

# AN OPEN LETTER TO GOVERNOR GRETCHEN WHITMER

January 2023

Dear Governor Whitmer:

We are Michiganders who may soon face the loss of lifelong investments in homes and communities by a potential plan to eliminate hydroelectric dams in Michigan. We ask you to join us in continued support of river hydro as a pillar of renewable and clean power. Our request comes at a time when at least one Michigan power company, Consumers Energy, is re-evaluating its century-long river hydro commitment.

## Add River Hydro to Your MI Healthy Climate Plan

As you know, under your leadership, Michigan adopted the *MI Healthy Climate Plan*. It calls for Michigan to increase its carbon-neutral electricity to 60% by 2030 and to 100% by 2050. Your plan admits that ‘to achieve our goals,’ we must ‘avoid actions ... that make it more difficult to reach carbon neutrality’ and ‘maintain existing clean energy and energy storage assets.’

Yet *nowhere does this 58-page plan mention Michigan’s river hydro operations*. We view this omission as the rare oversight in an otherwise exceptional program. Omitting river hydro from Michigan’s renewable energy resources hinders your own plan and our state’s chances of achieving its necessary goals.

Michigan has a wealth of river hydro resources at a time when environmental and hydropower experts are calling for state and federal investments in river hydro plants. Instead of omitting river hydro, Michigan’s climate plan should embrace substantial funding for what one environmental working group calls ‘innovative approaches to a climate-ready, river-friendly hydropower industry.’<sup>i</sup>

We ask you to revise the MI Healthy Climate Plan to include river hydro as a fundamental pillar in Michigan’s green and renewable future.

## Encourage Your Agencies to Support River Hydro

We also note that your plan requires the Michigan Public Service Commission (MPSC) to ‘analyze and more fully consider the potential community health and environmental impacts of utility investment decisions.’ We endorse the plan’s commitment to environmental justice. *But MPSC must also recognize and consider economic and recreational injustice to communities if dams are removed.*

Right now, Consumers Energy is reviewing whether it will continue to generate hydropower at thirteen dams. These 13 dams support Michigan communities in eight counties. These communities and Consumers Energy have benefited enormously from the ponds, lakes, and impoundments formed by these dams. Consumers Energy claims that MPSC’s resistance to allowing some rate elasticity is hindering the company’s ability to keep up with dam maintenance, threatening the future of river hydro at these 13 dams.



The 13 Dams Under Review Span the State

A case in point: In March 2022, Consumers applied to MPSC for a rate increase, presenting costs, totaling over \$350 million, needed for safety and reliability upgrades to its Hardy dam. The case is still pending, but MPSC currently rejects Consumer's request to increase rates to fund these upgrades, which Consumers says are required to maintain its operating license.

We are not in favor of excessive power rates. But MPSC's resistance to cost recovery for safety upgrades seems both dangerous and counterproductive. Your plan calls for an ambitious expansion of Michigan's clean energy resources. Yet MPSC's stance invites power companies to abandon their river hydro assets.

Removing the dams would strip communities of their lifeblood. Property values and commerce would fall, reducing tax revenues that support schools and community needs. Our recreational waters and related camping, hunting, and other outdoor activities would suffer, both for residents and for visitors whose dollars anchor many of our areas' economies. It is certain that dam removal would harm Michigan's hydro communities; the damage would flow throughout the state. *We need your help to ensure that does not happen.*

*Please encourage the MPSC to prioritize preserving all forms of renewable power and communities.*

Governor Whitmer, retaining river hydro and our dams is undeniably consistent with your environmental policy objectives. River hydro must remain an essential element of Michigan's clean energy future. For these reasons, we ask you to turn policy into practice: *Invest in river hydro. Work with Consumers Energy and its regulators to protect our dams and to ensure the viability of our communities.*

To this end, we would welcome an opportunity to meet with you and your environmental policy leaders. Will you give us an opportunity to more fully detail our position and perspective?

Yours truly,

The undersigned Michiganders—People, businesses, officials, and organizations united to keep river hydro.

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<sup>i</sup> *Innovative and Advanced Hydropower Technology Can Improve Environmental Performance, Generation Efficiency, and Grid Resilience*, Uncommon Dialogue Working Group 1, October 2022. Under the auspices of The Stanford Woods Institute for the Environment, Working Group members include environmental organizations, hydropower companies, and key industry stakeholders. In 2021, members of Congress—including Reps. Debbie Dingell and Rashida Tlaib—endorsed this group's recommendations and sent them to President Biden.

CC: U.S. Secretary of Energy Jennifer Granholm  
CC: Michigan Attorney General Dana Nessel

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