

Northwest Utilities Agencies Looking To Steam, Atomic Power for Future Use

Editor's note: This is the last of three articles describing the requirements for new electric power generation in the Pacific Northwest and what the region utilities have planned to meet these needs.

By HENRY G. CURTIS
United Press Correspondent
Seattle—(U.P.)—The Pacific Northwest's utilities agencies are looking to steam generation and even atomic power for future electricity in the face of "obstacles" to hydroelectric development.

The Washington State Power Commission expects to produce 1,200,000 kilowatts of electricity in steam plants by 1964. Significant power for atomic reactors apparently is for the more-distant future of the region, but a serious study of atomic possibilities is underway.

In most cases, hydroelectric power is cheaper than steam power and far less expensive than atomic power now possible. But power dams take from three to eight years for construction; and not nearly enough hydro projects are being started to provide sufficient power for the immediate future.

Factors in the way of dam construction include fisheries problems, objections to reservoir

flooding, the question of compensation for sites. These obstacles to hydro development are serious enough to turn the hopes of the region's power agencies to steam generation for power.

The Washington Power Commission did not get from the 1955 Legislature the \$275,000 it requested for initial work on steam power plants. But the agency plans to carry on its work with operating funds and through issuance of revenue bonds.

The commission's "most conservative" estimate is that 1,200,000 kilowatts of steam power will be needed by 1964. This power would be augmented by some secondary hydro power which would be too unreliable to be sold without being firmed up by the steam.

"Design of steam plants should be undertaken at once," says a report by J. Frank Ward, managing director of the State Power Commission. The planned program is for a start of construction in 1956, and these would be producing power in 1958. By 1964, eight units would be com-

pleted, turning out the required 1,200,000 kilowatts.

The steam units would be built by the power commission. Their output would be sold to and distributed by the Northwest's utilities.

Plans call for steam plants which could burn coal, oil or gas, whichever would be most available at any time. Washington's coal industry looks to the power plants as a market for the product of its mines.

Experimental atomic plants are being developed in the East and the Washington Power Commission follows closely any atomic developments in the generation of power. Ward says, however, that atomic power probably will not replace conventional power in the foreseeable future.

Power producers and scientists estimate the cost of an atomic reactor at twice that of conventional boilers for the same power output. Operating costs, too, would be higher for the atomic reactors, which would produce power at a cost of \$5.60 per kilowatt per year. A steam plant can do the same job for \$3.60.

More A-Power in Future

Atomic power costs can be expected to decrease as technology improves, and atomic reactors for production of electricity will become common in later years.

Speakers at the American Power conference at Chicago this spring estimated that only two per cent of the new power plants built by 1960 will be atomic, but by 1970 the atomic reactors will account for 14 per cent of the annual increase in power production. And, said the speakers, 65 per cent of the power plants built in the year 1980 should be nuclear.

The Pacific Northwest probably will need its share of these atomic power plants. If the area grows in population and industry as expected, the Northwest will need power from wherever it can be obtained.

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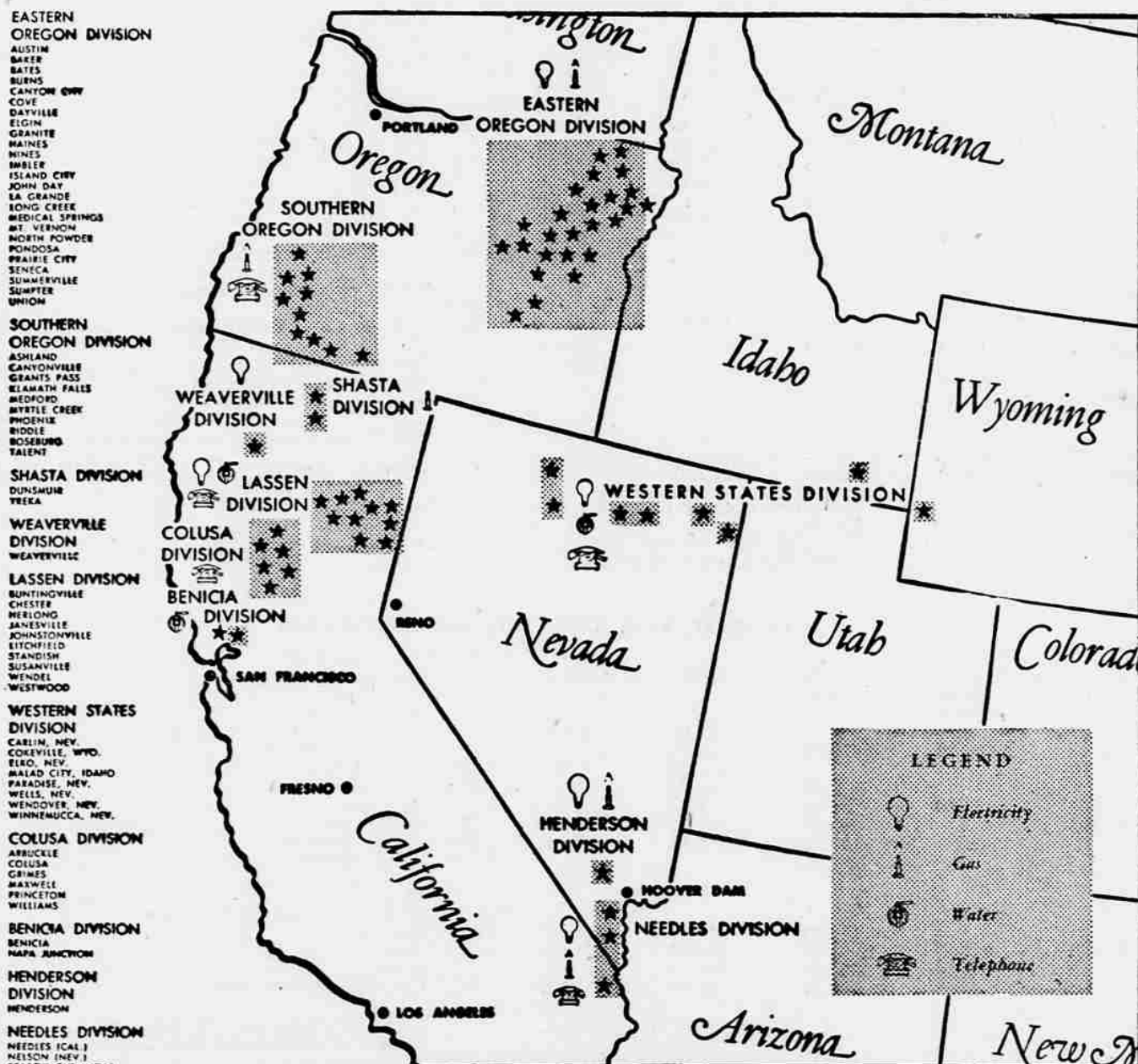


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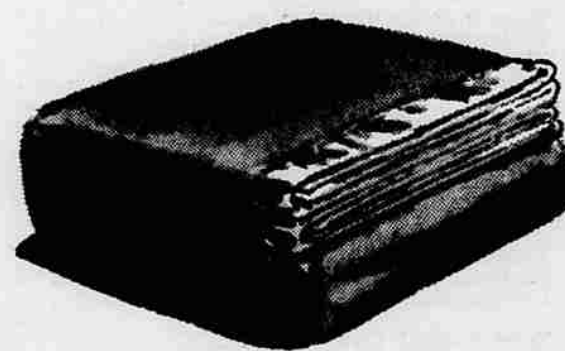
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