

Summary

AFS Policy Statement #32:
Dam Removal

AFS Policy Statement on Dam Removal

The American Fisheries Society (AFS) recognizes that dams and associated aquatic communities provide many important societal benefits but that river blockages may cause adverse environmental impacts and societal costs. The net costs and benefits of dams should be compared to traditional values that were affected by altered habitat and ecology. AFS believes that dam removal can be a legitimate alternative to mitigate the adverse environmental effects of dams and their operation. Decisions about dam removal should rely on the best available scientific information give full, objective consideration to local costs and benefits and broader, regional considerations. The AFS supports dam removal when it is determined that both:

- 1) the benefits of dam removal outweigh the costs associated with societal, cultural, environmental, economic, engineering, and technical issues; and
- 2) dam removal is the best approach to restore fish habitat and the fish populations and fisheries they supported. Removal decisions should be selected with full stakeholder involvement.

When deemed to be the preferred alternative, dam removal should minimize impacts to aquatic and riparian resources. The AFS recognizes that adverse impacts to fisheries and impounded ecosystems are an unavoidable consequence of dam removal, but a well-designed removal can minimize short-term impacts. Over the longer term, removal is often warranted where temporary impacts are outweighed by the long-term benefits of dam removal. When the decision to preserve or rebuild a dam is made, effective and efficient fish passage facilities should be included at the structure to mitigate dam-induced fragmentation of the river ecosystem and resulting impacts to aquatic communities.

Implement this policy statement on dam removal, the AFS recommends that agencies, industry sectors, environmental interests, and others:

1. Develop a North American inventory and supporting database (location, dimensions, ownership, age, etc.) on public and private dams that is accessible to all stakeholders;
2. Organize workshops and symposia focused on science associated with the benefits and costs of dam removal;
3. Include all stakeholders from the beginning in the analysis of the ecological, economic, and sociological impacts of a specific dam removal;
4. Where warranted by project scope and applicable guidelines, use decision tools to quantify ecological, economic, cultural, and other values of river and riparian ecosystems above and below each dam;
5. Recognize long established water laws and the implications of dam removal on senior water rights;
6. Where cost and benefit analyses are conducted, consider scientific uncertainty and risk assessments;
7. Use accumulated knowledge to inform adaptive management processes in dam removal evaluations and projects, e.g., apply knowledge gained from past dam removal studies and projects to increase the success of future projects; and,

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8. For non-power dams, encourage public and private entities to establish monetary funds, both project-specific and pooled, to support informed decision-making regarding dam removal, dam repair, and/or implementation of fish passage, mitigation, and enhancement measures. For federally licensed hydropower dams, follow agency guidance and licensing processes that encourage licensee to pay for fish passage and other mitigation.