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DC line returns to full service in time for winter

Bonneville Power Administration

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Editor's Note to television reporters: We have B-roll shot in Beta SP in both Beta and 3/4-inch formats. Footage shows BPA's dispatchers at Celilo Converter Station near The Dalles, Ore. For more information contact: Sharon Blair (503) 230-7390, Dulcy Mahar (503) 230-5360, or Perry Gruber (503) 230-5359.

PORTLAND, Ore. -- If an arctic storm deep-freezes the Northwest this winter, the power system will be ready and able to buy electricity from as far away as New Mexico. That's because the Pacific Northwest-Pacific Southwest High-Voltage Direct-Current Intertie returned to full service Nov. 29, two years after being devastated by a fire and an earthquake in Southern California.

"Having the full DC line in service gives the Bonneville Power Administration greater access to power from southern California, Arizona and New Mexico, which can help meet power loads in the winter, especially during freezing storms," said Mark Reynolds, BPA's intertie expansion project manager. "It will also make more energy exchanges between the Northwest and the Southwest possible. The reduced capacity on the DC intertie the last two years has cost BPA approximately \$10 million in lost revenues."

The DC intertie is BPA's direct-current electrical link to Los Angeles and the Pacific Southwest. When operating fully, it carries up to 3,100 megawatts, more than enough power for the cities of Seattle, Portland and Boise combined. But a disastrous October 1993 fire and the February 1994 Northridge, Calif., earthquake severely damaged Sylmar Converter East Station just north of Los Angeles. The converter station, which is operated by the Los Angeles Department of Water and Power, is the southern terminal of the intertie.

"The fire took out 1,100 MW of capacity," Reynolds explained. "It burned converter no. 1 and caused smoke damage to converter no. 2. The earthquake damaged the remaining converter groups."

For a time after the earthquake, the entire DC intertie was off-line. BPA crews helped LADWP put some capacity back in service quickly.

"We removed parts from our station at Celilo [at The Dalles Ore.] and sent LA the pieces to try to put at least one converter back together," Reynolds said. "And we sent them our spare parts. Gradually, we put the system back into operation." By mid-February 1995, the DC intertie was up to about two-thirds of its normal capacity. The final 550 MW came on line Nov. 29. LADWP reimbursed BPA for its expenses.

BPA worked closely with LADWP to help restore the station. BPA provided technical expertise, testing services and project management assistance. At the same time, BPA took advantage of the Sylmar outage to improve its own Celilo terminal at the northern end of the line. "We've replaced combustible components with materials that won't burn," Reynolds said. "The work done at Celilo should prevent a

catastrophic event like that at Sylmar. The work at Celilo has cost about \$2 million."

Sylmar was first built in 1970, just before a major earthquake in 1971. That disaster kept the DC line out of service for over a year. LADWP spent about \$22 million repairing the station after the 1971 earthquake and about \$18 million in the last two years. In addition, the Federal Emergency Management Agency recently contributed \$53 million to improve the station to prevent damage in future earthquakes.

"Two earthquakes and a fire ought to be enough," Reynolds said. "I think the DC line has had its share of disasters for awhile."

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