

## FERC Commissioners Comment on Hydro



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**H**ydro is back! Call it what you want: “cool,” “suave,” “sophisticated” or “sexy,” but hydro-

power is fashionable in the energy world again, whether the paparazzi know it yet or not.

Of course hydropower never went away, as it has remained largely a safe, reliable, economical, and renewable source of energy in almost all regions of the U.S. It provides nearly 10 percent of the electricity consumed in the nation and emits no carbon. Sometimes taken for granted, hydropower is often noticed only by the general public on those rare occasions when it is not available. But this industry is on the verge of some exciting changes, and you know what they say: get behind the wave before it gets behind you!

As someone who was raised in Washington State — clearly “hydro country” — I have long been very familiar with the multiple benefits of a river system. Fish and wildlife habitats,

recreational opportunities, and hydropower potential are known to most citizens. Less obvious — depending on the project — are the potential benefits of flood control, drinking water, irrigation, and navigation.

In my role as a commissioner, I have endeavored to raise the profile of hydropower at the commission. During my term, I am hopeful that we can hold regular conferences not only on the existing state of regulation of traditional hydropower but also on the development of new hydropower technologies.

This new generation of hydropower technologies offers amazing potential for abundant supplies of domestic renewable power generation, and for educating energy consumers on the existing environmental and economic benefits of this source of electricity. Regardless of whether it is tidal power, ocean current power, in-stream hydropower, or other creative designs that harness energy from water, the opportunities for expanding this renewable resource appear limitless. This is what captures people’s imagination.

Although widespread development of these resources is still a few years away, the actual work of studying and analyzing the technologies and sites is happening now. The public’s fascination with new technologies is clear based on the

extensive amount of their coverage in the “mainstream” media.

This widespread interest in the new technologies — and the near obsession with public policy related to carbon emissions — provides a rare opportunity for the hydropower industry to further educate the public on the existing benefits of this industry. It is all about balancing multiple interests — something the industry and the regulators have been doing for decades. I hope the industry will seize this opportunity to educate current and future consumers.

One of my priorities is to support policies that avoid delays in the development of new hydropower technologies. Recognizing the need to get the process right and the continuing need to balance various interests, I remain somewhat impatient about the time it could take to capture this resource. I will strive to assure that the commission continues to send strong and coherent signals to potential developers of the resource.

Every source of energy — including hydropower — will continue to have benefits and challenges that need to be balanced. But the hydropower industry is in a unique period where its contribution to the U.S.’s infrastructure is about to have a higher profile. And that is good for everyone, paparazzi included. ■