

Rains swell reservoirs

Energy saving drops for fourth consecutive week

Energy conservation by City Light customers continued to slip last week as reservoir-filling rainstorms made people forget the need to cut back their electricity use.

City Light said energy use for the 30 days ending Friday was 8.2 per cent below forecasts. It was the fourth consecutive week in which the rate of conservation declined.

The utility said the 30-day average dropped sharply because the Seattle Steam Corp. resumed use of a long-idle electric boiler. The Bethlehem Steel Corp. and The Boeing Co. also increased their use of electricity slightly.

Long-range conservation — dating from February 3 when the utility asked for a 10 per cent reduction because of the drought — remained steady at 8 per cent below forecasts, City Light said.

Heavy rainfall in the past few weeks increased streamflow into Ross Lake and the Skagit River hydroelectric reservoir now is 5.5 feet above the level normal for this time of year, City Light said.

The level of the reservoir is within 3 feet of the maximum prescribed by the federal government for flood control. If the rainfall continues, City Light may be required to release water, the utility said.

City Light measured 20 inches of rainfall at

Diablo Dam on the Skagit during November, twice the normal amount.

The utility measured nearly 5 inches of precipitation at Diablo Friday, Saturday and Sunday.

Some of the water in the reservoir represents energy borrowed from other utilities earlier in the drought. City Light now is paying back that electricity.

The rainfall does not represent the ending of City Light's drought problems, however.

That will depend upon snowfall during the winter.

City Light said the first snowpack survey will be in January.

As a result of the heavy rainfall and refilling of reservoirs, City Light said "dramatic cutbacks" in energy use no longer are required. The utility added, however, that "conservation of electric energy is still very much a continuing goal."

Supt. Gordon Vickery said: "We feel now that severe cutbacks such as uncomfortably low thermostat settings in living areas and drastic reductions in the use of hot water will no longer be required.

"We at City Light are grateful for the great cooperation of our customers, whose conservation efforts set an example for the rest of the Northwest during the past 10 months," Vickery added.