

## **Assessing the Outcomes of Collaborative Governance in Federal Hydropower Licensing**

Nicola Ulibarri  
PhD Candidate  
Emmett Interdisciplinary Program in Environment and Resources  
Stanford University  
ulibarri@stanford.edu

Prepared for the Western Political Science Association Annual Meeting  
Seattle, WA  
April 17-19, 2014

**ABSTRACT:** Despite the popularity of collaborative approaches to environmental management, previous empirical work on whether collaboration improves the effectiveness of governance decisions yields mixed results. This study assesses the link between collaboration and environmental outcomes in the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission's process for licensing hydropower facilities. Data used to measure collaboration include an online survey of participants and archival documents including meeting minutes, ground rules, and public comments. The outcome variable is licensed changes in project operations, which affect river flows and lake levels and have spillover effects on resources ranging from electrical generation to fish habitat to recreational access. All data were collected for eight cases, and then three cases, selected for maximum variation in level of collaboration, were evaluated using process tracing to qualitatively assess whether collaboration—and in particular which components of collaboration—led to observed outcomes. High levels of collaboration resulted in jointly-developed operating regimes that were designed to improve a variety of resources and likely to be implemented as written. With medium collaboration, licensed project operations emerged from a mix of negotiation and non-collaborative regulatory mandates and addressed a subset of potential resources. With low collaboration, operating requirements did not change despite stakeholder input. These results are consistent with the hypothesis that collaboration leads to improved environmental outcomes, providing evidence for the pragmatic value of collaborative decision-making.

**For a copy of this paper, please contact the author. Thank you!**