

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
January 19, 2024

Contact: Scott Simms
Phone: (503) 595-9775
Email: ssimms@ppcpdx.org

Northwest hydro comes to the rescue (again) during region’s record cold In winter or summer extremes, hydro continues to be our region’s top performer

PORTLAND, OR – As wind, snow, ice, freezing rain, and record-breaking temperatures have gripped the Pacific Northwest over the past week – and as consumers ratcheted up their thermostats and drove new records in peak electricity demand – Pacific Northwest hydroelectric projects came to the rescue once again, reliably serving communities during life-threatening winter conditions and continuing its legacy as our region’s predominant reliable and carbon free source of electricity.

A series of storm systems that brought record cold and all types of winter weather descended on Northwest communities January 9 and still firmly holds its icy grip on many communities more than a week later. While hundreds of thousands of homes and businesses were experiencing weather-driven power outages across the region at one point or another, those homes and businesses that did have the power flowing to them were largely supported by the region’s fleet of renewable hydroelectric projects, several sources of data show.

- **Hydro made up more than 70 percent of our region’s supply while the cold took hold**

“Yet again, Northwest hydropower projects dependably carried a majority of the region’s electricity demands through these cold weather extremes, and continued to do so as the region’s demands eclipsed peak records of utilities in many parts of the region,” said Scott Simms, CEO & Executive Director of the Public Power Council (PPC), which represents the non-profit, community-owned electric utilities in the Northwest served in whole or in part by power marketed by the federal Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). “Over the past few days, federal and non-federal hydropower made up about 70 percent of the electricity being consumed across the Northwest.”

- **10,000+ megawatts of federal hydropower/1,165 megawatts of contracted nuclear power**

PPC’s staff experts determined federal Lower Snake River Dams (LSRDs) reliably produced 1,000 megawatts (MW) or more of electricity on average during the highest electric demand hours throughout the past week of cold weather events. These LSRDs, in conjunction with the other federally-operated Columbia River Basin hydro units, together produced more than 10,000 total

MW of output – yet again serving as the backbone of the Pacific Northwest electricity supply. Meanwhile, the region’s sole nuclear power plant and part of the BPA’s power supply portfolio – the Columbia Generating Station – also was reliably producing 1,165 MW of emission-free electricity for the duration of the cold period. (For purposes of basic comparison, 1,000 MW of reliable baseload power, such as from hydro and nuclear projects, can power about one million households.)

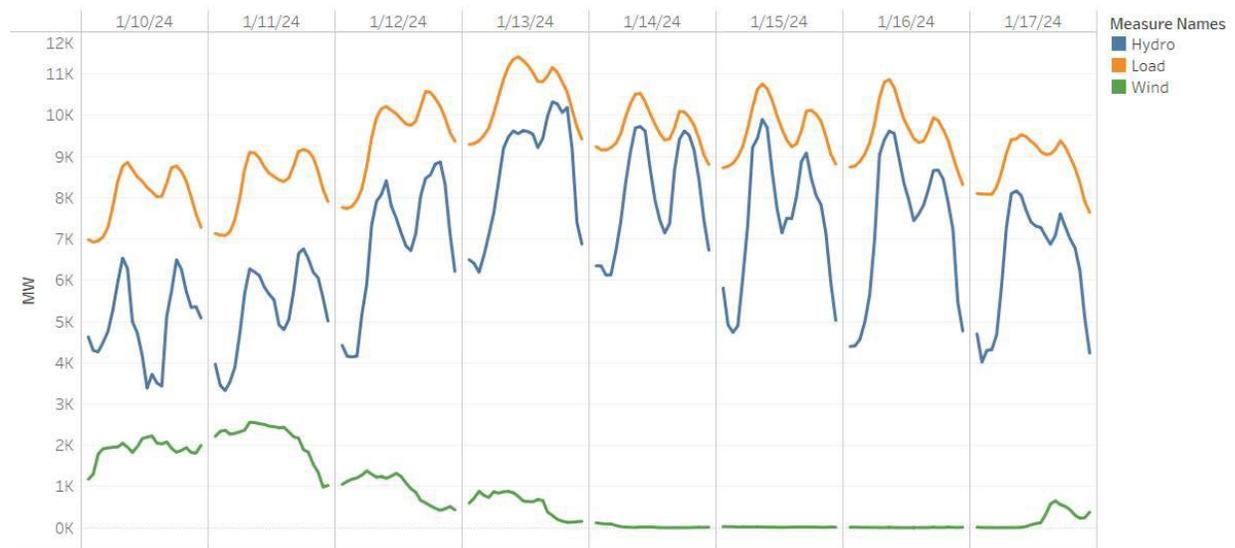
- **Natural gas storage problems and low wind power production among the challenges**

As the cold enveloped the region, a few challenges also emerged. First, a major natural gas storage facility in Washington experienced equipment failures, which in turn threatened supplies to Northwest natural gas-fired power plants and raised questions about their ability to fully operate for a period during the storms. Second, the region’s wind power facilities were not especially helpful for the week. While wind showed up with 1,000 MW of production on January 13, these wind power projects tapered off to nearly zero production for the remainder of the week.

