

**Federal Actors in Dam Removal Policy:
Legal and Bureaucratic Influences in the Decommissioning
of Powered and Non-Powered Dams in the United States**

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Multiple avenues exist by which the Federal Government can influence dam removal for environmental, safety, economic, and socio-cultural purposes. The role of federal actors in America's dam removal trend can be organized by the analysis of three classes of dams: (1) non-federal powered, (2) non-federal nonpowered, and (3) federally owned dams operated for hydropower or other purposes. For non-federal powered dams, the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's regulatory procedures accommodate for non-developmental values and the participation of resource agencies in project licensing, which can compel the decommissioning of certain projects. In addition, with aging dams increasingly posing safety risks to downstream populations, the Federal Emergency Management Agency has supported the removal of certain non-federal non-powered dams as a preventative measure to avoid dam failure-related emergencies. Federal dams are largely owned and operated by the US Bureau of Reclamation and the US Army Corps of Engineers. Removal is less-frequently considered, as a formal relicensing process does not exist for this dam class. Though federal forums for dam removal do exist, there is a lack of evidence to prove that the Federal Government has a dominant role in compelling dam removal. Dam removal is primarily negotiated through settlements, in which public participation has an increasingly important role. In public settings, it is especially important to discuss dam removal by the partitioning of these three dam classes in order to direct public sentiment appropriately and thus encourage the longevity of America's hydropower industry.