



Hydro Deserves a Key Place in Our Renewable Future

In this week's inaugural address, President Barack Obama talked about the weighty issues that face the United States. Among others, he referred to the need to "roll back the specter of a warming planet" and "harness the sun and the winds" to fuel the nation. The President's words portend a renewed push in Washington, D.C. for legislation that will curb carbon emissions. Many states, including Washington and Oregon, have already mandated that utilities must get a certain percentage of their power from renewable resources.

Yet, the Northwest's cleanest and most reliable renewable resource -- hydropower -- is excluded from the equation. Ironically, this forces utilities in Oregon and Washington to sell their clean reliable hydropower to other states that count it, while Northwest utilities must buy more expensive and less reliable renewable resources to meet state mandates. This drives up utility bills to families and businesses, many of whom are struggling today, adding insult to injury.



At RiverPartners, we want to see "water" front and center in the list of fuels that can take us renewably, cleanly, and carbon free into the future.

Scott Corwin, executive director of the Public Power Council (PPC), appeared before a Congressional committee last year to extol the benefits of hydropower as a resource that is renewable, efficient, clean, reliable, and domestic. Because of the energy produced by the federal hydropower system in the Northwest, the portfolios of many of PPC's members are over 92 percent emissions free.

Corwin also referred to the [Northwest Power and Conservation Council's Study](#) that found the Northwest has a carbon footprint one-half that of the rest of the country because of hydropower.

Tim Culbertson, general manager of Grant County PUD, has also urged Congress to fully consider and support hydropower and its many benefits as an important part in solving the climate problem. He pointed out the role that hydropower can play -- a role RiverPartners thinks has been overlooked -- in providing services to integrate other types of renewable resources.

Hydropower is one of the few resources suited to "firming" intermittent or non-dispatchable resources such as wind, he noted. As more wind, solar, and other intermittent resources are brought online, the need for resources to firm up that generation will become even more important. Without the firming hydro can provide, the value of other renewable resources is greatly diminished.

Fortunately, RiverPartners and its supporters aren't alone in recognizing the folly of leaving large hydropower out of the renewable equation. A column late last year in the *Oregonian* questioned the wisdom of the Oregon legislature in excluding nearly all of the state's hydro generation from being counted as "renewable." The writer called it "legislative legerdemain" or sleight of hand.

The rationale for excluding hydro from the renewables equation is misguided at best. Hydropower produces no carbon dioxide, nitrous oxides, or other air emissions. There are no gases that contribute to air pollution, acid rain, or global warming. There is no need for trucks, trains, barges or pipelines to burn carbon to bring fuel to the generation site. It is the Northwest's premier renewable domestic energy resource.

We agree with Dave Lister, whose *Oregonian* column put it this way: "What I do know is that the rivers will always flow and hydroelectric power is the perfect renewable resource. Legislating that it's not doesn't change that."

Northwest RiverPartners is a partnership of farmers, electric utilities and large and small businesses in the Pacific Northwest, joined together to ensure that the Columbia and Snake rivers remain living, working rivers. It was founded on the belief that these rivers are the Northwest's greatest natural resource providing residents with clean, affordable and renewable electricity, flood control, irrigation for our farm lands, healthy fish and wildlife, maritime trade, and a multitude of recreational opportunities. For more information, please visit www.nwriverpartners.org.