

One thing we have learnt this week – problems with hydropower

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Who would have thought that there could be any environmental

problems with hydropower? This form of energy is clean, does base load and can be relatively unobtrusive. Dams behind reservoirs can be beautiful as I have seen myself many times. There are some problems though. In the tropics as this blog has outlined before the dams can be net greenhouse gas emitters. Amongst the other problems with hydropower are flooding of beautiful wilderness and displacement of indigenous tribal groups. The way around this I thought was to build not vast dams producing multiple gigawatts of peak output but many small "run of river schemes". In these there is no dam and water travels down a pipe and is then returned to the river. These are generally regarded as friendly and benign to wild life. It seems I and other like me might have to think again. In the Balkans nearly 3000 hydropower plants are planned with 187 under construction. Most of these are very small with no dams. This should tick OK boxes but obviously there are [concerns](#). Many of the plants are in national parks or protected areas. The problems with hydropower here have arisen since the run of river plants are taking too much water out of the rivers leaving the stretches between the extraction and return pipes dry. In addition very multiple small plants are being put in on the same bit of river which individually do not require permission but cumulatively have a big effect. There have been conflicts and even murders committed in the conflicts between the small farmers and large energy companies in Albania. In the UK permission has to be granted, the rules are strict and it takes a long time to get the go ahead. It looks like this may be a good thing. Neil

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