

Commissioner Connor: Hydropower

(We're) continuing our series of video podcasts about certain issues of importance to the Bureau of Reclamation. Today I wanted to talk to you a little bit about the progress that we're making in the area of renewable energy. As most of you have heard, President Obama has described an all-of-the-above energy strategy that he has to meet the country's future energy challenges.

The Department of the Interior under Secretary Salazar has been very much of a leader in that effort. Reclamation has a very strong history, as you know, in the area of generating electricity and providing for the western United States. And I'm happy to say that we're continuing along those lines today.

We've got, currently, 53 powerplants that have the capacity to generate 14,700 megawatts of electricity. All total, we average about 40 million megawatt hours of electricity production per year. That provides energy for about 3.5 million households. It would take about 33 medium-sized coal powerplants to replace the energy resources that Reclamation generates.

Notwithstanding that history, we're moving aggressively to try and build more energy-generating capacity at Reclamation facilities. Since developing the March 2010 MOU, we've moved forward and we've looked at our existing facilities. In March of 2011, we developed what we call the Phase One Report that identified 190 sites where we could potentially develop 225 megawatts (of) additional generating capacity. A lot of our partners in the private sector are now working with us to develop some of those facilities. In April of this year, 2012, we looked at our existing canals, laterals, a lot of the water delivery infrastructure that we have, looking for opportunities for low head hydropower development. We identified well over 300 sites with the capacity to generate something like 365,000 megawatt hours per year. And we're working with some of our partners on developing those sites. All told, in the last 3 years, we brought online about 42 megawatts of new generating capacity, and if you include the turbine upgrades we've done, we've added about 115 megawatts of generating capacity.

So we've got a very aggressive, sustainable hydropower program, we're making a lot of good progress, and we're getting a lot of support from the private energy industry to work with us to develop those new resources. So we're an important player in the President's all-of-the-above energy strategy, and I appreciate all the hard work that you Reclamation employees have put to this effort. Thanks.