



COMMUNITY AND HYDROPOWER IMPROVEMENT ACT (S. 1521)

The Community and Hydropower Improvement Act would bolster the development and deployment of hydropower throughout the U.S. by streamlining the licensing process, increasing stakeholder engagement, expediting low-impact projects, and coordinating federal decision making.

SUMMARY

The Community and Hydropower Improvement Act would improve licensing efficiency by directing the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) to implement a two-year licensing process for electrifying non-powered dams (NPDs), and a three-year process for closed-loop and off-stream pumped storage projects. The act also directs FERC to convene a conference of agencies with licensing authority to coordinate a timely completion schedule. The act also allows for collaboration between relevant agencies regarding Environmental Impact Statements (EIS) and Environmental Assessments (EA).

HISTORY:

Hydropower makes up almost 30% of U.S. renewable energy generation. This act takes into account a wide range of relevant stakeholder perspectives including hydropower industry, environmental groups, and Tribes, with the goal of increasing the viability of hydropower. At the end of 2021, only 6.2% of the hydropower projects under deployment were in the construction phase, while the rest were tied up in various stages of permitting. A reformed licensing process is an important step toward the realization of the full potential of hydropower. This Act comprehensively considers changes to expand U.S. hydropower generation, an essential component of U.S. clean energy.

SPECIFICS:

The Community and Hydropower Improvement Act is focused on reforming the permitting and licensing processes conducted by FERC. Specifically, the Act:

- Directs FERC to convene periodic technical conferences to discuss and consider new technologies and methodologies.
- Directs FERC to limit license review periods to two years for the electrification of NPDs and three years for low-impact projects.
- Directs FERC to cooperate with other relevant agencies with a responsibility under NEPA.

ORIGINAL SPONSORS:

Sen. Steve Daines (R-MT)

Sen. Maria Cantwell (D-WA)

COSPONSORS:

Sen. James Risch (R-ID)

Sen. Ron Wyden (D-OR)

SUPPORT: ClearPath Action, National Hydropower Association, National Congress of American Indians, American Rivers, Confederated Salish and Kootenai Tribes, NorthWestern Energy, Seattle City Light, California Sportfishing Protection Alliance, American Whitewater, Northern California Power Agency

CONGRESS.GOV LINK: [S. 1521](#)