

BPA Administrator Hairston announces retirement after three decades of service to Pacific Northwest

Portland, Ore. – John Hairston, who has served as administrator and CEO of the Bonneville Power Administration since January 2021, is announcing his retirement from federal service.

“From the beginning of my tenure as Administrator, I have thrived only because I could depend upon the professionalism, skill and resilience of the best federal workforce I have ever encountered,” said Hairston. “We are a workforce of serious people capable of solving serious challenges. As we navigated turbulence, that capability proved stronger than ever. I have complete confidence in the Bonneville workforce and in our current leadership to guide BPA to continued success on behalf of our customers and the region.”

Hairston was named the BPA’s 16th administrator after serving in an acting capacity since September 2020. He dedicated 35 years of service to BPA in numerous positions, including as the agency’s first Chief Administrative Officer in which he significantly advanced the safety, security and resilience of BPA’s workforce. His incomparable agency experience and proven leadership acumen made him the ideal candidate for BPA’s top position, which he assumed at the height of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“John Hairston has been a steady, principled leader for BPA during a period of real complexity and change,” said Scott Simms, CEO and executive director of the Public Power Council. “On behalf of public power utilities across the Northwest, I want to thank John for his service and for his commitment to keeping BPA and its talented workforce focused on reliability, affordability, and its core public mission. John and the BPA team’s work to strengthen BPA’s financial footing, advance transmission investments, pursue day-ahead market participation, cement new long-term contracts and engage constructively with customers and regional stakeholders has positioned the agency to meet the challenges ahead. We are grateful for his leadership and wish him the very best in what comes next.”

As current wholesale power sales contracts neared expiration, Hairston recognized the importance of BPA’s financial strength as a foundation for establishing new contracts. He advanced policies and tools to give BPA greater flexibility for strategic asset investments and ensure long-term competitiveness. Despite inflationary pressures and rising costs, BPA avoided rate increases for most of his tenure while maintaining highly reliable service.

With a clear path to long-term competitiveness, Hairston oversaw a highly collaborative regional effort to forge new wholesale power sales agreements. Through the Provider of Choice initiative, BPA and 134 of its utility customers secured another two decades of certainty and



stability for millions of energy consumers in the Northwest. Under these new contracts, utilities are assured a firm supply of wholesale power and BPA is assured of its ability to recover costs and to continue providing reliable, affordable electricity for years to come.

In another defining moment, Hairston clarified BPA's path toward day-ahead market participation following an exhaustive regional process. At Hairston's direction, BPA is pursuing participation in the Southwest Power Pool's Markets+ day-ahead market. By enabling more efficient, cost-effective and reliable sharing of resources across a wider geographic area, BPA's pursuit of day-ahead market participation aligns with the agency's strategic objectives designed to meet a sharp rise in demand for power and transmission services.

"John Hairston has been a courageous, steady and principled leader for the Pacific Northwest as our industry has faced tremendous challenges," said Lanny Nickell, SPP president and CEO. "I'm very grateful for John's leadership in advancing Markets+ as a solution that promotes increased reliability and affordability for the West. I look forward to partnering with BPA and his successor as we work together to power progress for Western consumers."

Recognizing a void in comprehensive transmission planning, Hairston worked with the Western Power Pool to spearhead the Western Transmission Expansion Coalition, a first of its kind inter-regional effort to develop actionable transmission plans encompassing the entire Western Interconnection.

"John's leadership at BPA has been invaluable to the region during times of great change and challenges," said Sarah Edmonds, president and CEO of Western Power Pool. "As an advocate for the Western Resource Adequacy Program and an originator of the Western Transmission Expansion Coalition, John has been a steadfast champion of regional reliability for the West."

Within BPA, Hairston initiated reforms to modernize and advance the agency's transmission planning and expansion capabilities. After identifying more than \$6 billion in grid reinforcement and expansion projects to add significant transmission capacity and enable the addition of more energy sources, Hairston spearheaded the launch of a transformative project to serve transmission requests on an accelerated timeline. This effort builds on reforms he adopted in 2024 to more quickly and efficiently process requests for generator interconnections.

