

Northwest power bill to aid Idaho patrons

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The proposed Pacific Northwest Power Bill, passed by the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee last week would bring lower preferential rates to farm irrigators, including those in Idaho.

Sen. James A. McClure, R-Idaho, one of the prime movers in rewriting the electrical rate schedule for consumers in Oregon, Washington, Idaho and the Western half of Montana said it reduces the disparity in rates paid by residential customers of privately owned utilities and customers of publicly owned utilities.

The legislation is aimed at allocating electrical power throughout the Pacific Northwest. It is scheduled for full Senate action before the congressional recess starting next week said McClure.

"This legislation paves the way for an equitable distribution of power throughout the Bonneville Power Administration system," said McClure. "Idaho, along with other Northwest states, will have a stronger voice in BPA policy. Customers of investor-owned utilities, such as Idaho Power Co., will receive power at lower rates, and an important benefit will be the lower cost to Idaho's irrigators."

McClure pointed out he offered dozens of amendments to the original legislation during nearly two weeks of intensive committee hearings and markup sessions.

"I believe we have significantly strengthened the state's role in power allocation policy making through the creation of a special council," McClure said. "This bill represents many hours of difficult work and compromises, but it will serve us well as a framework for electrical power allocation."

McClure, and Sens. Henry Jackson, D-Wash., and Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., were the main participants earlier in the month on the measure.

Also helping were Sens. Frank Church, D-Idaho, and John Melcher, D-Mont.

McClure said the gist of his argument are hinged on the fact that individual consumers were supposed to receive benefits of lower electrical rates under the original BPA bill.

Bring lower rates

McClure said the bill should bring lower power rates to Idaho customers, the amount of which is not exactly determined, but he estimated it will mean a cut of 10 percent.

One of his amendments was to increase the present limit of 100 horsepower pumping load for each farmer to at least 300, but he said he now has an agreement that it can be hiked to 400 and he is hoping eventually for 500 horsepower. The 500 power limit would cover 99 percent of the users, said McClure.

McClure said at this time he doesn't know what the allocation will be, but the new amendment requires that preference power go to the

user, a residential customer, or an "irrigation pumping load," generally the farmer.

McClure said the bill was argued in the Senate Energy and Natural Resources Committee, with Sterling Munro, Portland, BPA administrator, and Kirk Hall, Boise director of the Idaho Office of Energy, assisting in lending technical advise.

There were suggestions that a proposed Pacific Northwest Electric Power Planning Council, made up of governors of Washington, Oregon, Idaho and Montana and the BPA administrator, would adopt a regional energy plan to carry out conservation measures and develop new energy sources.

McClure offered an amendment which would require all actions of the BPA administrator to be consistent with the plan adopted by the council and other provisions of the power bill.

But Jackson, felt such an arrangement would get itself involved in the day-to-day operations of the BPA. He contended the council role should be advisory.

Limit authority

McClure said he was willing to limit the council's authority to interpret consistency to major issues, and under his amendment the BPA administrator could go to Congress for authority to take action if the council found it to be inconsistent with the plan.

Munro said a provision for judicial review provides an adequate check to require the administrator's actions are

"consistent."

Church, whose efforts in the deliberation have been limited because of chairing the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on SALT II, pointed out the preferential rate contracts with the aluminum companies are now expiring. The companies know they must make concessions after enjoying low costs for these many years.

The bill, generally, provides the cheapest rates to continue for preferential customers, such as those using public power at the City of Idaho Falls, Rural Electrification Associations, and other public power customers; and a second category provides for the comparatively inexpensive hydroelectric power to go to private utilities which will pass on the lower rates to their customers.

Conservation

Cleve Corlett, press secretary for Church, said the bill puts a heavy emphasis on conservation, promotes obtaining new sources from renewal resources, such as lowhead hydro power contemplated by Idaho Falls, or go for coal, nuclear or solar or other alternatives.

"Basically," said Corlett, "Idaho has the traditional method of providing water to turn the turbine. Under the bill Idaho will receive a greater portion of hydro power and it will stop rates from escalating. Essentially, the benefits will come in future years as cheaper power will go, for customers and private utilities."

Church and McClure stressed

that the amendment will now permit Idaho irrigators receiving power from the investor-owned Idaho Power Co. to receive the lower utility rates for pumping up to 400 horsepower, and perhaps 500.

They pointed out Oregon and Washington irrigators receive preferred rates because they get power from publicly owned

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Talk electrical rates

WASHINGTON — Three Pacific Northwest senators took a leading part in hammering out provisions of the Pacific Northwest energy bill which allocates electrical power and rates in the Senate Energy Committee

and now awaits action before the Senate. From left are Sens. Henry Jackson, D-Wash., chairman; Mark Hatfield, R-Ore., and James A. McClure, R-Idaho.