



Alaska Region Hydropower Program

Issue

With high fuel costs, increased demand, proposed transmission lines through Canada, and tax breaks for renewable energy projects, the Alaska Region's hydropower program is expected to continue to grow in size and complexity for the next several years.

Background

Forest Service policy is to encourage hydropower production where it is compatible with National Forest System purposes, and to ensure that any planning, construction, and operation of hydropower projects protect and effectively use lands and resources. The Alaska Region actively participates in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) licensing process and cooperates with other federal agencies, state, local government, and other organizations in responding to proposed projects and in preparing license clauses and conditions. The Alaska Region tries to balance the many, and sometimes competing, internal and external resource management issues while being mindful of our responsibilities to foster the economic wellbeing of the many people, industries, and communities that are dependent on these hydropower projects. Many of the smaller communities in the Alaska Region are dependent upon diesel-generated electricity and are now actively pursuing hydroelectric projects. Projects are also being proposed that would generate electricity in Alaska and then export the power to Canada or the Lower 48.

Current Situation

Project proponents have filed permit applications with FERC for approximately 20 new hydroelectric projects on the Tongass and Chugach national forests. Proposed Tongass projects are located at Soule River, Takatz Lake, and Thomas Bay. Proposed Chugach projects are located at Falls Creek, Grant Lake, and Snyder Falls Creek. These projects are at various steps in the permitting and FERC licensing process; most stages necessitate Forest Service review and/or response. Forest Service involvement includes: the permitting of investigative studies; reviewing and commenting on project documents; review of study plans and results; participation in project development and resource mitigation; development of Federal Power Act 4(e) terms and conditions; and, issuance of a authorization after the project is licensed by FERC. Two additional projects (Little Port Walter/Osprey Lake and Angoon Hydro) are not under FERC jurisdiction. At least 16 of the new projects are within inventoried roadless areas.

In addition to the hydro projects, several tidal projects have received preliminary permits from FERC. These projects would primarily be located in saltwater but associated structures would likely be located on National Forest System uplands.

If licensed and constructed, many of the proposed hydroelectric and tidal projects will include transmission lines and in some cases, access roads. At least 20 new transmission line corridors are being proposed on the Tongass. Many of these are still in the early conceptual planning stage and applications have not been submitted to the Forest Service. Several organizations in Southeast Alaska have planned interconnected transmission lines and or interties that connect multiple power projects and allow power sharing throughout the region. A major transmission line is being proposed in Bradfield Canal to tie into existing

electrical lines in British Columbia to facilitate the selling of power generated in Southeast Alaska to Canada and the Lower 48 states. Plans are underway to connect Hoonah, Angoon, Kake, and Coffman Cove to existing electrical systems through interties. The recently completed Swan-Tyee intertie connects the Tyee Lake project near Wrangell with the Swan Lake project near Ketchikan and has been operating since December 2009.

In addition to proposals and plans for new energy projects, the Alaska Region has a ongoing workload associated with existing hydroelectric projects. Approximately 15 operating hydroelectric projects are located on NFS lands and another 15 projects are on State or private land adjacent to NFS lands. Forest Service involvement continues throughout the life of the project with the implementation and monitoring of license terms and conditions. Examples of existing operating projects on NFS lands include the Black Bear, Lake Dorothy, and Goat Lake projects on the Tongass and the Cooper Lake project on the Chugach.

The Alaska Region hydropower program is experiencing unprecedented growth due to the national emphasis on renewable energy, the increasing demand for power, and high fuel costs. This trend is expected to continue into the future.

More Information

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