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BPA SPRINT Program and the Need for Hourly Power Forecasts

BPA's Speed to Power Request for Interim Non-Firm Transmission (SPRINT) plan is intended to accelerate grid access for large loads by offering interim non-firm transmission service under Bonneville's broader Grid Access Transformation and RAPID initiatives. For SPRINT to be commercially useful, however, participating customers will need credible hour-by-hour information showing how much power is likely to be available during each hour of each day across the year. Annual or monthly averages are not sufficient for operating, procurement, curtailment, and investment decisions because non-firm service exposure is inherently hourly. Therefore, BPA should provide customers with historic 8760 data, including expected available surplus energy, timing and duration of shortfalls, seasonal variability, and any limitations on the data in the data base. Obsidian could help Bonneville prepare the data set.

Obsidian Renewables has performed 8760 analyses for each of the past 10 years of BPA operations using publicly available hourly generation and consumption data to illustrate the type of information customers will want to participate in SPRINT and RAPID. As an example, the report generated for BPA's 2016 operations shows an average hourly surplus of 6,758 MW, with 8,783 surplus hours—2016 was a leap year— zero deficit hours, and 8,584 hours, in which surplus exceeded 3,000 MW. In comparison, the 2025 analysis shows that BPA average hourly surplus was 2,419 MW, with 8,576 surplus hours, 181 deficit hours, and only 2,505 hours in which surplus exceeded 3,000 MW. (Only 539 hours during the year when the surplus exceeded 5,000 MW.) These results demonstrate that both the magnitude and frequency of surplus conditions can change materially from year to year and reinforce the need for BPA to provide detailed historic information to help customers prepare forward-looking hourly forecasts, rather than relying on static monthly or annual averages. Ultimately, SPRINT's promise of faster grid access will only translate into real projects if customers can see when, and how much, power may be available.

This is, of course, only one piece of the data analysis. Having a surplus of power does not automatically mean that the surplus can be reliably delivered to an identified point of interconnection.

Obsidian understands that Energy GPS (Tim Belden)'s data and charts published in a recent Opinion article in Clearing Up presented Bonneville surplus energy sales data from 2022-2025. The data is reported in dollars, not MW hours. It shows that a significant amount of Bonneville surplus energy was sold over those three years to Portland General Electric, Puget Sound Energy, PacifiCorp, and Umatilla Electric Coop, much of it on a term contract basis. It seems very unlikely that this power was consumed outside of the region, and a SPRINT strategy that substantially absorbs the currently available surplus would seem to have a significant impact on other load serving entities in the Pacific Northwest.

We don't judge whether that impact is good or not, but to emphasize the point that a reliable data base on hourly surplus energy needs to be developed and shared with stakeholders.

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