

March 25, 2025

Position on Bills at 2025 Session of Oregon Legislature:

SB 1178: Support



The Consolidated Oregon Indivisible Network (COIN) is a coalition of over 50 local Indivisible groups throughout Oregon that cooperate and amplify their joint efforts to advance important federal and state legislation and engage with elected officials to promote causes for the benefit of all Oregonians.

COIN supports SB 1178, which would change the existing requirement that 10 percent of the electricity sold in this state by each electric company with 25,000 or more retail electricity consumers to be generated by small-scale renewable energy facilities or certain biomass facilities. The change is that, to be counted, the facilities must be owned by a person that is not an electric company. The bill also requires electric companies to make best efforts to continually increase the annual percentage of electricity sold that is generated by small-scale renewable energy facilities until 2030.

This bill also clarifies the language of the existing statute, which literally does not require that any utility meet the 10% requirement. The existing language states:

(2) For purposes related to the findings in subsection (1) of this section, by the year 2030, at least 10 percent of the aggregate electrical capacity of all electric companies that make sales of electricity to 25,000 or more retail electricity consumers in this state must be composed of electricity generated by one or both of the following sources:

That aggregate requirement in existing law would appear to be unenforceable against any electric company, because there is no requirement applicable to any particular electric company. This bill changes the aggregate 10% requirement to a 10% requirement applicable to each electric company.

The bill also removes the “capacity” loophole in existing law, which applies the 10% requirement to “aggregate electrical capacity” The bill changes the measurement to 10% of “electricity sold in this state by each electric company.” Renewable and biomass power projects can have “capacity” much higher than actual electrical output (energy). The proper measurement of progress in implementing these resources is the energy they produce, not their nameplate “capacity.”

As for the contention of the utilities that renewable projects need extensive backup, the Pacific Northwest is adding large quantities of solar and wind generating resources. Considered individually, they are not baseload. Collectively, they are quite reliable. They are dispersed over wide areas, from Canada in the north to the border of Mexico in the south. When the wind is not blowing in the Columbia Gorge, it may well be blowing in the San Gorgonio Pass and elsewhere. Pacific Northwest utilities have access to California's solar and wind generation due to the Pacific Intertie transmission system. One of my projects while staff director of a subcommittee of the U.S. Congress in the 1980s was to expand that system with a third high capacity AC transmission line from the Oregon border into central California. It was built.



Further, the Pacific Northwest can accept huge quantities of intermittent solar and wind generation due to its enormous storage batteries--the huge reservoirs behind dams on the Peace River in Canada and the Columbia River in Canada and the United States. These are among the largest reservoirs and largest hydroelectric generators in the world. They are dispatchable and can fill in energy, if solar and wind are underperforming. If existing hydroelectric output were insufficient, existing facilities could be supplemented with pumped storage systems to pump water uphill back into the reservoir when solar and wind power are plentiful.

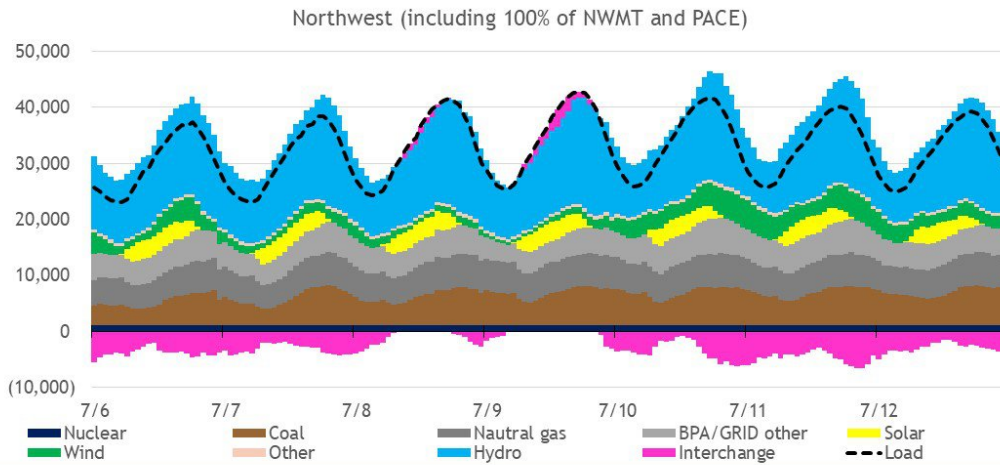
When solar and wind are underperforming, the hydropower system fills in the gap. The Northwest Power Planning Council (NPPC) charts below show PNW loads and resources (during the July 2024 heatwave and during the January 2024 winter storm). Notice how the hydroelectric system balances the loads and resources by fluctuating widely during each day. Also notice that in summer the PNW is exporting large amounts of power to California, while in winter the PNW is importing large amounts of power.

Further, solar and wind facilities can be backed up with chemical batteries, although that is not necessary in the Pacific Northwest due to the large hydroelectric reservoirs. Even when the cost of batteries is included, new wind generation is no more expensive than new gas-fired generation, according to Lazard, the international financial advisor and asset management firm (see table below).

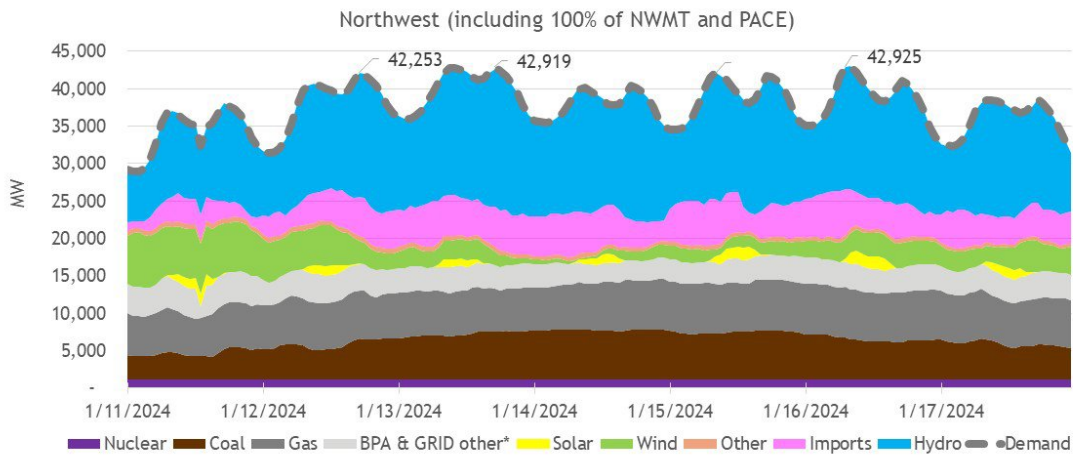
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Northwest resource usage (larger area than NWPCC)



Resource stack (approximate)



*"BPA & GRID other" is likely mostly natural gas plants