“Utilities across the region and the country are increasingly being tested by weather extremes of all types in both winter and summer months, all the while consumers are using more electricity than ever before,” Simms said. “Here in the Northwest, this recent, long-duration cold weather event is yet another strong reminder of just how essential our hydropower resources are.”

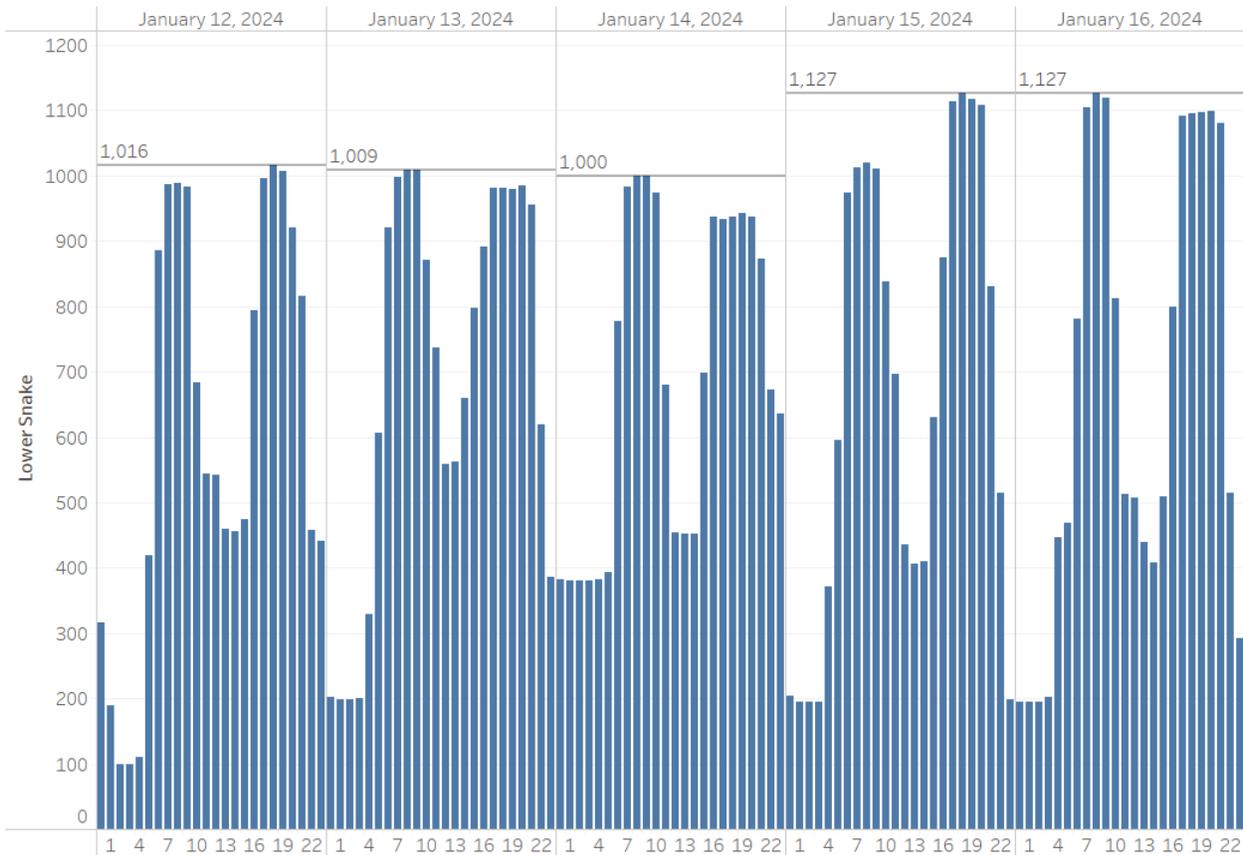
- **Generation Graphics**

The following graphic shows load, hydropower, and wind generation in the BPA balancing authority during the cold snap. Hydro was crucial in meeting regional loads, including dramatic ramping to meet historic peak demand levels.



The Lower Snake River Dams in particular played a major role, consistently ramping up to 1,000 MW or more of generation twice each day to meet morning and evening peak demand. This scale of carbon-free, dispatchable generation cannot be replaced with existing technology. This event is yet another example of the value of the Lower Snake River Dams to the region, not only economically but in reliably meeting peak demand on the wholesale grid to ensure human health and safety in extreme weather conditions.¹

Lower Snake Generation



###

About the Public Power Council

The Public Power Council, established in 1966, is an association that represents over 100 consumer-owned electric utilities in the Pacific Northwest. PPC’s mission is to preserve and protect the benefits of the Federal Columbia River Power System for consumer-owned utilities, and is a forum to identify, discuss and build consensus around energy and utility issues. For more information, please visit us on the web at www.ppcpdx.org.

¹ For additional information, see “Impacts of Lower Snake River Dam Removal and Increased Spill Requirements on Cost, Carbon, Emissions and Reliability: Final Report” from EnergyGPS Consulting: <https://www.ppcpdx.org/wp-content/uploads/Cost-Carbon-and-Reliability-Impacts-of-Increased-Spill-Requirements-and-LSRD-Removal.pdf>