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For Immediate Release

Senate unanimously approves legislation promoting hydropower expansion

Bills to improve regulatory process head to President Obama's desk

Washington, D.C. (August 1, 2013) – The United States Senate today unanimously approved a pair of bills aimed at promoting hydropower development by streamlining the federal regulatory process for certain types of projects.

The bills, H.R. 267, the Hydropower Regulatory Efficiency Act, and H.R. 678, the Bureau of Reclamation Small Conduit Hydropower Development and Rural Jobs Act, now head to President Barack Obama's desk for signature. The House of Representatives completed action on the bills earlier in the year, passing them with overwhelming bipartisan support.

“By passing these bills, the Senate has taken an important step toward providing Americans additional access to reliable, low-cost hydropower,” said Linda Church Ciocci, Executive Director of the National Hydropower Association. “The Senate has sent a strong and clear message about hydropower's critical role in our nation's diverse energy mix. NHA applauds the Senate for this decisive action and urges President Obama to quickly sign these bills into law.”

H.R. 267, introduced by Reps. Cathy McMorris Rodgers (R-WA) and Diana DeGette (D-CO), promotes the development of small hydropower and conduit projects and aims to shorten regulatory timeframes of certain other low-impact hydropower projects, such as adding power generation to the nation's existing non-powered dams and closed-loop pumped storage.

The House moved quickly and unanimously passed the bill in February.

Senate Energy Committee Ranking Member Lisa Murkowski (R-AK), along with Chairman Ron Wyden (D-OR) introduced companion legislation, S. 545. They were joined by Sens. Begich (D-AK), Bennet (D-CO), Cantwell (D-WA), Casey (D-PA), Coons (D-DE), Crapo (R-ID), Feinstein (D-CA), Murray (D-WA), Risch (R-ID), Roberts (R-KS), and Mark Udall (D-CO).

“I commend my colleagues for unanimously passing these two bipartisan, widely-supported hydropower bills,” Murkowski said. “Hydropower, as the largest source of renewable electricity generation in the United States, must continue to be a major part of our energy solution. These bills will help remove roadblocks and advance our country's conventional and small conduit hydropower.”

“There's no better evidence that hydro is back than these two bills passing the Senate on a unanimous vote,” Wyden said. “Capitalizing on the power potential of existing dams, pipes and conduits is the kind of practical thinking our country needs to generate more renewable energy and cut our carbon footprint.”

Rep. Scott Tipton's (R-CO) H.R. 678 authorizes small hydropower development at existing Bureau of Reclamation-owned canals, pipelines, aqueducts, and other manmade waterways. Such development could provide enough power for 30,000 American homes with no environmental impact. It too was approved by the House with strong bipartisan support, 416-7.

Sen. John Barrasso (R-WY) introduced companion legislation, S. 306, joined by Sens. Crapo (R-ID), Enzi (R-WY), Flake (R-AZ), and Risch (R-ID).

"After today's vote, hydropower developers will soon have the certainty they need to create rural jobs and lower electricity prices for American families," said Barrasso. "Wyoming and other states with many potential Bureau of Reclamation sites will be able to fully embrace hydropower's potential. I encourage the President to sign this bill into law immediately. Congress must also continue to come together, remove more Washington red tape and clear the way for more American energy development."

Once out of the House, the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee moved quickly, approving them both unanimously in May.

"The hydropower industry greatly appreciates both Chairman Wyden and Ranking Member Murkowski for their championing of hydropower and their stewardship of these bills through the Senate. Their committee stands as a bright spot of bipartisanship in a divided Congress," Ciocci said.

In 2012, hydropower provided the majority of the nation's renewable electricity, with 100,000 MW of installed capacity from coast to coast, and employs approximately 300,000 workers. Estimates done by Navigant Consulting indicate that 60,000 MW of hydropower could be added with the right policies in place, while creating 1.4 million cumulative jobs. The legislation unlocks some of that tremendous potential.

"Expanding hydropower in the United States will strengthen and diversify our country's energy portfolio. From the unanimous passage of these bills, it is clear that the development of more clean, affordable hydropower is a goal that lawmakers from both parties can get behind," Ciocci said. "We look to build on these successes and will continue to work with policymakers on further improvements to the hydropower licensing process."

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