

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**Media Contact:** Jenn Strang
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Years of environmental research and collaborative decision-making result in a final license application that commits City Light to a whole-ecosystem, adaptive management approach for the watershed that surrounds this critical source of renewable energy

SEATTLE— Seattle City Light submitted a final license application to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) today, detailing plans to operate the Skagit River Hydroelectric Project for the next 50 years. Although this is not the last step in the FERC relicensing process, the final license application (FLA) is a significant milestone for City Light and its partners. Totalling approximately 15,000 pages, it represents years of collaboration among Treaty Tribes, Canadian First Nations, federal and state regulatory bodies, environmental groups, and nearby communities.

The Skagit River Hydroelectric Project is an integrated, three-dam system that generates about 20 percent of Seattle's electricity. In managing the dams, City Light also manages the flow of the Skagit River, providing flood risk management for Skagit County communities and ensuring appropriate flows for the many species of fish, as well as education, recreation and other public benefits.

"While there is still a lot to do, we are so grateful to the dozens of license partners, City Light staff, and experts who have worked extraordinarily hard to put together the FLA," said City Light General Manager/CEO Debra Smith. "The next license will dictate how we operate the dams for decades, and it's crucial that we carefully balance the need for renewable energy with the need to respect Tribal interests and be good stewards of the watershed."

About 30 license partners collaborated with City Light on the FLA, which reflects not only the need for safe and stable electricity, but regulatory requirements of agencies such as the National Marine Fisheries Service (NMFS), the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and many others. It attempts to also reflect the interests of the Tribes and the surrounding communities.

"This has been an extraordinarily deep and thorough process," said Scott Schuyler, Policy Representative for the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe. "Since time immemorial the river, the salmon and the wildlife have been central to our community life and very culture. This license makes progress in recognizing its connection to us. Adding fish passage is a logistic challenge, and we appreciate the hundreds of hours Seattle City Light has spent with us and other partners to determine an approach that will help reconnect the different parts of the river. The Upper Skagit people can now take pride knowing that a brighter future is on the horizon for the river and generations to come."

Significant Changes to the License

City Light manages the flow of water through the hydroelectric project according to the following priorities: flood risk management, fish habitat, recreation and power generation. While those priorities

won't change in the next license, there are new measures that reflect climate change, partner and regulatory agency requirements, and tribal cultural interests.

The FLA is based on \$28 million in relicensing research studies. But even with all that data, the climate and the environment are changing faster than the license can adapt. Our next license is built for more monitoring, more flexibility and more collaboration.

- 1) *Whole-ecosystem approach*: The next license takes a whole-ecosystem approach to managing the hydropower project's effects on the watershed.
- 2) *Adaptive management*: The next license will include a robust/long-term monitoring program, which is essential to a flexible and adaptive management program.
- 3) *Comprehensive fish program that includes fish passage*: City Light has worked with Tribes, NMFS, and other key partners to develop a comprehensive fish program that will contribute to protection and restoration of fish throughout the river. This includes considerations such as water quality, spawning beds, shade, food sources and more. City Light has also been responsive to the interests expressed by the Upper Skagit Indian Tribe, NMFS and others, and has proposed a fish passage program for passage across all three dams.

The most significant investment in the new license is the development of a fish passage program designed to move fish completely around the three-dam project. The dams are 30, 39 and 54 stories high and thus too high for fish ladders and similar solutions. In order to get fish around the project to Ross Lake, City Light and partners are collaboratively developing a "trap-and-haul" program. This would involve building an upstream fish collector below Gorge Dam, downstream fish collector at Ross Dam, and building a road through the North Cascades National Park to Ross Lake. The collector and the road will allow trucks to transport fish to and from the Ross reservoir.

This is just one tactic of many to improve fish populations. City Light is also committed to estuary restoration, mainstem habitat restoration and managing flows to reduce the risk of floods while protecting salmon habitat. The FLA identifies over \$500 million in new environmental measures over the next 50 years of the license, and recognizes other potential costs for projects, such as fish passage. Those costs will continue to be refined, as City Light's discussions with partners conclude and projects are finalized.

Next Steps

The final license application is not the final step in the relicensing process. FERC's public environmental review process will be completed over the next several years. Additionally, City Light will continue to collaborate with partners to develop agreements on operating the project and managing the complex ecosystem of the Skagit River. Once completed, those additional agreements will be presented to FERC and may be included in the FERC license.

Additional Resources

Visit the [Relicensing](#) webpage for more information.