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Northwest helps California deal with emergency

Bonneville Power Administration

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PORTLAND, Ore. — The Bonneville Power Administration is shipping power south this week to help California avert another major power outage during extreme high temperatures. "We are responding to a human health and safety issue," said Randy Hardy, BPA administrator.

With temperatures in California's Central Valley hitting 110 degrees Tuesday, California utilities were seeing record demands for electricity. San Francisco-based Pacific Gas & Electric (PG&E) reported that Monday's power consumption in its service territory hit a record demand of 21,435 average megawatts, and the utility expected to top that record by exceeding 22,000 average megawatts on Tuesday. (By comparison, the Northwest's entire average energy consumption is under 21,000 average megawatts.)

Northern California is especially vulnerable this week because two of its nuclear units at Diablo Canyon were tripped out by last weekend's power outage. The units are expected to be in operation by Thursday, August 15.

Until the nuclear units can be brought on line, BPA, the Corps of Engineers and the National Marine Fisheries Service have jointly agreed to temporarily waive fish spill requirements at The Dalles Dam on the Columbia River to curtail spill and allow additional generation that can be sent to California. The Dalles was selected because it is nearest the major intertie line that runs from the Northwest to California and will cause the least stress on transmission. Some spill at The Dalles will continue during nighttime hours when California temperatures are cooler and power needs drop.

BPA conferred with the National Marine Fisheries Service and the two agencies estimated that, based on fish counts at upriver dams, about 107,000 juvenile fall chinook salmon will pass the dam each day during the three-day emergency period. The agencies said the overwhelming majority of these fish are hatchery-produced salmon, with only about 20 wild fish listed under the Endangered Species Act passing the dam daily. The fisheries service estimates that in a worst case scenario, a total of four to six listed fish may be killed because of the cutback in spill.

Spill refers to the release of fish-laden waters through spillways at the dam rather than running the water through generators to produce electricity. Even without spill, about 25 percent of migrating juvenile fish would travel through sluiceways avoiding the turbines. Of those fish that pass through the turbines, about 15 percent are killed.

This is a very short-term situation, Hardy noted. The full spill regime will be resumed to meet Endangered Species Act requirements by Thursday, providing the Diablo units are back up and

California temperatures moderate.

Pacific Gas & Electric is curtailing power to large industrial and agricultural and has launched a massive media campaign calling for voluntary reductions in residential and commercial use of electricity. Other California utilities are responding with similar campaigns as the situation in the state remains precarious.

During winter, when California power demand is low, California sends some of its power north to help the Northwest meet its power peaks during cold spells. This arrangement has environmental and economic benefits for both regions. Because of power swaps and sales between the two regions, neither California nor the Pacific Northwest has to build costly power plants to meet peak demands. Such plants would be idle most of the time.

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