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QuickPoint! – A new loss of load probability heightens concerns over the Northwest’s power grid

By Rachel Dawson

The race is on for a reliable power grid. A newly redeveloped model used by the Northwest Power and Conservation Council to calculate annual loss of load probability (LOLP) shows significantly higher LOLP in 2023 compared to previous predictions.

The LOLP calculates the likelihood that utilities will have to take some kind of emergency measure in order to prevent a blackout. Emergency measures could include initiating rolling blackouts, calling on ratepayers to decrease usage, and buying back power from large industrial users.

The classic model estimated the LOLP in 2023 would be 15.7% with a resource need of 1250 MW. The redeveloped model, which simulates more aspects of the power system in detail, predicts an LOLP in 2023 of 32% and a resource need of 1600 MW. That’s a 104% increase for LOLP and a 28% increase for resource need from previous predictions.

Rolling blackouts are becoming less of an anomaly now that more reliable resources like nuclear and natural gas are being replaced by intermittent resources like solar and wind.

Oregon officials can reduce LOLP by legalizing nuclear power, ensuring current resources stay on the grid, and investing in resources that promote reliability like natural gas and hydropower. These steps can prevent Oregon from becoming the next Texas or California.

Rachel Dawson is a Policy Analyst at Cascade Policy Institute, Oregon’s free market public policy research center.

