PUD Offers Comment on Lower Snake River Dam Report

Citing their importance to system reliability and resource adequacy, the Grays Harbor PUD has offered comments on a state report concerning the Lower Snake River Dams.

The report was the result of a state funded, $750,000 study into the feasibility of maintaining the four Lower Snake River Dams. As sections of the report called into question the dam’s value in terms of the regions power system and costs of maintenance, the PUD jumped to their defense with a response backed by scientific reports from NOAA Fisheries, the Public Power Council, the Bonneville Power Administration and other agencies.

“With production of over 1000 average megawatts of clean and reliable energy (enough energy to power roughly 800,000 homes), the dams have been identified by the Bonneville Power Administration as a key component of the FCRPS (Federal Columbia River Power System) mission of supporting peak power generation,” the PUD response stated.

PUD Brings Last Substation Under SCADA Control

For over 30 years, PUD staff, led by substation and automation engineers have been working to bring all the utility substations under monitoring and control of the “supervisory control and data acquisition” or SCADA system. On January 23 they reached that goal. With the update to the Central Park substation, all of the transmission and distribution utility substations can now be monitored and controlled by dispatchers in the PUD Power House.

“For our customers, this means we have the ability to do a faster diagnosis of issues on the utility system and to respond quickly,” said PUD Substation Engineering Supervisor Chris Eide.
Be Quiet and Let It Happen!

By Russ Skolrood, District Three Commissioner

Over the past eleven years I have learned that the electrical industry is continually changing. Some of the changes are for the good and some of the changes I will never understand. Technology continues to improve our system and our business so that we are constantly able to improve our reliability and safety measures.

The changes that are hard to understand are the ones that come from outside our area and often outside our ability to control them. Laws and regulations are constantly changing in the electrical industry. The most costly change is coming in the form of environmental legislation. Coal is definitely on its way out as a source of power for our industry. There are only two States that have lower power costs than Washington and they are both based on coal power as their main power source. That should give you an idea of the cost of power generated by coal but because of its carbon footprint it is being forced out as a source for electrical power. Natural gas has become a major source of power ever since gas fracking increased the supply of gas available in the US and drastically decreased the cost of electricity produced by the burning of natural gas turbines. With the latest changes in legislation on moving to a carbon free electrical system even natural gas will soon be forced out of our power mix.

I know that some believe wind and solar are the answer to the future and maybe they are. The issue now is that we have no economical way to store power from these intermittent resources so that we have power every hour of every day. The two clean power producers that currently can fill the gap for reliability in our power system are hydro and nuclear power. They both serve as the batteries that can be used to make sure we have power when the wind isn’t blowing and the sun is not shining. Nuclear is costly and has issues that most people are afraid to deal with. Hydropower would seem to be the perfect answer but even that resource is under attack.

Lately groups have pointed to the hydro dam system as the reason for poor fish returns and the dying of baby Orcas in the Puget Sound. Now, as the title of this letter states, I could just “be quiet and let it happen”. It is not in my nature to allow the ratepayers of Grays Harbor to again be stuck paying higher costs for power so that we can do away with our best clean power source in the name of questionable science. I don’t believe that removing the dams will bring back huge salmon runs throughout the Pacific Northwest. With all of the money spent on fish by BPA and with the small part the dams play in the life cycle of the salmon I can’t justify removing any of the hydro dams on the Columbia River system. Some day when we find a cheap, environmentally safe and reliable way to store power I might be able to be quiet but we are not there. To just sit and be quiet and let it happen would be a crime in itself for a PUD Commissioner to allow. Please join with me and make sure that we share the word on how valuable hydropower is to our safe, reliable and cost effective power system.