

Our Energy, Our Future

The days of abundant and low-cost electricity in the Northwest are nearing an end. Surplus power generation from the 1970s and 1980s currently is being used. The Western Energy Coordinating Council predicts that some western states will experience supply shortages as early as 2009. Consumers have felt first-hand the effect of higher electricity rates during the Energy Crisis of 2000.

In addition, transmission is not being built fast enough to accommodate new energy resources that may be ready to come on line. The lack of adequate transmission has resulted in rolling brownouts and blackouts in other parts of the country. It could happen in the Northwest, as well. Also exacerbating the problem of supply and transmission are the issues of climate change and fish and wildlife mitigation.

Saving salmon and reducing green house gas emissions are worthy goals. However, policymakers sometimes pass laws that conflict with one another. For example, the way federal hydroelectric dams are managed for fish survival reduces generation by approximately 2,500 megawatts of clean, renewable electricity every year. Investors are hesitant to build clean-burning coal and nuclear plants, as well as new transmission lines, because of their unpopularity with the public and the lack of funding for researching new technology. And, while renewable energy is growing in popularity, there simply aren't enough projects to meet the nation's demand for electricity or transmission to deliver the power.

Over the next several months, Power of Community will be reaching out to our grassroots members, sharing ideas on saving electricity, and making needed energy efficiency improvements with the help of your local electric co-op. The next step involves working with our elected officials to help influence policy decisions that could adversely impact your electric bill without achieving the desired results.

Power of Community wants to encourage an open discussion between electric cooperative members and those who represent us at both the state and federal levels about the challenges we face together to keep power affordable and available for Oregon families. Here are some questions we will be asking our representatives to answer:

1. Experts say that our region's growing electricity needs will soon go well beyond what renewables, conservation and efficiency can provide. What is your plan to make sure we have the electricity we'll need in the future?
2. What are you doing to fully fund the research required to make emissions free generation plants an affordable reality? Why doesn't Congress recognize the importance of hydro power to reducing Northwest emissions?
3. Balancing electricity needs and environmental goals will be difficult. How much is all this going to increase my electric bill and what will you do to make it affordable?

Power of Community will be addressing Climate Change on all fronts - the federal, regional and state levels. There is current federal legislation that is being discussed by Congress that could be harmful to Oregon electric co-op members. It is urgent that you as a POC member contact your Congressional representatives in Washington, DC to ask them what their plan is to address reliability concerns while reducing greenhouse gases. This can be done very easily through the National Rural Electric Cooperative Association website www.ourenergy.coop you can simply click on the link to "Contact Elected Officials" and enter your contact information. In 2 clicks a letter will be sent to both of your U.S. Senators and your U.S. House Representative.

Asking difficult questions now will help our region prepare for this emerging problem before it becomes a crisis for consumers.