

[in the news](#)[home](#) [site search](#) [org chart](#) [contact us](#) [web comments](#)

BPA announces more aggressive hydro operations

[Click here for other BPA news releases](#)

Bonneville Power Administration

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE: THURSDAY, Jan. 18, 2001

PR 03 01

CONTACTS: [Ed Mosey](#), BPA (503) 230-5359

PORTLAND, Ore. – The Bonneville Power Administration announced today that the federal Columbia River hydropower system will be run more aggressively as power supplies continue to shrink throughout the West.

Releasing more water out of Grand Coulee Dam will not have any immediate effect on endangered fish. It could, however, reduce the likelihood that reservoirs will be able to refill to provide targeted river flows for fish in spring and summer.

BPA entered the week seeing its power resources more than 1,000 megawatts short of contractual obligations to supply power. "We tried to buy our way out, and paid extremely high prices to secure power supplies. But we found the megawatts dwindling and prices skyrocketing," said Steve Wright, BPA's acting administrator. BPA has spent \$50 million in power purchases this week alone, but that hasn't been enough.

Wright stressed that BPA's power exchange with California is not contributing to the Northwest's problems. "In the exchange, we get back all the power we send within 24 hours, so the Northwest is made whole. Also, because California later returns double the megawatts that BPA sends south, the Northwest gets a bonus which keeps our reservoir levels higher and prices lower. The additional return represents power we don't have to generate at dams or buy on the market," Wright said.

So far, California has returned 170 percent of the power sent through the exchange. As a result, Grand Coulee reservoir was 1.25 feet higher at year's end than it would have been without the exchange. That's equivalent of the power a nuclear plant would generate in one week.

BPA's response to the power situation is consistent with the National Marine Fisheries Service's "biological opinion." Operation beyond the targets in the biological opinion is allowed under limited circumstances. Wright stressed that the current action is to meet the Northwest's needs, not California's.

Prior to taking this action, BPA had already activated several other steps and is continuing them. These include buybacks of power from customers, especially aluminum smelters, and calls for energy conservation. BPA's acting administrator participated with Governors John Kitzhaber of Oregon and Gary Locke of Washington in an open letter to Northwest citizens calling for conservation that is appearing in several newspapers this week.

BPA hopes reservoir operations can return to normal quickly. However, continuing low streamflows and the serious shortage of power throughout the West, as evidenced by California's problems, make the situation unpredictable. "Weather could help or hurt," according to Wright. "There is one thing that we do know will help save fish, energy and money and that's energy conservation."

###
