

The Sensible Environmentalist

Time To End Anti-Hydro Bias

(NAPSA)—DEAR DR. MOORE:

My power company says hydroelectric power is renewable, clean and cheap—but aren't dams bad for the environment?



Dr. Moore

There is no doubt that large dams have environmental impacts. The question is whether those impacts can be mitigated enough to make the good outweigh the bad.

Most people don't think of hydroelectric power as renewable but it's the most abundant and reliable source of renewable energy we have. In the heat of the sun, water evaporates from oceans and lakes, forms clouds and falls as rain, which in turn swells rivers. To generate power, a dam is built creating a reservoir of water behind it. When tunnels in the dam are opened, water flows through, forcing turbines into action and driving generators. Once it passes through the dam, the water flows down river.

Although it's a nonpolluting technology, a number of negative environmental effects have been associated with large dams, such as the inability of migrating fish to swim upstream and the potential loss of biodiversity in surrounding areas. While these and other challenges remain, improved planning and design have done much to reduce the impacts—through fish ladders, for example, which mimic waterfalls and allow migrating fish to pass. In terms of biodiversity, a well-

designed reservoir can actually lead to a greater abundance of fish and wildlife than were present in the past, which is why lakes created by dams are often valued as prime recreation and sport fishing areas.

In terms of benefits, dams have been built for thousands of years for many reasons, such as the need to collect drinking water, irrigation, water storage (in case of drought) and protection against flooding. About 20 percent of the world's large dams are used to generate power.

Most people agree that renewable energy is needed in order to lessen our dependence on fossil fuels such as coal and natural gas and reduce the risk of climate change. But, while many favor sources such as solar, wind and even ocean tides, it's important to recognize that these are intermittent. In order to provide a stable supply of electricity to a large number of homes and businesses, they have to be coupled with a stable source—such as hydropower.

As a sensible environmentalist, I agree that large dams must be designed to minimize environmental impacts. I also think it's time to recognize the value of hydroelectric power as a renewable, abundant and nonpolluting source of energy.

Dr. Patrick Moore has been a leader of the environmental movement for more than 30 years. A co-founder of Greenpeace, he holds a PhD in ecology and a BSc in forest biology. Questions can be sent to Patrick@SensibleEnvironmental.com.