NHA
National Hydropower Association

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For Immediate Release

Murkowski, Oak Ridge National Lab Tout Hydropower Potential

Alaska Senator urges action on Hydropower Improvement Act; ORNL study shows huge hydro potential in South, Rust Belt and Midwest

Washington, D.C. (April 5, 2011) –"There is no question that hydropower is, and must continue to be, part of our energy solution," Alaska Senator Lisa Murkowski (R) said in remarks delivered at the National Hydropower Association's annual conference today.

"Hydro is clean, efficient and inexpensive. And yet, despite its tremendous benefits, I'm constantly amazed at how some undervalue this important resource," Senator Murkowski, Energy and Natural Resources Committee Ranking Member, said today.

A longtime supporter of hydropower, Senator Murkowski introduced the Hydropower Improvement Act on March 17, 2011. The legislation would spur development of hydropower by increasing support for research and development; calling for better coordination on regulation and permitting processes; and establishing a grant program for hydropower projects. The bill has nine original cosponsors, including Energy and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Jeff Bingaman (D-NM) and Washington Senator Maria Cantwell (D) – a rare show of bipartisanship that Senator Murkowski called "impressive."

"I consider hydropower to be our hardest working renewable resource – and one that often gets overlooked in the clean energy debate," the Senator said, noting that the Energy Committee should pass legislation that encourages "cheaper energy, cleaner energy, and more secure energy."

NHA Executive Director Linda Church Ciocci applauded the Senator's leadership on energy issues and hydropower development.

"With support from leaders like Senator Murkowski, the hydropower industry is ready to work even harder to provide Americans with the clean, low-cost, renewable energy they need," Ciocci said. "Hydropower already plays a vital role in the U.S. energy mix. With the right policies in place, the industry can expand that role; studies have shown capacity could grow by 60,000 MW by 2025."

This morning's presentation also featured the release of a new Oak Ridge National Laboratory analysis of potential hydropower additions to America's existing non-powered dam infrastructure. The study found that 12.6 GW of power can be added to existing dams, with a concentration of potential projects in the South, Midwest and Rust Belt. The National Hydropower Association estimates that this new capacity could power 12.6 million homes.

Brennan Smith, water resources engineer with the Environmental Sciences Division of Oak Ridge National Laboratory and one of the authors of the report, noted that Oak Ridge's analysis, which

looked at multiple federal resource assessments, found that non-powered dam potential exists in areas where other renewable energy sources, like wind and solar, are less available.

“The concentration of potential hydropower at just 100 existing dams is huge,” said Smith. “Those facilities, which are concentrated in areas of the country not usually associated with hydropower, can provide 8 GW of clean, reliable hydropower.”

The ORNL report also found that many of these dams can be converted to power-generating facilities without impacting critical habitats, parks or wilderness areas. NHA estimates that converting these structures to electricity-generating facilities could create hundreds of thousands of jobs.

“The Oak Ridge National Laboratory study clearly shows that there is huge potential to expand hydropower in areas of the country that may not think of themselves as having renewable energy resources,” said Ciocci. “Developing these assets as soon as possible will create jobs and provide low-cost, reliable and clean power where it is needed most. The Hydropower Improvement Act, along with other essential policy reforms, can help make that a reality.”

For more information about NHA’s annual conference, being held April 4-6, 2011 at the Capitol Hilton in Washington, D.C., please visit www.nationalhydroconference.com/index.html.

For more information on NHA and to download the ORNL study, please visit www.hydro.org.

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