Working closely with his counterparts at the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and Bureau of Reclamation, Hairston has been a strong proponent for investments in the reliability, capacity and efficiency of the federal power system. Jointly, the agencies are implementing a portfolio of projects with the potential to increase the capacity of the federal hydropower system by 800 MW over the next two decades. Hairston also committed to working with Energy Northwest to increase the capacity of the region's only nuclear plant, the Columbia Generating Station, by 160 MW, which is enough electricity to power over 125,000 more homes.

"Throughout my thirty-plus years at Bonneville, I have witnessed firsthand John's work to best position BPA to both deliver value to the region and meet our customers' needs," said Suzanne Cooper, deputy administrator and chief operating officer at BPA. "John is truly a long-term thinker — steady, focused, and always keeping the bigger picture in mind. His definition of

success hasn't ever been personal; it's been about the organization and the people around him. He consistently invested in fellow leaders, cultivated a spirit of teamwork, and empowered his executive team to move BPA's strategic priorities forward. Bonneville and the Pacific Northwest are all the better for his public service."

A hallmark of Hairston's leadership is his consistent emphasis on the importance of partnerships and strengthening coalitions, with an emphasis on considering diverse viewpoints. This was evident in his work with tribes resulting in a 20-year agreement to test the feasibility of reintroducing salmon above Chief Joseph and Grand Coulee dams. The historic agreement supports important research while preserving the capacity and flexibility of the Federal Columbia River Power System.

The Department of Energy is actively in the process of selecting the next BPA Administrator to ensure a smooth transition.

ADDITIONAL QUOTES REGARDING JOHN HAIRSTON:

"I want to thank Administrator Hairston for his diligent work on behalf of the region, his leadership was instrumental in unlocking progress on the Columbia River Treaty and leveraging BPA's borrowing authority to advance much-needed transmission investments. Looking ahead, our region needs to ensure Bonneville and its next Administrator is laser focused on meeting surging electricity demand, recovering salmon runs, and keeping rates affordable."

– **Senator Maria Cantwell, Washington**

"Administrator Hairston's work on behalf of Oregonians and folks across the Pacific Northwest will be felt far into the future. I thank him for his years of public service and congratulate him on his next chapter." – **Senator Jeff Merkley, Oregon**

"I thank John for his years of service to the Bonneville Power Administration and those across the Pacific Northwest who rely on BPA's affordable, reliable power. His leadership has positioned BPA for long-term success, focusing on the unique needs of the many customers they serve. While navigating complex political challenges, John remained steadfast in his commitment to BPA's mission and the responsibility they have to the ratepayers. He will be missed by the many of us who had the pleasure of working with him, and I wish him and his family the best in the next chapter." – **Representative Dan Newhouse, 4th District, Washington**

"Administrator Hairston has helped move BPA toward a more collaborative and solution-oriented approach. Through P2IP, we are advancing coordinated investments in salmon recovery, fish and wildlife protection, and long-term system reliability. For the Colville Confederated Tribes, this work is grounded in our Tribal trust rights, our inherent sovereignty, and our responsibility to future generations. This partnership reflects a shared commitment to durable outcomes for both Tribal communities and the region as a whole." – **Jarred-Michael Erickson, Confederated Tribes of the Colville Reservation**

"The Coeur d'Alene Tribe wishes the best for John as he moves on to his next venture in life. As the first person of color sitting in BPA's administrative seat, John has proven that hard work,

character, and true leadership transcends all barriers as he has led with excellence through challenging times. He has brought solutions to the table while balancing cost, energy, and stewardship. Along the way, he has made courageous decisions that were needed to keep both our energy supply and environmental health moving forward. His leadership will be missed by all of us here in the Northwest. We wish him blessings as he moves on.” – **Chairman Chief Allan, Coeur d’Alene Tribe**

“We will miss John Hairston and wish him the best in his future endeavors. He was particularly important to the Kalispel Tribe and also for the Tribes of the Upper Columbia Basin. He demystified the Administrator's office at BPA. He was the first Administrator to visit the Kalispel Reservation. His easy manner and engaging personality were well suited for the complexities of balancing the needs of the Columbia River Basin, both from the energy and fish and wildlife perspectives. I know I am not alone in expressing these thoughts about John. He guided BPA through challenging times with decisiveness and fairness. He leaves big shoes to fill.” – **Deane Osterman, Executive Director, Kalispell Tribe of Indians**

