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Floods reduce hydro generation

Bonneville Power Administration

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: THURSDAY, February 8, 1996

PORTLAND, Ore. - Responding to threats of massive flooding, the Bonneville Power Administration is curtailing generation at Columbia and Snake river dams.

While the transmission system has sustained only minor damage in isolated areas, generation has taken a major hit. Still, Northwest residents will have adequate supplies of power.

During normal water flows, the dams are operated primarily for fish passage or power generation. During times of extreme high water, the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers exercises its flood control responsibility and operates the dams to save lives and property. The Corps took over the hydro system on Tuesday, Feb. 6, to reduce flooding along the lower Columbia River.

Before flood control measures began, flows at 150,000 cubic feet per second were being released for power generation at Grand Coulee Dam. In order to reduce flooding in the Portland harbor area, the Corps asked that flows be reduced by 50,000 cfs by Wednesday. On Wednesday, the Corps asked for another reduction of 50,000 cfs.

Flood water is also being held behind these projects: Albeni Falls in northern Idaho, Arrow in British Columbia, Dworshak on the Snake River in Idaho, John Day on the Columbia and Brownlee in Idaho.

"BPA power schedulers did a great job to find power to replace lost generation as a result of the flood-control actions," said Walt Pollock, Group Vice President for Marketing, Conservation and Production. "They had as little as six hours to find about 1400 MWs of power to meet contractual demands in the region. It took pulling together 100 to 200 deals to get enough replacement power to meet that demand." Some of that power, 200 MW, is from pre-arranged exchange agreements with other utilities in the West, and storage agreements with BC Hydro.

The purchases are in stark contrast to the previous month. In January, BPA was earning about \$2 million per day in surplus power sales. In the first week of February, the agency was selling about \$1 million per day. Due to the Corps-ordered generation cutbacks, BPA quit selling non-firm, surplus power and sold only contractually obligated energy (both firm and surplus power under block sale deals).

It appears that power generation will be curtailed until well into the weekend. The Willamette and Columbia rivers are expected to crest sometime Friday morning.

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For more information, contact BPA Media Relations, 503-230-5131, mediarelations@bpa.gov.
