

Colorado Governor's Energy Office Renewable Energy Development Team (REDT) is Driving Small Hydropower in the State

by Susan Carollo, Colorado Governor's Energy Office Renewable Energy Development Team



Three years ago the Colorado Governor's Energy Office formed a small hydropower working group to collaborate with the industry and understand small hydropower barriers in the state. What they learned was that the federal permitting process was very cumbersome and complex, and it was not unusual for a project to take between two to three years to get the required permits necessary to move forward. "So many potential applicants were afraid of even starting the process," recalls Francisco Flores, the Governor Energy Office's Renewable Energy Program Manager. "Big companies could afford sophisticated consultants to help them navigate the process, but for farmers and ranchers that process was very expensive and this caused smaller projects to be uneconomical."

The Governor's Energy Office used America Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA) funds received through the U.S. Department of Energy to establish the Renewable Energy Development Team (REDT) and provide technical assistance to help projects navigate through a new streamlined Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) review process. Ryan Broshar, REDT project manager reflects, "Before this process the steps needed to obtain a permit from FERC for a low impact hydropower project on a rancher's irrigation ditch were as complicated as those to those to obtain a permit for the Hoover Dam. The new streamlined process makes sure the application is right the first time, all environmental regulations are met and resource agencies' comments and regulations are upheld. The result is that low impact projects are able to obtain the permit quicker, with less cost and effort by the applicant."

In the state of Colorado only 26 small hydro projects have been permitted by FERC over the last 30-35 years. That translates to less than one a year. In contrast, the Governor's Energy Office REDT has submitted 8 projects in the last 7 months, and expects that half of all FERC exemptions in the entire nation over the last year will occur in the state of Colorado alone.

Francisco Flores comments, "This program has been a catalyst. As you can see from statistics the rate of small hydro projects being permitted is being increased. We are creating a strong small hydro industry in the state of Colorado, and you can see how important this is when you see other states around the nation looking at our model trying to replicate it."

About the Renewable Energy Development Team (REDT)

The REDT was established by the Colorado Governor's Energy Office to provide technical and business development assistance to renewable energy projects through a stage-gate process designed to ensure that projects with the best opportunity for success advance. The FERC Small Hydro Pilot Program mentioned in this story moves Colorado low

impact hydropower projects efficiently through a streamlined review process, reducing the time and money to receive a federal permit, saving approximately \$100,000 per project. SRA International is the contractor supporting the Governor's Energy Office's REDT.