

Skamania County PUD's *News From the Wire*

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**PUD #1 of
Skamania County**

**PO Box 500
1492 Wind River
Hwy.
Carson WA 98610**

Office Hours:

8:30 a.m.—5:00 p.m.

www.skamaniapud.com

Phone: 509-427-5126

Toll Free: 800-922-5329

Fax: 509-427-8416

**Board of
Commissioners**

Meeting Schedule

9 a.m.

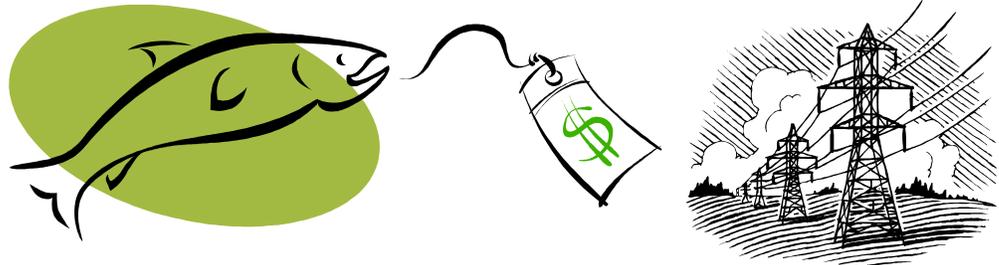
Monday 08/17/09

Tuesday 09/08/09

Monday 09/21/09

Monday 10/05/09

Monday 10/19/09



Salmon, Power Rates, and Energy

I read in the power industry newsletters that the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) is proposing to raise wholesale power rates by something like 7% on October 1st, 2009. They say this is driven by many factors including increased spending on salmon recovery. I wish to offer some varying perspectives on the salmon recovery effort. Why, you ask? Because you and I, and every other user of BPA power, are paying for the effort.

The federal Endangered Species Act created several requirements for the protection and recovery of animal and plant species listed under the Endangered Species Act. Among these is the creation / writing of a Biological Opinion. In our case, this means the new 'Bi Op' developed to ensure that operation of the federal hydro-system [the eight main-stem dams on the Columbia and Snake rivers] do not further "jeopardize" listed salmon and steelhead.

The latest Bi-Op was written collaboratively by the federal agencies such as the NOAA Fisheries, BPA, Corps of Engineers, and Bureau of Reclamation, with the States, and Native American tribes. Other stake holders, including environmental and river user groups also had opportunity to provide input.

The States of Washington, Idaho, and Montana support the Bi-Op, while Oregon opposes it. Many tribes such as the Yakamas, Warm Springs, Umatillas, Colvilles and others support it, while the Nez Perce tribes oppose it. Special interest groups such as the National Wildlife Federation continue to sue over it, and call for the breaching of the four dams on the lower Snake River, for starters.

The first interesting thing I find in the Bi-Op is the cost. Although salmon are often called a 'national treasure' relatively few federal dollars go into the recovery effort. In contrast, you and I and every user of BPA power paid over \$940 million in 2008 for this effort. For Skamania PUD electric customers, that's roughly 15% of your monthly electric bill. This is an enormous investment which the general public is largely unaware of.

Unlike the Unarmored Threespine Stickleback and the Alabama Redbelly Turtle, two other species listed as Endangered, we hunt, catch and eat endangered salmon. Yes, we try to only catch hatchery-born fish rather than wild fish, but, nets are really hard to train, and have trouble discerning the difference.

Great debate also centers on the habitat the fish are to thrive in. Some folks advocate for pristine rivers like that Lewis & Clark came down 200+ years ago. This, of course, is a pipe dream. As a society, we have turned the Columbia and Snake rivers from a violent and oft-times damaging force into a tamed river, navigation waterway, irrigation system, recreational area, and energy source – the life blood of the Northwest. These rivers are the most cost-efficient means of transporting large quantities of all manner of crops and goods. The generation system is the envy of the world. The irrigation works have turned a very dry desert into an amazingly productive agricultural center. To turn all this back to its natural state would be a catastrophe. Where would our food and energy come from? Without the commerce, who would pay the taxes to fund federal projects ?? What about our jobs?

Let us imagine this pristine river a bit more. It might be better habitat for salmon, although we're seeing fish survival rates that are the same as in undammed rivers like the Fraser to the north. Salmon would still be caught in the ocean before they can return to the river. The tradeoff is people would have a much lower standard of living with higher costs and unemployment. The river could flood violently every spring, harming cities, communities and farms, and run very low in September and October causing further harm. No thanks, just the same.

As for power rates, they are going up, some. Keep in mind, however, that BPA power is still the envy of the world. It's cheap, reliable and flexible. It can be used to back up intermittent sources such as wind power. This is why great political pressure is brought to bear on the river and its management. Lots of folks want a piece of the action for their own purposes.

