishing, camping, skiing and hiking are just some of the recreational activities that take place year-round and across the country at sites developed and supported by the hydropower industry."<sup>2</sup> Hydropower can also negatively impact outdoor recreation by reducing river flows and limiting access to public waterways.

Outdoor recreation generates \$646 billion in annual consumer spending and directly employs more than 6.1 million Americans, with more than 142 million Americans recreating outside last year. Much of this activity happens around water given that "the presence of water is essential to or enhances the satisfaction of recreationists engaged in most outdoor recreation activities."<sup>3</sup> Instream flow, which is directly affected by hydropower development, is a fundamental aspect of recreational quality, and quantifying flow-recreation relationships has become common in most Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) licensing proceedings.<sup>4</sup> The outdoor recreation economy is dispersed, contributing to the economic well-being of rural communities that are most often directly affected by hydropower development, and outdoor recreation offsets the often cyclical nature of resource development activities. Outdoor recreation is a part of our heritage, uniting families and communities in support of common passions.

## Comments

Efforts to expand hydropower cannot come at the expense of FERC's existing responsibility to protect, mitigate, and enhance recreational opportunities. Past legislative proposals (*i.e.*, H.R. 8, Subtitle on Hydropower Regulatory Modernization<sup>5</sup>) considered by this Committee would severely limit the ability of local communities to advocate for recreational benefits in hydropower licensing by shifting responsibilities away from states, federal land managers with locally-based recreation staff, and affected communities. Instead, it would place that responsibility exclusively in the hands of FERC, a regulatory agency whose limited local field staff do not participate in licensing and are unlikely to understand local community needs. FERC staff only have the ability to participate in one or two site visits in all over a multi-year licensing process, and typically have minimal experience and familiarity with local resources and values. In

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.hydro.org/why-hydro/other-benefits/>, last accessed March 12, 2017.

<sup>3</sup> Kakoyannis, C. and G.H. Stankey. 2002. Assessing and evaluating recreational uses of water resources: implications for an integrated management framework. USDA Forest Service, PNW-GTR-536.

<sup>4</sup> Whittaker, D., B. Shelby, and J. Gangemi. 2005. Flows and recreation: a guide to studies for river professionals. Hydropower Reform Coalition and National Park Service.

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.congress.gov/bill/114th-congress/house-bill/8>, last accessed March 12, 2017.



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considering future legislative changes to the Federal Power Act, our interest is in outcomes that are protective of and beneficial to outdoor recreation and local communities.

While there are opportunities to improve hydropower licensing, we oppose any effort to diminish the ability of local citizens and public resource agencies to ensure that hydropower licenses include provisions to protect the public river resources that are important to them. We urge you to focus on efforts that uphold the important responsibility and authority that resource agencies have in the hydropower licensing process, including providing adequate funding for these agencies to meet their statutory obligations in a timely fashion. The primary focus of expanding hydropower should be on promoting efficiency, retrofitting suitable non-powered dams, and upgrading century-old technology that affects rivers across the country. In some cases modernizing infrastructure means removing projects that are not cost effective and restoring rivers for the benefit of communities, the environment, and the outdoor recreation economy.

Best regards,



Adam Cramer  
Executive Director  
Outdoor Alliance

cc: Brady Robinson, Executive Director, Access Fund  
Wade Blackwood, Executive Director, American Canoe Association  
Mark Singleton, Executive Director, American Whitewater  
Dave Wiens, Executive Director, International Mountain Bicycling Association  
Mark Menlove, Executive Director, Winter Wildlands Alliance  
Tom Vogl, Chief Executive Officer, The Mountaineers  
Phil Powers, Executive Director, American Alpine Club  
Lee Davis, Executive Director, the Mazamas

