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FERC Looks to Ease Development of Small Hydropower Projects

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) took a step toward making its small hydropower licensing program more user-friendly today by announcing a series of Web-based tools that will help developers understand the FERC licensing process, help improve coordination with other agencies, and help license applicants complete the process more quickly and efficiently.

“Efforts to reduce carbon emissions and meet the growing number of state renewable energy standards are drawing increased attention to small hydropower project development,” FERC Chairman Jon Wellinghoff said. “These new tools will help provide additional resources to applicants considering developing hydropower.”

“Small and micro hydropower has enormous potential, but these projects often cannot be developed under traditional licensing methods,” Commissioner Philip Moeller said. “By our action today, the Commission is working to ease the regulatory burden of harnessing this clean and renewable form of energy.”

The new resources, to be available at www.ferc.gov in August 2010, came out of discussions at FERC’s December 2009 technical conference on small, non-federal hydropower projects. The resources will provide a roadmap that walks applicants through the process of selecting a project site, determining if a project is jurisdictional, selecting a FERC licensing process, consulting with stakeholders, and preparing a license or exemption application. New tools, such as fill-in-the-blank license and exemption application templates and tips on how to expedite the application process, are intended to make it easier for a potential applicant to apply for a license or exemption.

Staff also intends to update existing agreements, or Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs), with other agencies to improve coordination, and will employ a new outreach program to educate potential small hydro developers. Staff also will continue to provide a small hydro hotline and email address to answer applicants’ questions.

At the December 2009 technical conference, participants noted the increasing interest in small hydropower in recent years. Last year, FERC staff received almost twice as many inquiries on small hydro issues than in 2008. And the Commission has received more preliminary permit, license and exemption applications for these types of projects.

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