

Report: Hydropower Untapped Domestic Energy — only 2,500 of 90,000 U.S. Dams Are Generating Electricity

[Penny Starr](#) 24 Mar 2022



Katy Kildee/Midland Daily News via AP

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Environmentalists long ago declared war on dams, claiming that they

harm fish and contribute to so-called climate change. But according to a report on the oil price dot com website, dams also store water, prevent floods, and provide renewable energy that is even cheaper than solar.

The energy resource, however, is not generally in the spotlight, even as the country could face energy shortages because of President Joe Biden's oil and gas policies and the Russian invasion of Ukraine.

To date, hydropower — or the generation of electricity using water and turbines — is vastly underutilized, according to the report. Of the 90,000 dams identified by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, only 2,500 are being used to generate electricity.

The website [reported](#) on the role of hydropower in the U.S. energy landscape:

In the U.S., hydropower [currently accounts](#) for 37 percent of total U.S. renewable electricity generation and about 7 percent of total U.S. electricity generation; provides over [90 percent](#) of America's long-duration energy storage, and powers an estimated 30 million homes.

The golden era of dam building swept the nation in the 1940s and 1950s, impounding some of the most important rivers of the American west. But environmentalists have lately been winning a good deal, with the U.S. now leading the movement to decommission dams. According to "Free Rivers: The State of Dam Removal in the U.S.," report by American Rivers, 57 dams were removed in 2021, reconnecting more than 2,131 miles of rivers. American Rivers has been advocating for dam removals on

environmental grounds. A total of 1,951 dams have already been removed nationwide, roughly equal to 2 percent of the more than 90,000 dams.

“We do recognize that (hydropower) is probably going to play some role in the transition, Ted Illston of American Rivers admitted. “It’s certainly better than coal.”

But make no mistake about it: hydropower remains a very integral part of the U.S. energy ecosystem. You can clearly tell that by President Joe Biden’s infrastructure law, [which puts](#) \$2.5 billion toward projects including upgrades at existing structures for hydropower and energy storage as well as dam removals.

And dams could actually prevent weather-related threats to the environment by retrofitting dams to produce electricity.

The oil price website cited Rye Development, a Boston-based hydropower company that is retrofitting dams in southwestern Pennsylvania. The projects could come online as early as 2025 and the new structures will also help with water quality and fish health.

Rye sought certification from the Low Impact Hydropower Institute, which the website article said has standards that are often stricter than state or federal guidelines.

In some states, dams the institute has certified qualify as green-energy programs.

“It’s very easy for individual river systems to get lost in the message of climate change and the need for renewable energy,” Shannon Ames, executive director of the Institute, told the Associated Press.