

Truckee River hydroelectric plants set records



Written by

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Plentiful water draining from the mountains produced an added benefit -- lots of electricity.

The Truckee Meadows Water Authority produced more power at its Truckee River hydroelectric plants than at any other time in its decade-long history.

And for the first time, the utility generated more electricity than it used in its task to provide water to roughly 93,000 homes and businesses across the greater Reno-Sparks area.

"We actually had a surplus. It was a record year," said Pat Neilson, manager of distribution and generation for the utility.

During the fiscal year ending June 30, the water authority's three hydroelectric plants generated 45,863 megawatts. That's compared to an average of between 41,000 and 42,000 megawatts, Neilson said.

Electricity produced by the utility's plants is

sold for use on NV Energy's power grid. One megawatt is sufficient electricity to power about 750 homes for an hour.

The water system, including the hydroelectric plants, was sold by Sierra Pacific Power Co. to Washoe County and the cities of Reno and Sparks -- which jointly operate the utility -- in 2001.

It's likely that Sierra Pacific at some point produced more electricity than the water authority did last fiscal year but that would have occurred when the system's most powerful hydroelectric plant at Farad, Calif., was operating, Neilson said. That facility was destroyed during the Truckee River flood of January 1997.

A heavy winter snowpack set the stage for a big electricity year, Neilson said. The situation received another boost with cool June temperatures, which allowed for a steady, measured runoff on the Truckee. Often, a warm spring brings a quick and gushing runoff followed by a quickly dropping river that limits hydroelectric

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generation.

"We had a great winter with great runoff and for us, the runoff came perfectly," Neilson said. "It really kind of paced itself."

The 43,512 megawatts of electricity used by the water authority last fiscal year is a record low for the utility, Neilson said.

"We're trying to be as green as we can and this year we made great progress in that endeavor," he said.

The decrease in power use largely resulted from the 2010 completion of the \$19 million Mogul Bypass pipeline project.

That project allows Truckee River water to flow to the utility's primary water treatment plant at Chalk Bluff by gravity, saving what had been \$400,000 per year in pumping costs and significantly dropping power consumption.

"That definitely helped dramatically," Neilson said. ©

Truckee River hydroelectric plants

Fleish Plant, west of Gold Ranch. Built in 1905. Capacity of 2.5 megawatts per hour.

Verdi Plant, near Verdi Elementary School. Built in 1911. Capacity 2.3 megawatts per hour.

Washoe Plant, near Mogul. Built in 1904. Capacity of 1.9 megawatts per hour.

Source: Truckee Meadows Water Authority.

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