

“Dammed if you don’t”

Industry perspectives on regulatory obstacles to and policy incentives for the electrification of non-powered federal dams in the United States

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Abstract

Non-powered dams (NPDs) present policymakers with low-impact opportunities for carbon-free, reliable clean energy production. This paper studies policy incentives for and regulatory barriers to NPD development by non-federal developers working on federal dams. Presenting case studies from industry voices working on dams owned by the US Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation, this paper explores common pitfalls undermining hydroelectric development at NPDs, as well as state and federal policy levers that have encouraged development. This project finds that arduous regulatory reviews, declining power purchase rates and insufficient policy recognition for hydropower have hindered development since 2005. Conversely, access to low-interest financing, supplemental income streams and expedient permitting processes, such as the Lease of Power Privilege, have presented a model to encourage future NPD development.