



April 22, 2013

Senator Ron Wyden, Chairman
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
United States Senate
SD-364 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Senator Lisa Murkowski, Ranking Member
Energy and Natural Resources Committee
United States Senate
SD-312 Dirksen Senate Office Building
Washington, DC 20510

Dear Senators Wyden and Murkowski:

On behalf of the Western Governors' Association and the Western States Water Council, we are writing to support the goals of the Hydropower Improvement Act of 2013 (S. 545), the Hydropower Regulatory Efficiency Act of 2013 (H.R. 267), and the Bureau of Reclamation Small Conduit Hydropower Development and Rural Jobs Act (S. 306/H.R. 678), which aim to increase the development of small hydropower projects. As you review these bills, please consider the enclosed position from the Council, which supports federal legislation and other efforts to authorize and implement reasonable hydropower development through streamlined permitting processes.

Our organizations support an "all of the above" energy strategy that includes responsible small hydropower development. As stated in the Council's position, hydropower is the United States' largest source of renewable electricity. While hydropower currently produces some 100,000 megawatts, or seven percent of the nation's electricity needs, the potential exists to develop an additional 60,000 megawatts. Developing small hydropower projects at existing conduits and canals represents a significant opportunity to help realize this potential because the water that already flows through these structures contains substantial amounts of untapped energy.

In addition, the western states hold great potential for hydropower in existing dams. There are over 23,000 non-powered dams throughout the West capable of providing over 2,000 megawatts of capacity if retrofitted for hydroelectric generation. The development potential at non-powered dams is in addition to the potential at existing canals and conduits.

Although recent improvements and innovations have greatly increased the technical feasibility of small hydropower projects, Congress can do more to reduce the costs and risks associated with small hydropower development by minimizing and streamlining current permitting requirements. We also believe that streamlined permitting processes can provide appropriate protections for important environmental and ecological resources.

In addition, given the states' primary and exclusive authority over surface water allocation, any federal legislation that facilitates small hydropower development should comply with state water laws and interstate compacts. Such legislation should also respect the rights and preference privileges of existing water and power users.

Facilitating small hydropower development should be a bipartisan endeavor, as was the work of Representatives Cathy McMorris Rodgers, Diana DeGette, Scott Tipton, and Jim Costa in securing broad support for H.R. 678 and H.R. 267, which passed the House with 416 and 422 votes respectively. We are also encouraged by your bipartisan leadership in developing and introducing S. 545, and hope that the Committee will continue this approach as it considers other bills.

In sum, your Committee's consideration of this legislation is timely. Electricity providers in the West and across the country are currently working to develop domestic energy supplies to satisfy growing electricity demands while also reducing carbon emissions. Small hydropower projects represent a significant opportunity to develop a key renewable domestic energy source and create much needed jobs, while minimizing environmental impacts.

We appreciate your consideration of our comments and look forward to working with you to encourage the responsible development of our nation's hydropower resources.

Sincerely,



Jim Ogsbury
Executive Director
Western Governors' Association



Tony Willardson
Executive Director
Western States Water Council

Enclosure

cc: Representative Cathy McMorris Rodgers
Representative Diana DeGette
Representative Scott Tipton
Representative Jim Costa
Senator John Barrasso

**POSITION STATEMENT
of the
WESTERN STATES WATER COUNCIL
in support of
RENEWABLE HYDROPOWER DEVELOPMENT**

**Denver, Colorado
April 5, 2013**

WHEREAS, the water and hydropower resources of the West have been developed through partnerships between energy and water users, and continue to be inextricably connected;

WHEREAS, clean, efficient, inexpensive hydropower is a vital part of the energy resources needed to meet our present and future energy demands; and

WHEREAS, hydropower is the largest source of renewable electricity in the United States, producing some 100,000 megawatts or about 7% of the Nation's electricity needs; and

WHEREAS, the potential exists for further public and private development of as much as 60,000 more megawatts of this valuable resource, including upgrading existing generators, developing small hydro and the power potential from existing man-made conduits and canals, as well as hydroelectric pumped storage projects; and

WHEREAS, such development can often be undertaken with little impact on the environmental and important ecological resources, requiring minimal further environmental review; and

WHEREAS, permitting requirements may be appropriately minimized and streamlined so as to promote reasonable development while avoiding unnecessary costs; and

WHEREAS, the future development of potential hydropower resources should be appropriately undertaken in compliance with substantive and procedural state water law and interstate compacts; and

WHEREAS, the rights and preference privileges of existing water and power users should be respected; and

WHEREAS, federal legislation has been introduced to further authorize and promote the wise and sustainable development of our renewable hydropower resources, also creating jobs and reducing carbon emissions.

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED that the Western States Water Council supports federal legislative and administrative actions to authorize and implement reasonable hydropower projects and programs that enhance our electric generation capacity and promote economic development, through streamlined permitting processes, while appropriately protecting environmental resources.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the Western States Water Council also supports the development and implementation of appropriate energy and water conservation programs at all levels to minimize demands placed on our natural resources and ecosystems.