October 13, 2020

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Majority Leader  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker of the House  
U.S. House of Representatives

The Honorable Chuck Schumer  
Democratic Leader  
U.S. Senate

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Republican Leader  
U.S. House of Representatives

Dear Majority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Leader Schumer and Leader McCarthy:

We write to transmit an important new agreement between representatives of the U.S. hydropower industry and the U.S. environmental and river conservation communities. The “Joint Statement of Collaboration on U.S. Hydropower: Climate Solution and Conservation Challenge” (Joint Statement), represents an important step to help address climate change by both advancing the renewable energy and storage benefits of hydropower and the environmental and economic benefits of healthy rivers.

The Joint Statement is the result of a two-and-a-half-year dialogue, co-convened by Stanford University, through its Uncommon Dialogue process, and the Energy Futures Initiative, to bring together a diverse range of representatives of the U.S. hydropower industry and the environmental and river conservation communities. The parties are motivated by two urgent challenges. To rapidly and substantially decarbonize the nation’s electricity system, the parties recognize the role that U.S. hydropower plays as an important renewable energy resource and for integrating variable solar and wind power into the U.S. electric grid. At the same time, our nation’s waterways, and the biodiversity and ecosystem services they sustain, are vulnerable to the compounding factors of a changing climate, habitat loss and alteration of river processes. Our shared task is to chart hydropower’s role in a clean energy future in a way that also supports healthy rivers.

There are more than 90,000 existing dams throughout the country, of which about 2,500 have associated hydropower facilities for electricity generation. In the next decade, close to 30 percent of U.S. hydropower projects will come up for relicensing. As such, the parties focused on three potential opportunities:

- **Rehabilitating** both powered and non-powered dams to improve safety, increase climate resilience, and mitigate environmental impacts;
- **Retrofitting** powered dams and adding generation at non-powered dams to increase renewable generation; developing pumped storage capacity at existing dams; and
enhancing dam and reservoir operations for water supply, fish passage, flood mitigation, and grid integration of solar and wind; and

- Removing dams that no longer provide benefits to society, have safety issues that cannot be cost-effectively mitigated, or have adverse environmental impacts that cannot be effectively addressed.

The potential development of new “closed loop” pumped storage to increase capacity to store renewable energy, including variable solar and wind, was also a focus of the dialogue. Closed loop pumped storage systems do not involve construction of a new dam on a river, but they may have other impacts that need to be avoided, minimized or mitigated, including impacts to surface and ground water.

The parties found inspiration in a precedent-setting 2004 agreement involving Maine’s Penobscot River where the Penobscot Nation, the hydropower industry, environmentalists, and state and federal agencies agreed to a “basin-scale” project to remove multiple dams, while retrofitting and rehabilitating other dams to increase their hydropower capacity, improve fish passage and advance dam safety. After project completion in 2016, total hydropower generation increased, more than 2,000 miles of river habitat had improved access for the endangered Atlantic salmon and other species of sea-run fish, and the Penobscot River again helps support the realization of treaty rights and other aspects of tribal culture for the Penobscot Nation.

Driven by the urgent need to address the twin challenges of climate change and river conservation, the parties have identified seven areas for joint collaboration, specifically:

1. Accelerate Development of Hydropower Technologies and Practices to Improve Generation Efficiency, Environmental Performance, and Solar and Wind Integration
2. Advocate for Improved U.S. Dam Safety
3. Increase Basin-Scale Decision-Making and Access to River-Related Data
4. Improve the Measurement, Valuation of and Compensation for Hydropower Flexibility and Reliability Services and Support for Enhanced Environmental Performance
5. Advance Effective River Restoration through Improved Off-Site Mitigation Strategies
6. Improve Federal Hydropower Licensing, Relicensing, and License Surrender Processes
7. Advocate for Increased Funding for U.S. Dam Rehabilitation, Retrofits and Removals

Over the next 60 days, the parties have agreed to invite other key stakeholders, including tribal governments and state officials, to join the collaboration, and to address implementation priorities, decision-making, timetables, and resources.
In sum, the parties agree that maximizing hydropower’s climate and other benefits, while also mitigating the environmental impacts of dams and supporting environmental restoration, will be advanced through a collaborative effort focused on the specific actions developed in this dialogue. The parties are committed to seizing these critical and timely opportunities.

