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OR-48

A Careful Balancing Act

BPA does the right thing to manage oversupply of electricity

A rainy—and blustery—spring has created an interesting situation for the Bonneville Power Administration. The agency markets the power generated at Columbia and Snake river dams, where Oregon's 18 electric cooperatives get their electricity to serve you.

BPA also is in charge of balancing the electric system with not only the dams, but the scores of windmills in the region.

The problem is spring winds and rain result in too much hydroelectric and wind generation during a time of low customer use. Only so much water can be stored behind the dams, so the option is to generate electricity or spill it over the dams. A high level of spill creates dangerous conditions for endangered salmon and steelhead.

For the system to stay in balance, something has to give.

After an extensive public process, Bonneville has developed a set of priorities for reducing generation. The first is reducing federal generation by storing water in flood control areas behind dams. Second is limiting generation at thermal plants: coal, natural gas and nuclear. If electricity supply continues to exceed demand, as a last resort Bonneville will limit wind generation, replacing it with hydroelectric power at no cost.

Bonneville's plan is a fair and responsible way to avoid harming endangered salmon, maintaining system reliability and avoiding transferring costs to electricity customers. It's a high-wire act, but BPA has maintained its footing on the line. ■

Provided by the Oregon Rural Electric Cooperative Association for its Power of Community members. To learn more about Power of Community or to sign up, go to www.oreca.org/powercom.php.

For Werner Buehler's monthly manager's message, see page 25.