



Hydro System Operators Help Avert Floods

June 2011

As we watch news about flooding in other parts of the country this spring, we are reminded of how fortunate we are in the Northwest that we haven't experienced a major flood disaster this year.

But it was close.

Because of this year's massive amounts of water pouring into our local rivers from heavy rain and snowfall, we were seeing water levels at near record-breaking highs that recently were threatening Portland, Vancouver, and other lowland areas.

So you might wonder just how we avoided a major flooding crisis.

In large part, dam operators on the Columbia and Snake rivers hydro system worked masterfully to capture floodwaters and store them in reservoirs. By managing water levels this way, they were able to control the amount of water rushing into the river below, and in the process, protect lives, public health and property.

In fact, dam operators' estimates indicate that if we didn't have the sophisticated and well-coordinated series of dams and reservoirs in place, we would have seen waters within a few feet as high as they were during the floods of 1996.

That's why we can all take a moment to be thankful that we here in the Northwest have such a valuable resource with our system of hydro projects and dams and dedicated people running it.

Not only are dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers the foundation of the Northwest's clean and renewable electric power system, they also play this crucial role in flood risk management, as well as for river transportation of goods, irrigation and recreation.

It wasn't always this way. Back in 1948, Columbia River flooding destroyed Vanport, Oregon and impacted cities throughout Oregon and Washington. Thirty two lives were lost. The flood

forced 50,000 people to be evacuated and caused an estimated \$100 million in damages. This prompted the development of a multiple-use reservoir storage system and a coordinated plan with Canada.

We all saw the system really put to the test in February 1996, when heavy rains and melting snowpack due to mild temperatures created some of the highest water flows in over 30 years. Heroic dam operations were able to keep the river level nearly two feet lower than it would have been otherwise, preventing an estimated \$3.2 billion in damages.

This year water levels were about at their forecasted peak, but thanks to the coordinated efforts of the operators of the dams on our rivers, major problems are being prevented.

Just imagine where we'd be at today if we didn't have this incredible resource protecting us?

Did you know...

The Pacific Northwest has one of the largest hydroelectric systems in the world. There are 55 major hydroelectric projects located on the Columbia River and its tributaries. The dams keep our carbon emissions of "footprint" half of the rest of the nation and create a river highway that transports over \$19 billion in goods by barge. New technologies at the dams keep salmon safe on their journey to the ocean. Thirty are federal dams owned and operated by the Corps of Engineers or Bureau of Reclamation. Twenty-five are non-federal owned by various public and private utilities.

The Columbia River is the fourth largest river in North America. It originates in British Columbia and flows 1,214 miles to the Pacific Ocean. The Snake River, the largest and longest tributary of the Columbia River, starts in Wyoming and empties into Columbia at the Tri-Cities.

Check out the **Plan Today Power Tomorrow** regional energy project
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