Public Works Board Approves PUD Feasibility Study Grant

The Washington State Public Works Board has awarded the Grays Harbor PUD a $50,000 grant to study the feasibility of expanding the PUD fiber network in East Grays Harbor County. In all, nine applicants were selected to receive a total of $450,000 for broadband planning-feasibility studies.

The Grays Harbor study will look into a project to extend the fiber network from Sund Road in South Elma to the Cedarville substation and the surrounding area, Porter, the City of Oakville and the Chehalis Tribal Center. When built, it will benefit emergency responders, cities, schools and residents by bringing improved broadband services to the area.

In a statement from the Public Works Board, board chair Scott Hutseell said, “This is another step toward accomplishing the governor’s vision of all Washington residents being served with quality broadband access. In our modern society, access to broadband internet is a vital resource that touches all aspects of life from personal health and safety to education and economic welfare.”

Fitch Raises PUD Financial Outlook to Stable, Awards A-Rating

Back to back years of strong performances, a dedication to stabilizing finances and the expectation of continuing improvement have led Fitch Ratings to raise the Grays Harbor PUD’s financial outlook from ‘negative’ to ‘stable’ and award the utility with an ‘A’ credit rating.

“This is the result of a team effort to develop and then successfully execute a financial plan,” said PUD Board President Russ Skolrood. “This goes to prove that hard work and planning can make a real difference. I am very proud of the PUD staff and their work that brought us to this point.”

In compiling their report, Fitch Ratings examined the PUD’s financial history over the last decade and outlook for the next four years, their ability to respond and adjust to changing power markets and their financial liquidity, including stability in financial reserves.

The Fitch Ratings report credits an improved financial performance in 2017 and 2018, driven by favorable conditions resulting in higher operating income and the utility’s effort to rebuild cash reserves. Perhaps most importantly, the report states Fitch’s expectation that the financial profile will remain supportive of the rating through 2022.

“Fitch’s report not only tells us that the utility is on firm ground moving forward, but that they are confident that it will continue to be,” said General Manager Dave Ward. “That shows a confidence in the future of the PUD and the direction in which we are headed.”

Commission Meeting Dates

Meetings are held in the Nichols Building, 220 Myrtle Street, Hoquiam.

January 2020
Monday – January 6
Tuesday – January 21
(rescheduled from January 20)

February 2020
Monday – February 4
Tuesday – February 19
(rescheduled from February 18)

Regular business meetings are scheduled to begin at 4:30 pm. A one hour workshop (3:30 to 4:30 pm) will precede each business meeting, unless otherwise noted. The public is welcome to attend all commission meetings, special meetings, workshops and public hearings. Public comment periods are included at the open and close of every meeting.

Commission meetings may be cancelled and special meetings may be scheduled. Please visit our website (www.ghpud.org) for updated information.

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Dam Removal Threatens Power Resources

By Dave Ward

Before long, resources may not be there to allow power providers to keep the lights on.

While some may scoff and call that a doomsday scenario, the numbers facing power providers today paint a stark picture. It cannot be denied that Washington is growing and growing fast. According to the US Census Bureau, the Pacific Northwest gained over 200,000 new residents between July 2016 and July 2017. Washington alone is anticipated to have over 7.5-million residents by 2020. More residents mean more customers using services like electricity and in this day and age, the number of items needing electricity is on the rise.

Second, a number of the resources responsible for generating electricity are being removed from the grid. Nearly 3000 megawatts of energy will be lost by the retirement of coal fired facilities in Montana, Oregon and Washington, with additional retirements scheduled throughout the region. Given their negative environmental impact, not many tears will be shed over their loss but it still begs the question: Where is that power going to come from now? A study by the Energy and Environmental Economics, Inc. predicted that with all coal retirements and population growth, between eight and 16 gigawatts of new energy capacity will be needed by the year 2030. That means that without new resources, the question of resource adequacy, or having enough power to meet demand, becomes a real worry.

This brings up the third (and perhaps most troubling) point: A growing number of people seem to think that now is the time to remove elements of the clean, reliable and renewable Columbia River hydropower system from the grid. What makes this point so troubling is that it is almost entirely avoidable. Proponents of dam removal have lately been centering their argument on the assertion that the dams are the main cause of declining salmon returns on the Columbia and Snake Rivers. They believe that to return those runs, to the benefit of wildlife and the fishing industry, the first step is removing four hydroelectric dams on the Lower Snake River. However, the hydropower system does more to integrate itself into the region than many other industries. The Bonneville Power Administration spends billions of dollars on wildlife mitigation efforts, including assisting salmon on their journey up and down river.

Another argument for dam removal is that the four Lower Snake River Dams are not that important to the reliability of the Pacific Northwest system. Look no further than March of last year to poke holes in that theory. At that time, a late winter cold snap caused temperatures across the Northwest to plunge. Bonneville Power Administration wind generation was accounting for just six megawatts during the coldest evening hours, a time when people were arriving home, turning on their lights and heaters and seeking a little comfort. At that same time, the Lower Snake River Dams were called on to churn out 1337 megawatts to provide energy for thousands of Northwest homes.

So, is now really the time to think about removing resources from the grid, especially ones that meet the clean, renewable and reliable standards that hundreds of utilities across the country would love to have? Of course not. There are plenty of existing factors which may threaten the resources needed to power the Northwest. Let’s not create another one.

ENoEnergEY, an informational newsletter, is published monthly for families and businesses energized by Grays Harbor PUD.

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