

Navigating the Hydropower Relicensing Landscape

How utilities can prepare when the realities and requirements are a moving target.

HOLDEN, MA, USA, December 9, 2013 /EINPresswire.com/ -- For hydroelectric utilities, the federal and state licensing landscape has changed over the past 10 years, and it continues to evolve. For utilities that haven't gone through the process, the changes can come as a surprise.

To hit the ground running before re-licensing time arrives, hydropower experts at [ALDEN](#) say it's never too early to start planning. Here's how.

Know which changes will have an impact.

The adoption of the now-standard integrated licensing process (ILP) affects everything from stakeholder consultations and studies to time commitments and when expenditures may need to be made. Fish passage requirements, databases and evaluation methods have also changed. Federal and state endangered species listings include new additions, and other species are currently being reviewed for listing or have been placed on watch lists. Operations have changed, too, with the creation of ISOs and the value of energy produced. Even tax credits provide new financing considerations. It's never too early for a utility to get educated on which changes will impact them— and use what they know to prepare and identify knowledge gaps, timelines, potential facility or capacity upgrades, and areas of concern.

Put a relicensing team and plan in place early.

Regulations require a licensing Notice of Intent to be filed with the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) 5 years before the current license expires. But it's smart to start planning much sooner. Eight years ahead is not too early to research and understand current FERC criteria, bring in stakeholders and gather information for a Pre-Application Document (PAD). Small operations may be able to manage the re-licensing process in-house with limited outside help. Larger operations may need to outsource to a full-service re-licensing consultant to achieve the depth of expertise needed to move them smoothly through the process. Either may benefit from independent outside services that provide specific FERC licensing experience and expertise.

Pick a relicensing path.

Which route to take will depend on the utility's individual circumstance. Since 2005, the ILP has been the default approach, with the benefit of identifying issues early on and front-loading the licensing process with specific study, time and investment commitments. Utilities wanting a more familiar road and more control over timing and cost may choose to apply for approval to use a traditional licensing approach (the pre-2005 default process). However, though this could save time and money upfront, it may also prompt costly requests for information later on. An alternative licensing process also exists, but this requires a settlement agreement and is less commonly used.

Collaborate with stakeholders.

Today, hydropower faces a new openness from many former "adversaries:" NGOs, governments and community members. Utilities can leverage this by educating their stakeholders early and often, whether through independently facilitated meetings, a dedicated re-licensing web site or other means. Initiate communication with a goal of creating understanding and achieving mutual wins. In working together and providing solid facts, utilities can identify the real issues and save time and money with a focused study and testing plan to address them.

Although the hydropower licensing landscape continues to evolve, utilities don't need to be caught flat-footed. With smart preparation, education, collaboration and strategic investments, it's possible to save time, money and many headaches throughout the process.

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