

California drought expected to raise energy costs in Northwest

By **DON JENKINS**
Capital Press

SALEM — The wholesale price of electricity will rise in the Northwest this summer as drought-stricken California buys energy from neighboring states to offset a nearly 50% reduction in hydropower, the U.S. Energy Information Administration projects in a new report.

California can cover about half of the 6 million megawatt-hour cut in hydropower by ramping up natural gas plants but will need to purchase electricity on Western power markets to make up the rest, according to the EIA.

California's demand for electricity will in turn put pressure on power supplies elsewhere. The EIA estimates the Golden State's drought will push up peak-demand wholesale prices by 5% in Idaho, Oregon and Washington to an average of \$59 per megawatt-hour.

"California has a diverse electricity fuel mix and is highly interconnected with the regional elec-



Capital Press, File

The U.S. Energy Information Administration projects a sharp decline this summer in the amount of electricity generated at Shasta Dam and other hydropower facilities in California.

tric grid, but our study shows that a significant decrease in hydro-power generation this summer could lead to higher electricity prices, among other effects," EIA

Administrator Joe DeCarolis said in a statement.

The EIA's report supplemented a forecast on retail electricity prices. Assuming a cooler summer

than last year, the EIA projected customers will pay about 4% more in the West than in 2021, though rates will vary widely by utility.

Wholesale prices are more volatile than retail rates, reflecting the ever-changing demand for and supply of energy, especially on the hottest summer days, according to the EIA.

Drought blankets California. About 60% of the state is in an "extreme" or "exceptional" drought, the two worst categories, according to the U.S. Drought Monitor.

California's snowpack was 54% of normal on April 1. With little snow to melt into already lower reservoirs, the state will generate 48% less hydroelectricity between June 1 and Sept. 30 than in a non-drought year, the EIA forecasts.

Normally, hydroelectricity meets about 15% of the state's summer energy needs. This year, it will provide 8%, the EIA projects.

To partially fill the gap, California will use more electricity

generated by natural gas. The EIA estimated carbon emissions from the energy sector will increase by 978,000 tons, or 6%.

Even then, the state will need to import another 2.9 million megawatts-hours. California already buys one-third of its power from out-of-state sources.

The EIA projected California will generate about as much hydropower this summer as it did in 2015, another poor water year.

The state, however, has less ability than it did seven years ago to ramp up during peak demands to offset the lost of hydropower, according to the EIA.

California has added solar power and battery storage since 2015, but 58% of the state's natural gas-fired power capacity was shut down.

The EIA said droughts in Arizona and Nevada also could push up the cost of electricity. Prices could be held down if retail customers adjust and use less electricity during peak times, according to the report.

Oregon State research finds ways to slow wildfires in critical sagebrush rangelands

By **ALEX BAUMHARDT**
Oregon Capital Chronicle

CORVALLIS — Nearly 45% of historic sagebrush ecosystems in the Great Basin — 200,000 square miles of California, Idaho, Nevada, Oregon, Utah and Wyoming — have been lost to invasive plants, grasses and wildfires, according to the federal Bureau of Land Management.

To slow the frequency and severity of such fires, scientists at Oregon State University undertook a 10-year study of the long-term effects of popular fire prevention and mitigation methods to see which ones were successful over many years, and which only had short-term impacts.

In a new report published in the scientific journal *Ecosphere*, those scientists concluded that

thinning vegetation across the sagebrush landscape was the most effective, long-term method for mitigating wildfire spread and severity. Other methods, such as prescribed burns and the use of herbicides to kill non-native grasses and invasive tree and shrub species were only effective in the short term.

The OSU scientists teamed up with specialists from Great Basin states, including Eva Strand, a professor of rangeland ecology and management at the University of Idaho. She said studying this over a decade gave scientists a broader perspective.

"A treatment might be followed for a couple years, but there's no looking at the long-term response," she said. "With this, we could see for how long these methods are effective in

mitigating wildfire."

The scientists didn't ignite fires but used computer models to study how each treatment — thinning, herbicides or prescribed burns — could impact the speed of a fire's spread and the height of the flames. In their study, the scientists found that herbicides left behind dead vegetation that could create hotter fires with higher flames. They found prescribed burns were effective short term, but long term, invasive grasses quickly returned and reestablished themselves, creating a greater fire risk.

Strand said their findings will also impact firefighter safety in a wildfire.

"We were able to model how they actually impact fire behavior," she said. "We can tell which methods create shorter flame lengths,



East Oregonian, File

In a new report published in the scientific journal Ecosphere, scientists concluded that thinning vegetation across the sagebrush landscape was the most effective, long-term method for mitigating wildfire spread and severity.

so firefighters can approach it in a different way."

Oversight by Bureau of Land Management

The bulk of sagebrush ecosystems in the Great Basin are overseen

by the federal Bureau of Land Management, which is currently involved in a project to create fuel breaks along 435 miles of roads throughout sagebrush habitat along the Oregon-Idaho-Nevada border

in the Great Basin. These are areas where BLM is reducing vegetation like grasses and trees in order to reduce the probability of a fire spreading and growing in height.

The scientists hope their research can inform the methods the agency adopts to create those fuel breaks.

"We need to be implementing strategies that preserve our good condition sagebrush steppe areas and get ahead of this invasive grass and fire feedback cycle that we're in," said Lisa Ellsworth, lead author of the study and a range ecologist at OSU, in a statement.

Ellsworth said that sagebrush ecosystems are among the most fragile ecosystems on the North American continent.

"I feel the pressure of time in these systems," she wrote.

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CROSSWORD PUZZLER

- ACROSS**
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 - Kind of meditation
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 - New Zealand parrot
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 - Big fuss
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 - Jack —
 - Trim a doily
 - Faucet problem
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 - Kyoto sash
 - San Francisco hill
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