

Hydropower Is Nonpolluting, but Does Have Environmental Impacts

Hydropower does not pollute the water or the air. However, hydropower facilities can have large environmental impacts by changing the environment and affecting land use, homes, and natural habitats in the dam area.



Most hydroelectric power plants have a dam and a reservoir. These structures may obstruct fish migration and affect their populations. Operating a hydroelectric power plant may also change the water temperature and the river's flow. These changes may harm native plants and animals in the river and on land.

Reservoirs may cover people's homes, important natural areas, agricultural land, and archeological sites. So building dams can require relocating people. Methane, a strong greenhouse gas, may also form in some reservoirs and be emitted to the atmosphere.

Fish Ladders Help Salmon Reach Their Spawning Grounds

In the Columbia River, along the border of Oregon and Washington, salmon must swim upstream to their spawning grounds to reproduce, but the series of dams gets in their way. Different approaches to fixing this problem have been used, including the construction of "fish ladders" which help the salmon "step up" the dam to the spawning grounds upstream.