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Columbia Generating Station goes offline Saturday, prepares for largest refueling outage

RICHLAND, Wash. – At 10:00 p.m. last night, Columbia Generating Station operators began powering down the reactor following a request from the Bonneville Power Administration, due to anticipated weather conditions. Columbia was removed from the power grid this afternoon, and will remain powered down through the previously scheduled refueling outage, which begins Wednesday.

BPA made the request to Energy Northwest on March 30 because weather conditions could produce high water flows through the federal hydroelectric dam system.

Columbia was scheduled to power down April 6 for its biennial refueling outage. The shutdown ended Columbia's longest continuous operation record at 505 days, besting the old record of 485 days set in 2006. The current run began on Nov. 13, 2009.

"Setting this record has not been without its challenges," said Mark Reddemann, Energy Northwest chief executive officer. "I congratulate our employees for their commitment to overcome those challenges and keep us producing clean, safe and cost-effective power for Northwest ratepayers."

The focus now for the Columbia team is on the outage, during which workers will add new nuclear fuel, conduct maintenance and replace the plant's main condenser – the largest scope project ever undertaken in the 26-year history of the plant. The condenser converts steam back to water for re-use in the reactor. Replacing it will cost \$113 million and require 350 workers. The new condenser will provide up to an additional 12 megawatts of power generation, essentially paying for itself over time.

"This refueling outage will allow us to enhance our equipment reliability and gain efficiency going forward," said Brad Sawatzke, chief nuclear officer for Energy Northwest. "Our goal in this outage is to further strengthen our position as one of Washington state's primary sources of reliable, full-time electricity."

About Energy Northwest

Energy Northwest develops, owns and operates a diverse mix of electricity generating resources, including hydro, solar and wind projects – and the Northwest's only nuclear power plant. These projects provide enough reliable, affordable and environmentally responsible energy to power more than a million homes each year, and that carbon-free electricity is provided at the cost of generation. As a Washington state, not-for-profit joint operating agency, Energy Northwest comprises 28 public power member utilities from across the state serving more than 1.5 million ratepayers. The agency continually explores new generation projects to meet its members' needs. www.energy-northwest.com.