

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
Wednesday, August 15, 2012
[PERMALINK](#)

CONTACT: [Spencer Pederson](#), [Crystal Feldman](#), or [Jill Strait](#)
202-226-9019

Hastings' Hydro Bill Will Protect and Promote Hydropower Dams

Witnesses Provide Laundry List of Hydropower Benefits for Jobs, Economy and Environment

Pasco, WA – Today, the House Natural Resources Committee held a [legislative field hearing](#) in Pasco, WA on [H.R. 6247](#), the *Saving Our Dams and Hydropower Development and Jobs Act of 2012*. Introduced by Chairman Doc Hastings (WA-04), the bill would protect America's dams and promote new clean, low-cost hydropower to help create jobs and grow the economy. Hydropower accounts for 70 percent of electricity generation in Washington and is source of reliable renewable energy for millions of American families across the country. The legislation received strong support from Subcommittee on Water and Power Chairman Tom McClintock (CA-04) as well as from a witness panel of local stakeholders, farmers, irrigators and elected officials.

"Our current Northwest dam infrastructure cleanly powers our industries, businesses, jobs and families – and at low cost. But we must not be satisfied with the status quo. With ongoing threats to these dams and future development of hydropower as a renewable resource, we simply cannot take the status quo for granted," [said Chairman Hastings](#). "The bill I introduced two weeks ago shines a bright light on the enormous benefits and potential of federal and non-federal hydropower dams, both in the Northwest and across the nation. The bill, as with all legislation, is a starting point for discussion and contains common sense actions to protect this renewable energy source. The people of the Pacific Northwest know that removal of the lower Snake River Dams would be an extreme action that would cost jobs, increase power rates, and harm the region's economy."

Chairman Hastings' bill contains simple, common sense reforms that will preserve low-cost hydroelectric bills for millions of Americans families, provide water certainty to American farmers who feed the world, and protect valuable navigation to transport billions of dollars worth of goods. The bill protects and promotes hydropower resources by ending practices that diminish existing hydropower, cutting regulatory red-tape, generating new non-federal funding for new projects and improving transparency.

"Some people seem to have forgotten that before the era of dam construction, an endless cycle of withering droughts and violent floods constantly plagued our watersheds. Our dams tamed these environmentally devastating events, they assured abundant water in dry years and protected against the ravages of flood years. By conserving water that would otherwise have been lost to the ocean, they turned deserts into oases and laid the foundation for a century of growth and prosperity for the American west," [said Subcommittee Chairman McClintock](#). "Mr. Chairman, I believe your bill, HR 6247 offers a very different future for our nation: a new era of clean, cheap and abundant hydro-electricity; great new reservoirs to store water in wet years to protect us from shortages in dry ones. It envisions a future in which families can

enjoy the prosperity that plentiful water and electricity provides.”

At the hearing, a panel of witnesses highlighted the benefits of hydropower and the need for H.R. 6247 to help protect this valuable renewable resource.

[Jack Heffling](#), President of the United Power Trades Organization and labor union representative, cited scientific studies stating, *“Dam removal will not increase fish survival and would have a significant negative impact on our economy and environment by eliminating about 1,020 average megawatts of carbon-free energy, increasing greenhouse gasses...and reducing navigation capacity.”* Heffling added, *“H.R. 6247, by enacting funding prohibitions on dam removal ensures that the focus of salmon and steelhead recovery is on actions that actually work and help fish.”*

[Tom Flint](#), Washington farmer, Grant County PUD Commissioner, and Founder of Save Our Dams, noted the importance of dams to the local economy, *“These valuable renewable resources support reliable electricity delivery, clean air and significant economic benefits for millions of families and businesses throughout the Pacific Northwest.”* Flint also made clear that, *“renewable hydropower generation and environmental performance goes hand-in-hand,”* citing statistics that new *“turbines and generators will boost the projects generation capacity by 12 percent, and has fish passage survival rate of 97 percent.”* Flint also mentioned the construction of a \$35 million fish slide, *“Which studies show a fish survival rate of 99 percent for steelhead and salmon.”*

[Jim Sanders](#), General Manager for Benton PUD testified that, *“At times it is hard to believe that we have to defend the economic and environmental benefits of the dams – but we do.”* Sanders thanked Chairman Hastings for introducing his legislation to protect *“the overall quality of life we enjoy in the Pacific Northwest,”* and said he was glad to *“see legislation that is trying to help resolve some of the many challenges facing our hydropower system.”*

[Kara Rowe](#), Affairs and Outreach Director for the Washington Association of Wheat Growers spoke about the importance of dams to navigation and transportation of agriculture products, *“Breaching dams would end barge navigation, and put up to 700,000 more trucks on the highways and increase greenhouse gas emissions.”* Rowe said, *“hundreds of thousands of jobs are tied directly to the river system’s activity, trade and commerce,”* and that *“without barging along the Columbia Snake River system, our American agricultural system would suffer consequences affecting every American citizen.”*

[Chris Voigt](#), Executive Director of the Washington State Potato Commission and Advisory Board Member, Family Farm Alliance argued for the importance of increasing hydropower stating, *“I believe it’s naïve to think that we can feed an additional two billion people and reduce our reliance on fossil fuels without growing our portfolio of water storage and hydropower.”* Voigt argued that, *“Dams play a critical role in the production of food for this country and for others who are unable to feed themselves.”*

[Jim Yost](#), Northwest Power and Conservation Council and current chairman of the Council’s Power Committee boasted that, *“Idaho has the third lowest electrical rate as a result of hydropower.”* However, Yost added that government red-tape will cause consumer rates to increase, *“As the costs of Biological Opinions, FERC relicensing, regulatory requirements, [and] mitigation...continue to increase and force additional operations expenses, the rates and bills of consumers will go up.”*

Highlights of [H.R. 6247](#), the *Saving Our Dams and New Hydropower Development and Jobs Act*:

- Declares that hydropower is a renewable energy source.
- Prohibits federal funding from being used to remove, breach or study the removal or breaching of any hydropower dam unless explicitly authorized by Congress.
- Prohibits federal funding to organizations that have engaged in dam removal or hydropower-decreasing litigation against the federal government.
- Prohibits federal funding for new activities proposed in Energy Secretary Steven Chu's March 16, 2012 [memorandum](#) mandating new missions for the Power Marketing Administrations until an agency report is completed to justify such activities and Congress authorizes the new activities. Over 160 bipartisan House members and Senators have [expressed concerns](#) with these vague new missions.
- Prohibits the Bureau of Reclamation and other federal agencies from bypassing hydropower turbines (through spills or pulse flows) if a state has declared a drought emergency or if these actions would harm endangered fish.
- Improves transparency by providing that each Power Marketing Administration to estimate and report costs related to federal fish and wildlife acts, including costs relating to lost power generation, to their power customers on a monthly basis.
- Advances new hydropower through new water storage by allowing non-federal parties to complete studies and finance projects.
- Creates a new, innovative funding source to build new water and power infrastructure.
- Authorizes hydropower development on existing, man-made Bureau of Reclamation water canals and pipes. This provision is based legislation by Rep. Scott Tipton ([H.R. 2842](#)), which [passed](#) the House with bipartisan support.
- Addresses burdensome costs and regulations imposed by the Interior and Commerce Departments on licensing and re-licensing non-federal hydropower dams.
- Protects electricity transmission lines from catastrophic forest fires by allowing electricity rights-of-way holders on federal lands to remove insect-infested trees or other hazardous fuels within 500-ft.

###

<http://naturalresources.house.gov>

[Facebook](#) | [YouTube](#) | [Twitter](#)