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Forecast looks at Northwest supply, demand

PORTLAND, Ore. – Northwest electric utilities have adequate supply of electricity now, but the demand for power could outstrip the region’s generating capacity during peak hours within the next several years. And while winter peak need for power remains the primary focal point with summer peak more balanced, some utility power planners say summer peaks are a concern as more customers use cooling during the hotter months, according to an annual report published today by the Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee.

The PNUCC *Northwest Regional Forecast* serves as an annual barometer for the region’s power system and provides a snapshot of utilities’ demand for electricity, generation available to meet that demand, and the need for power to provide customers with safe, reliable and affordable electricity.

The *2017 Forecast* highlights many of the trends outlined in previous years’ reports. Long-term growth in demand remains modest, between 0.8 and 1 percent for the Northwest overall. Although looking at individual utilities finds a wide variation in projected load growth. Some are losing load, while others expect significant growth – especially if they are smaller and foresee a potential for one or more large new industrial customers.

The demand for power is expected to approach and then surpass the available supply of electricity in the next several years during peak times. The *Forecast* highlights a potential gap of about 3,200 megawatts during peak winter hours by 2021, the result of growing demand, a 15 percent planning margin, and upcoming resource retirements. Other legacy Northwest power plants are expected to go offline in ensuing years, adding to the gap. Looking ahead, except for one natural gas-fired power plant added to the Northwest energy grid, nearly all recently and about-to-be added generating capacity in the region is renewable wind and solar energy.

“Peak demand is a major focus of most utilities and is reflected as something to watch in the next few years,” said PNUCC Executive Director Shauna McReynolds. “As some of these legacy coal-fired plants begin to go offline, the region will have to determine how to meet a growing need for flexible, dispatchable generation into the future, whether through new generating resources, or continued investments in energy efficiency and other demand-side management programs.”

The full report is available at www.pnucc.org/system-planning/northwest-regional-forecast

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PNUCC (Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee) is a utility trade association providing a forum for investigating and working through a range of issues affecting electricity providers and large industrial electricity users in the Northwest.