

MINUTES
SENATE RESOURCES & ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE

DATE: Monday, April 19, 2021

TIME: 1:30 P.M.

PLACE: Room WW55

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Vick, Senators Bair, Heider, Patrick, Guthrie, Burtenshaw, and Rabe

ABSENT/ EXCUSED: Vice Chairman Johnson and Senator Stennett

NOTE: The sign-in sheet, testimonies and other related materials will be retained with the minutes in the committee's office until the end of the session and will then be located on file with the minutes in the Legislative Services Library.

CONVENED: **Chairman Vick** called the meeting of the Senate Resources and Environment Committee (Committee) to order at 1:35 p.m.

PRESENTATION: **Bonneville Power Administration Update. John Williams**, Idaho/Nevada Constituent Account Executive for Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), provided an update on the role BPA serves in the Pacific Northwest.

Mr. Williams said although BPA is part of the U.S. Department of Energy, it is self-funded and covers its costs by selling its products and services. BPA operates a high-voltage transmission grid comprising more than 15,000 miles of lines and associated substations in Washington, Oregon, Idaho, and Montana. The power is produced at 31 federal dams operated by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) and Bureau of Reclamation, and one nuclear plant in the Northwest.

Mr. Williams stated the Northwest Power Act of 1980 has a broad reach over BPA and Pacific Northwest energy issues. BPA and its electric utility customers have saved more than 2,150 aMW electricity through energy efficiency. The Power Act reconfirmed BPA's existing mandates such as cost-based power rates, and regional and public preference, he said.

Mr. Williams said Congress authorized the USACE and the Bureau of Reclamation to construct, operate, and maintain the 14 federal dams along the Columbia River system as one interconnected system to meet multiple purposes. They include flood risk management, navigation, hydropower generation, irrigation, fish and wildlife conservation, recreation, and providing municipal and industrial water supply. **Mr. Williams** said BPA is not interested in participating in any efforts in which dam breaching is the ultimate goal. He said BPA needs to focus on balanced solutions that preserve the value of the hydropower system while making advancements for fish and wildlife.

Mr. Williams said, as the region's energy policies reshape the electric system and reduce the reliance on fossil fuels and carbon, BPA will have to keep a close eye on resource adequacy. Also, any discussion of breaching or removing any hydro facilities will need to be grounded in honest information about the value they provide to BPA customers and the region, and how it fits into the clean energy future.

Mr. Williams reviewed winter power outages in Texas and the Northwest, citing the differences. In Texas, the outages were largely caused by a lack of insulation and weatherization of equipment. In the Northwest, the issue was fallen trees and ice that brought down power lines and other distribution equipment.

The characteristics of hydropower also play a critical role in BPA's grid reliability, **Mr. Williams** said. The diversity of the hydro system, with major generation on the upper Columbia, lower Columbia, and lower Snake rivers, gives operators options to solve the unique challenges each event can bring. In the recent storm, technical issues at a Columbia River dam required BPA to lean on the lower Snake River dams for generation.

In conclusion, **Mr. Williams** said the Columbia River is known as the "crown jewel" of the Pacific Northwest. The Columbia River is undeniably among the region's greatest assets – supplying low-cost clean hydropower; making deserts bloom, thanks to irrigation; and providing navigation, recreation, and a home for many species of fish and wildlife.

The BPA Administration is proud to be a steward of this great resource and their mission is to serve the people and the environment of the Pacific Northwest. BPA's responsibilities include promoting energy efficiency, facilitating development of renewable power, protecting fish and wildlife affected by hydro development, honoring treaty obligations to tribes, and promoting a reliable energy future through collaboration and partnerships.

DISCUSSION: **Senator Patrick** inquired as to what stops other regions from using this reasonably priced power. **Mr. Williams** replied the Northwest Power Preference Act basically says that only public customers in the Pacific Northwest can acquire and enter into a long-term contract with BPA.

Senator Burtenshaw asked about the reliability of solar and wind power. **Mr. Williams** said when solar and wind power are generating, they are great, but during very hot and very dry events, they are not that reliable.

Senator Burtenshaw asked if Congressman Mike Simpson had been in communication with BPA concerning their projections and ideas to breach the dams. **Mr. Williams** said Congressman Simpson started talks two years ago when some public interest groups indicated that BPA was in financial trouble, the salmon were in trouble, and something needed to be done.

In closing, **Mr. Williams** said he has been with BPA almost 35 years, and has been a point of contact for 26 years and the dam breaching conversation probably started before his tenure began.

ADJOURNED: There being no further business at this time, **Chairman Vick** adjourned the meeting at 2:20 p.m.

Senator Vick
Chair

Juanita Budell
Secretary