So, how much can be reasonably done to restore salmon runs? In my opinion, a lot. Clearly, the best place to spend is not in the court room. Some very good and expensive attorneys file excellent briefs and motions, ostensibly in the name of the salmon. But, salmon do much better in water. Perhaps putting a screen on that irrigation diversion head gate or more accurately controlling the amount of water withdrawn from streams will help too.

Many such small tasks are called for in the Bi-Op and the Columbia River Fish Accords between BPA and the states and tribes. Actions that are not just in the Columbia, but in the tributaries such as the John Day River and the Umatilla River. This is where many of the salmon species go to spawn. The federal judge in Portland hearing the case challenging the Bi-Op and seeking to breach four dams on the lower Snake River seems solely focused on hydro operations.



And, many people argue salmon are still headed towards extinction. I argue, NO! Yes, some of the wild populations are still quite depressed, while others are flourishing. But, we can save them, in the water.

An anomaly worth noting is the Redfish Lake Sockeye. These salmon have the longest commute, over 900 miles from Redfish Lake past eight dams to the Pacific Ocean and back. This particular population of fish was in very serious trouble in 1992 with only one male sockeye making the return trip all the way to Redfish Lake. He was referred to as 'Lonesome Larry' and he helped focus attention on the plight of his species. An intense effort, with a captive breeding program, was started and results show promise. The counting station at Lower Granite Dam, the last hurdle before turning up the Salmon River, recorded from zero to 15 fish per year in the 1990's. This grew to 113 in 2004, then dropped back to the teens in 2005 and 2006, and 52 in 2007. Then in 2008, Lower Granite Dam counted 990 sockeye returning. So far this year 1,145 sockeye have been counted crossing Lower Granite Dam. Good news, but no cigar, yet. Two years do not a recovery make.

Huge challenges still face salmon. The environment, which is always changing, forces all species to adapt or die. Whether caused by sunspots, movement of continental plates, global warming, volcanoes, or the factory down the road, the environment for fish and people changes. Yet, we put a man on the moon, so I am confident we can save the salmon. To do so, we need to focus on getting them out of the court room and into the rivers.

And to continue our current life style, which I like very much, we need energy. Lots of energy.

Bob Wittenberg, Manager for the District

Going on Vacation?

When you're on vacation many of your appliances will continue to work. Appliances like the refrigerator, the freezer, the water heater and others will run normally; and that could lead to a surprising bill when you return. But, if you take a few simple steps before leaving, you can control your appliance energy bill.

- Freezers filled to capacity, with enough spaces between items, operate more efficiently than partially filled freezers.
- Increase the temperature setting on the refrigerator slightly, but no higher than 45 degrees Fahrenheit. Remove perishable foods.
- Turn off electric water heaters by switching off the circuit breaker.
- Decrease temperature setting for your heat, if need be.
- Decrease temperature setting on waterbeds, or unplug.
- Turn spa heaters off, use covers, and reduce filter time to a safe minimum.
- Ask a neighbor to keep an eye out.



Congratulations!



Thank you and congratulations to our General Foreman, Gary Leonard, and Line Foreman, Jim Anderson for 25 YEARS OF SERVICE with the PUD. Their knowledge of our system is a great asset to all of us!

PUD Adopts Identity Theft Prevention Policy

The District has adopted an Identity Theft Prevention Policy. The Fair and Accurate Credit Transaction Act of 2003 requires the District to have such a policy. The policy includes procedures to identify, detect and respond to “Red Flags” to prevent and mitigate identity theft. It establishes a prevention program for identity theft in our continual effort to safeguard you, our valued customers, and your confidential information against any possible identity theft occurrences. Please call or stop by the PUD office for more information on this policy.

Safety Alert Keep Signs Off Power Poles

Nails in power poles can injure linemen and could cause their climbing spikes to slip, leading to a fall.

That’s why hanging signs on power poles in Washington State is against the law (RCW 70.54.090).

Thank you for helping with this safety issue.

Special Thank You to our College Summer Helpers

- Matt Rockowski and Karl Bayer worked with the electric department crew.
- Amanda Boyes assisted in the office.



They all did a wonderful job. The PUD is proud to be able to offer a College Student Worker Program to local college students.

News From the Wire

is an informational newsletter published by
Skamania County PUD for our customers.
Reader comments are welcome.

PUD Commissioners:

District 1..... Dennis Gale
360-837-3862
District 2..... Curt Esch
509-427-8591
District 3..... Clyde Leach
509-493-3380

Skamania County PUD:

Manager.....Bob Wittenberg
Auditor..... Chris lobst

1492 Wind River Hwy
P.O. Box 500
Carson WA 98610

www.skamaniapud.com

Phone: 509-427-5126
Toll free: 800-922-5329
Fax: 509-427-8416

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