We would be pleased to follow up with you or your staff to provide additional information and answer questions regarding the Joint Statement of Collaboration and next steps. Please contact Dan Reicher of Stanford University at dreicher@stanford.edu (802-377-9138); or Jeanette Pablo of the Energy Futures Initiative at jmpablo@energyfuturesinitiative.org (202-468-9688).

Sincerely,

The Parties to the Joint Statement of Collaboration

American Rivers
World Wildlife Fund
Union of Concerned Scientists
Great River Hydro
American Whitewater
Natel Energy

National Hydropower Association
Eagle Creek Renewables
Low Impact Hydropower Institute
Rye Development
Hydropower Reform Coalition
Hydropower Foundation
Conveners of the Joint Statement of Collaboration

Woods Institute for the Environment Stanford University

Energy Futures Initiative
Washington, DC

Steyer-Taylor Center for Energy Policy and Finance
Stanford University
October 13, 2020

Hon. Dan Brouillette  
Secretary of Energy  
U.S. Department of Energy

Hon. Neil Chatterjee  
Chairman  
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

Hon. David L. Bernhardt  
Secretary of Interior  
U.S. Department of Energy

Hon. Richard Glick  
Commissioner  
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

Hon. Andrew Wheeler  
Administrator  
U.S. Environmental Protect Agency

Hon. James Danley  
Commissioner  
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission

Hon. Russell Vought  
Director  
Office of Management and Budget

Hon. Mary B. Neumayr  
Chair  
Council on Environmental Quality

Hon. Scott Spellmon  
Lieutenant General  
Army Corps of Engineers


Dear Administration Officials:

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that U.S. hydropower plays as an important renewable energy resource and for integrating variable solar and wind power into the U.S. electric grid. At the same time, our nation’s waterways, and the biodiversity and ecosystem services they sustain, are vulnerable to the compounding factors of a changing climate, habitat loss and alteration of river processes. Our shared task is to chart hydropower’s role in a clean energy future in a way that also supports healthy rivers.

There are more than 90,000 existing dams throughout the country, of which about 2,500 have associated hydropower facilities for electricity generation. In the next decade, close to 30 percent of U.S. hydropower projects will come up for relicensing. As such, the parties focused on three potential opportunities:

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- **Removing** dams that no longer provide benefits to society, have safety issues that cannot be cost-effectively mitigated, or have adverse environmental impacts that cannot be effectively addressed.

The potential development of new “closed loop” pumped storage to increase capacity to store renewable energy, including variable solar and wind, was also a focus of the dialogue. Closed loop pumped storage systems do not involve construction of a new dam on a river, but they may have other impacts that need to be avoided, minimized or mitigated, including to surface and ground water.

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Driven by the urgent need to address the twin challenges of climate change and river conservation, the parties have identified seven areas for joint collaboration, specifically:

1. Accelerate Development of Hydropower Technologies and Practices to Improve Generation Efficiency, Environmental Performance, and Solar and Wind Integration
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Over the next 60 days, the parties have agreed to invite other key stakeholders, including tribal governments and state officials, to join the collaboration, and to address implementation priorities, decision-making, timetables, and resources.

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American Rivers

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Woods Institute for the Environment
Stanford University

Steyer-Taylor Center for Energy Policy and Finance
Stanford University

Energy Futures Initiative
Washington, DC
October 13, 2020

Kevin Allis  
Executive Director  
National Congress of American Indians

Kitcki Carroll  
Executive Director  
United South and Eastern Tribes

Ann McCammon Soltis  
General Counsel  
Great Lakes Indian Fish & Wildlife Agencies

Terri Par  
Executive Director  
Affiliated Tribes of Northwest Indians

Scott R. Vele  
Executive Director  
Midwest Alliance of Sovereign Tribes

Dear Tribal Leaders:

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Dear State Association Leaders:

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