“His support, advocacy, and positive relationship with the Tribe has resulted in legacy work that will benefit future generations. His leadership and commitment to habitat restoration and the health of our waters, lands, fish, and wildlife has brought us closer to our shared vision and dream of bringing salmon home to our land once again. As one of our elders has said, ‘Bring salmon home and it will heal our people.’ John’s dedication and advocacy has truly helped move us a step closer to that future. We are deeply grateful for all he has done and for the commitment he has shown in advancing this important work.” – **Greg Abrahamson, Chairman, Spokane Tribe of Indians**

“John has provided strong leadership on some of the most critical issues to the region. In a complex and evolving industry, he has a skilled and balanced way of addressing challenges to chart a path forward. Congratulations to John and to EWEB.” – **Scott Corwin, President & CEO, American Public Power Association**

“Administrator Hairston has long recognized the value of always-available hydropower from the Columbia River System, which is the foundation of affordable, reliable electricity across the Pacific Northwest. We appreciate his service to BPA customers, including electric co-ops who keep the lights on across eight states in the region.” – **Jim Matheson, CEO, National Rural Electric Cooperative**

“At a defining moment for BPA, John provided steady, principled leadership marked by integrity, courage, and clarity of purpose. He earned the trust of our members and remained steadfast in his commitment to public power. NWPPA and its members are deeply grateful for his service.” – **Kurt Miller, CEO & Executive Director, Northwest Public Power Association**

“What made John a remarkable Administrator was that he always kept Bonneville’s preference customers front and center in his decision making. That focus on preference customers’ power and transmission needs is the essence of Bonneville’s mission, and I truly appreciate his leadership at the Agency.” – **Zabyn Towner, Executive Director, Northwest Requirements Utilities**

“Throughout his tenure, John approached leadership the way great athletes do—by listening to the team, making the hard calls and focusing on fundamentals. His work to advance transmission expansion will have a lasting impact on the region’s ability to connect new resources, meet growing demand and enhance reliability.” – **Crystal Ball, Executive Director, Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee**

“On behalf of PNGC Power, we sincerely thank Administrator Hairston for his support and collaboration during an extraordinary period of change. Even where our views diverged, he brought courtesy, clear communication, and transparency to the table, making him a valued partner in advancing reliable, affordable power for our members.” – **Jessica Matlock, President and CEO, PNGC Power**

“John Hairston is a tremendous leader, and millions of people across the Northwest have benefited from his decades of public service. John’s commitment to sharing proven facts to advocate for our affordable, reliable hydropower system has made a major difference for families and businesses across the Northwest.” – **Clark Mather, Executive Director, Northwest RiverPartners**

“It has been an honor to work with John Hairston, whose exemplary leadership as Board Chair of WEI provided clear strategic direction and a lasting legacy across the energy industry. His influence, mentorship, and leadership principles will continue to guide our organization for years to come.” – **Kevin Sullivan, President, Western Energy Institute**

“John Hairston’s leadership reinforced strong partnerships across the Pacific Northwest, including close coordination with the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. He consistently supported continued investments in the federal hydropower system, recognizing its role as critical infrastructure for the region’s reliability and resilience. We are grateful for his service and collaboration.” – **Brigadier General William C. Hannan, Jr., Commanding General, Northwestern Division, U.S. Army Corps of Engineers**

“As a federal partner, the Bureau of Reclamation has appreciated John’s steady leadership and collaborative spirit. The Federal Columbia River Power System is stronger for his dedication and service. We wish him continued success in his next chapter.” – **Roland Springer, Acting Regional Director, Columbia-Pacific Northwest Region, Bureau of Reclamation**

“John Hairston’s decades of leadership at the Bonneville Power Administration have strengthened the foundation of public power across the Northwest. His support for Energy Northwest’s mission, along with his commitment to operational excellence and regional collaboration, has been instrumental in advancing reliable, affordable and carbon free power for the communities we serve.” – **Bob Schuetz, CEO, Energy Northwest**

***About BPA** The Bonneville Power Administration is a federal non-profit power marketing administration that delivers reliable, low-cost hydropower produced in the Columbia River Basin as well as the output from the region’s only nuclear plant to communities across the Northwest. BPA also owns and operates more than 15,000 circuit miles of high-voltage transmission lines. More information about these and other activities is available on our [Media Relations](#) page.*

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