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ColumbiaGrid Provides Regional Transmission Planning and Expansion Services

ColumbiaGrid, a non-profit regional transmission entity, announced today that all of the Planning Parties have signed ColumbiaGrid's agreement to coordinate transmission planning and expansion in the Pacific Northwest. "I am happy to report that ColumbiaGrid is now providing independent, single-system transmission planning and expansion services," said Jon Kaake, the President and CEO of ColumbiaGrid. The Planning Parties include Avista Corporation, Bonneville Power Administration, Chelan County PUD, Grant County PUD, Puget Sound Energy, Seattle City Light, Snohomish County PUD, and Tacoma Power.

Kaake's announcement follows the April 3, 2007 acceptance of ColumbiaGrid's Planning and Expansion Functional Agreement by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission. According to the Commission's own press release,

The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission today accepted ColumbiaGrid's proposal to coordinate transmission planning and expansion in the Pacific Northwest.

"The United States does not have a national transmission grid, we have a series of regional grids. We need a major increase in transmission investment to assure reliability and support competitive power markets. This order should strengthen regional grid planning in the Pacific Northwest, an area that has a long history of regional cooperation," Chairman Joseph T. Kelliher said.

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The Commission stated its support of the members' effort to coordinate planning on a regional basis and to implement a single planning process for both public utility and non-public utility transmission providers.

“The increased coordination and transparency contemplated by the Planning Agreement have the potential to improve reliability, operational efficiency, and expansion of the transmission grid,” the Commission said.

Under the Planning Agreement, ColumbiaGrid will provide a number of services, including performing annual assessments of members’ transmission system in accordance with Western Electric Coordinating Council and the North American Electric Reliability Corporation requirements, drafting and approving Biennial Transmission Plans, convening study teams to assess requests for transmission service affecting multiple transmission systems, and coordinating planning of multi-system projects.

The Commission rejected claims that the Planning Agreement would allow public utilities to opt-out of its open access transmission tariff (OATT) obligations. “Nothing in the Planning Agreement changes the requirements of the *pro forma* OATT regarding reservation or processing of transmission service requests, participation in the interconnection study process, the Commission’s interconnection rules, nor eliminates a customer’s right to transmission or interconnection service,” the Commission said.

The Commission noted that ColumbiaGrid will not operate as a Regional Transmission Organization nor will it own, operate or control jurisdictional facilities.

The Commission also noted that issues related to the coordination of planning efforts among ColumbiaGrid members, Northern Tier Transmission Group participants and others will be raised in the staff technical conference required by Order No. 890 in the context of the regional planning requirements.

The agreement is effective April 4, 2007.

ColumbiaGrid was formed in March 2006 to improve the operational efficiency, reliability, and planned expansion of the transmission grid. Its members include Avista Corporation, Bonneville Power Administration, Chelan County PUD, Grant County PUD, Puget Sound Energy, Seattle City Light, and Tacoma Power. ColumbiaGrid filed the Planning and Expansion Functional Agreement with the Commission on behalf of public utilities Avista Corporation and Puget Sound Energy.