

Group responds to potential NW wind power shutdown

May 18 2011, By TIM FOUGHT , Associated Press

(AP) -- Wind power companies facing a springtime shutdown to accommodate a surge of hydropower in the Northwest said Tuesday the region's main power manager has a conflict of interest, using authority over transmission lines to protect its business interests.

The claim by the American Wind [Energy](#) Association follows the Bonneville Power Administration's announcement last week that it plans to curtail use of wind power because of a surplus of energy from [hydroelectric dams](#).

Such a shutdown could cost Northwest wind developers millions of dollars in tax credits.

BPA spokesman Michael Milstein said the process might not start this week because more water can be stored behind Grand Coulee Dam than had been expected, relieving pressure to use it for power generation.

The BPA has long handled about three-quarters of the region's electrical transmission. At the same time, it sells power from Columbia Basin dams to customers such as public [power](#) districts.

The wind energy [advocacy group](#) said in a statement the BPA is using its transmission authority "to illegally promote its own narrow economic interest," breaking contracts with wind developers, favoring other energy producers and, in the process, thwarting the green energy policy of the Obama administration.

The wind operators would like to be compensated for standing down, but that would put pressure on the BPA to pass the costs on to its customers.

Rob Gramlich, a vice president of the association, said in the statement that BPA's policy "is a classic case of anti-competitive and discriminatory behavior by a utility with a [conflict of interest](#)."

Regulations that followed the electricity deregulation scandals of the 1990s require BPA to keep the two parts of its business separate, to the point of segregating offices and having executives monitor meetings that involve people from both parts, Milstein said.

He said wind operators aren't the victims of discrimination. The BPA has taken its big nuclear plant offline, he said, and fossil fuel plants have been told to reduce their output to minimum levels, needed to prohibit damage to the plants and the grid.

Shutting down the [wind](#) farms is a last resort, he said. "They will be the last ones standing," he said.

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