

Bogged-Down Negotiations by Power Firms Being Investigated

By A. ROBERT SMITH
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Washington—An investigation of the bogged down negotiations between Idaho Power Co. and Bonneville Power Administration over a proposed power exchange agreement is being pushed by the bloc of pro-Hells Canyon senators from the Northwest states. The Senate Interior Committee has scheduled hearings on the issues May 14 and 15. The committee has been kept informed by Bonneville officials of demands which Idaho Power has been making and which the Interior Department has been resisting.

The power exchange being worked on would integrate the Brownlee and other units of the Idaho Power system with the Bonneville system through a main transmission line from the Snake river to the Bonneville system in eastern Oregon. The Federal Power Commission stipulated that such an integration was necessary.

Idaho Power needs extra power in the summer for peaking purposes making a heavy drain on its system. BPA usually has surplus energy at this time. BPA needs extra power for peaking in the winter, when Idaho Power usually has a surplus. Committee aides have received estimates that from 120,000 to 200,000 KW of firm power would be created by such an arrangement, instead of each separate system having seasonal surplus dump power.

Reason for Failure
Reason for the failure to reach agreement is reported to be Idaho Power's insistence on receiving 2 1/2 kilowatts of

Bonneville power for every kilowatt the power company supplied to the Northwest Power Pool from its system.

This is one of the points on which the Senate committee plans to focus its attention, for Northwest senators consider this would give the utility a subsidy.

Estimates of the size of the subsidy have been computed by those who have opposed Idaho Power's plan for three small dams instead of the high federal dam. They put it at something like \$8 million annually, or \$400 million over the 50-year life of the dam license. The high federal dam would cost about that amount.

First Right
Another point of inquiry will be the request that Idaho Power is understood to have made to get first right or preference on all increased generation at downstream federal dams—The Dalles, McNary, John Day, Ice Harbor etc.—which would be attributed to the storage and river control provided by the company's Brownlee dam.

Interior officials are understood to object to this request on grounds it would violate the preference clause which

gives public power agencies first call on federal power.

Interior is also reported to be willing to agree to a power exchange only if there is a parity of value on the kilowatts that flow between the two systems. This would rule out any subsidy to the Boise utility. It is willing to make an equitable division of the benefits derived from integrating the system.

Two other points are expected to be raised.

1. Rural electric co-ops in southern Idaho have wanted to get Idaho Power to wheel cheap power from federal dams to them. Rep. Al Ullman has suggested that any power exchange agreement worked out should include a requirement that Idaho Power agree to wheel government power to preference customers in the area.

2. Idaho Power has plans to sell some of its power to Utah Power and Light, from whom it has been buying steam power recently. Some senators want to explore the question of whether this hook-up in addition to the interchange between Idaho and BPA would result in the export of Columbia power.

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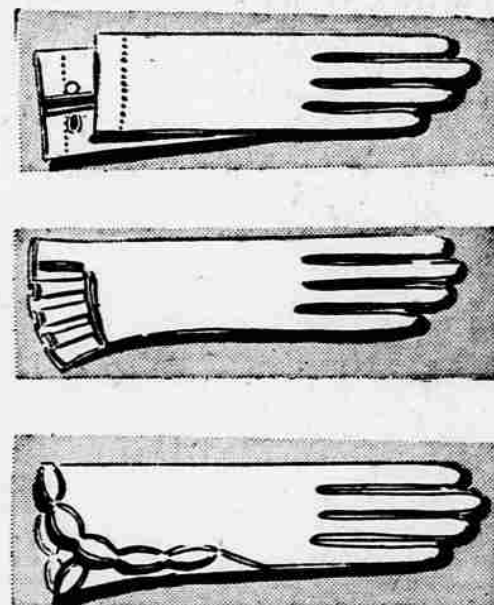
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