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Bonneville Power Administration reverses 30 job cuts, continues with plans to eliminate 430 positions



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By [Courtney Sherwood](#) (OPB)
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FILE - Transmission towers at Bonneville Power Administration's Earl D. Ostrander Substation near Eagle Creek, Jan. 5, 2023.

Kristyna Wentz-Graff / OPB

The Bonneville Power Administration is bringing back 30 employees it fired last week, according to multiple sources familiar with the agency's operations.

Roughly 130 of BPA's more than 3,000 employees were told they'd been dismissed last week, as part of large-scale job cuts initiated by the Trump administration. The cuts have largely targeted federal workers in their first year or two on the job, when they are still in probationary status and have fewer civil service protections.

But the 30 probationary workers who have now been asked to leave were later deemed critical to BPA's core work to manage power across the Pacific Northwest, strengthen the electrical grid and keep the lights on, according to staff who asked not to be named out of fear of retaliation, but whose identities OPB has verified through public records.

Even after rescinding those terminations, the agency is eliminating about 430 total positions – the 100 probationary employees who are still being fired, the 240 who resigned in exchange for a buyout, and the 90 people who received job offers that were then canceled.

BPA distributes hydropower from 31 federal dams and operates 75% of the Northwest's power grid, ensuring reliable access to electricity for millions of people in the Northwest.

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A spokesperson for BPA declined to comment on the cuts. But multiple people who are either still on staff or have recently been fired confirmed the latest staffing figures to OPB. One source familiar with BPA internal operations said there could be another wave of reductions in the next week, as well.

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The Northwest & Intermountain Power Producers Coalition, which represents private power companies that purchase electricity and transmission services from BPA, condemned the cuts and raised alarms about their consequences.

“NIPPC supports making the federal government more efficient but is deeply concerned that the announced level and type of workforce reductions at BPA to date will make the electric grid in the Northwest less reliable and a worse platform for economic growth,” executive director Spencer Gray wrote in a letter to U.S. Energy Secretary Chris Wright.

“Specifically, the combination of deferred resignations and early retirements, layoffs of new hires, rescinded job offers, and a hiring freeze, may thwart efforts to accommodate new industrial load such as data centers and semiconductor manufacturing, both key sectors in the nation's economic prospects,” Gray wrote.

The cuts at BPAs are part of a larger push by the Trump administration to reduce the size of the federal government by encouraging workers to quit, firing them or terminating them.

As of January, about 30,000 Oregonians worked at federal agencies. It's not clear how many of those positions have been eliminated. Across the United States, more than 3,000 Forest Service jobs have been cut, and more than 2,000 workers at federal health agencies have [received termination notices](#). Federal prosecutors, [including the U.S. attorney for Oregon](#), have been removed from their positions. And U.S. Department of Agriculture-funded researchers, including in Oregon, have had their [contracts cut](#).

Many of those jobs have been eliminated in the name of cutting federal spending, but ideology has also played a part. A small Bonneville Power Administration team dedicated to diversity, equity and inclusion was eliminated, according to two current employees, as part of a broader [government-wide move to eliminate or sharply limit DEI](#) programs.

Related: [Former leaders of Bonneville Power say federal staffing cuts threaten stability and safety of NW power grid](#)

As former [BPA administrator Randall Hardy previously told OPB](#), cutting positions at the power agency will not affect federal budgets. BPA is self-funded, paying for its staff and programs with power and transmission sales, and receiving no money from taxpayers.

While one person familiar with BPA operations said that the 30 probationary workers whose work will continue are engaged in "mission critical" work, other people knowledgeable with the agency said that other key positions are now vacant, after hundreds of people accepted [an offer to resign now and continue to accept paychecks](#) until fall.

The 240 employees who took that buyout include people who work on power lines, engineers, substation operators and power dispatchers — positions that take years of apprenticeship to learn.

"This blanket purge of federal jobs by the current administration is a fool's errand," said Thomas Girouard, who retired from BPA four years ago after working as an electrical lineman there for a dozen years. Workers whose positions have been eliminated play a key role in repairing and maintaining the electrical grid in Oregon, Washington, Montana and Northern California, he said.