

Response to Bright Future

Bright Future was released in March of this year by the Northwest Energy Coalition. It calls for the region to set much more ambitious energy efficiency and renewable energy goals, and relies on a wide range of new, unproven technologies. Its premise of reducing carbon emissions while meeting 4,000 megawatts of new Northwest load by 2020 through energy efficiency and renewable development – all while phasing out coal-fired generation and removing the lower Snake River dams, is highly unrealistic.

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council will release a draft of the 6th Power Plan very soon, BPA is engaged in resource planning, and regional utilities are refining their plans for the future. In those processes, we are fully prepared to explore a wide range of proposals, including some of the ideas within Bright Future. However, many of the recommendations in Bright Future are based on unrealistic assumptions, and fail to acknowledge some fundamental facts about the Northwest power system.

Our job is to keep the lights on – all the time

- Northwest energy needs are growing. We need resources we can count on.
- The Northwest Power Act mandate is to ensure “an adequate, efficient, economical and reliable power supply.” We do not believe this plan meets that test.
- Transmission availability and cost are not adequately considered in Bright Future.
- The report relies on energy sources and technologies at scales that do not currently exist.
- It’s good to be optimistic, but as energy providers, we must be *realistic* optimists.

The Snake River dams are a vital part of our clean energy future

- They provide over 1,000 average annual megawatts of clean, renewable energy and over 3,000 megawatts of capacity. They are especially valuable at times of peak demand.
- The dams play a critical role in backing up the region’s 3,000 megawatts of wind.
- Breaching the dams is counter-productive to reducing carbon emissions. More than four million tons of CO₂ would be added to the atmosphere if fossil fuels replaced these dams. There should be more hydro generation, not less, in the region.

Conservation and renewable energy top our list too

- The Northwest leads the nation in conservation and wind energy production and consistently exceed the targets.
- As important as they are, these are not base-load resources that we can rely on to meet peak loads and reliability standards.
- We will need a firm generation base that can be counted on, because wind is a highly variable resource. It needs to be backed up, and delivered to the grid. Energy efficiency reduces overall demand, but cannot be ramped up to meet peak customer loads.

The Northwest already has the smallest carbon footprint in the country

- Thanks primarily to the Columbia and Snake hydropower system we are well ahead of other regions.
- The region is adding more renewables to our resource base all the time, and addressing the challenges of integrating them into our system. Bright Future underestimates the magnitude of this challenge.

The power grid is the key to system reliability

- Reliability is essential, so any power plan must be far more than just a plan for meeting average energy needs.
- Integrating new resources and system upgrades will require significant investment in our transmission infrastructure, not considered in Bright Future.
- Public health, safety, and the economy depend on a reliable power system.

Costs matter – Our economy and quality of life are on the line

- New resources, regardless of technology, cost more than our existing resources.
- We must meet our energy and environmental goals at the lowest possible cost to consumers. Families and businesses depend on it.
- The costs of replacing the Snake River dams' capability are grossly underestimated in Bright Future.
- Bright Future estimates of the amount and costs of renewable energy are goals, and are not reliable.
- Transmission needs and costs are not adequately addressed.
- Underestimating the true cost of our energy future is a disservice to the public.

For a more comprehensive analysis of Bright Future, including its potential cost, please go to the Response to NW Energy Coalition's "Bright Future" document, found at ppcpdx.org. The analysis and these overview comments are brought to you by the following utilities and trade groups: PNUCC, PPC, PNGC Power, NRU, NWPPA, and NW RiverPartners who worked collaboratively on this project.

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