



# CONNECTED

The Newsletter of Cowlitz PUD

Volume 10, No. 12

## Here's a New Way to Pay Your PUD Bill

Our goal at the PUD is to make our services as convenient as possible for customers. With that in mind, we began offering customers an online bill paying option a year ago. Now we are excited to introduce another easy option – monthly recurring credit card payments.

For several years we have offered a similar option called an electronic funds transfer option (EFT). Today about 2,700 customers each month use EFT, which means their payment is automatically withdrawn from their checking or savings account about 10 days after they receive the PUD bill in the mail.

The new credit/debit card program works the same way as EFT, except your payment is charged to your “card.” Many customers like to earn travel benefits and other perks offered by credit card companies and have asked for this option. It was just unveiled the first week of December and we expect a lot of customers to take advantage of it.

To sign up, go to our website and click on the Payment Options link on the left to print out an application. You can

also call our customer service department and request an application. Fill it out and bring or send it in and we'll get you started. Your automatic card payment will begin with the next billing and will automatically be processed on the due date or the first business day thereafter.

### Can the PUD email my bill to me?

We are asked often when we plan to start online billing. We don't have an answer to that question yet, but it's on our radar screen. With the growing use of the internet, combined with higher costs of mail processing, postage and printing – it just makes sense that someday customers will have the option to receive their bill electronically.

### Electronic Bill Paying is Growing in Popularity

- In October 2005, about 1,200 PUD customers (or about 2.5 percent) paid their bill electronically, via a checking account EFT.
- In October 2007, nearly 5,200 PUD customers used the Online Payment or EFT options to pay their PUD bill. That represents about 11 percent of all PUD customers.

## Warm Neighbor Program in 7th Year

Lower Columbia CAP and Cowlitz PUD are teaming up again to offer the Warm Neighbor Program. Last year PUD customers generously gave about \$30,000 to fund the program.



Cowlitz PUD forwards all Warm Neighbor funds to CAP, which in turn uses them to assist qualified, low-income residential electric users in Cowlitz County through the winter.

To contribute you can make a payment over-and-above the amount due on your regular electric bill and then designate that additional amount to Warm Neighbor. Only amounts paid in excess of the amount due can be credited to the fund.

“Thank you to everyone who voluntarily gives to the Warm Neighbor fund,” CAP Executive Director Ilona Kerby said. “Every dollar raised is used to help someone in-need to pay their electric bill.”

**To make a voluntary donation to the Warm Neighbor Program:** Complete the designated space on your next PUD bill and send in an amount you would like to donate, along with your PUD payment. Contact CAP at 425-3430 if you prefer to make a direct donation to Warm Neighbor or if you are seeking assistance.

# PUD to Audit Poles, Facilities in 2008

Cowlitz PUD has contracted the services of Davey Resource Group to systematically check all 23,000 power poles it owns across the county, starting in January. The purpose of this work is to update our data base with information about the location of every pole and what is attached to it.

We have “pole contact” agreements with several telephone, cable and fiber optic companies. It makes no sense for all utilities to have their own poles, as that would just take up too much space. Since the PUD needs bigger poles and more of them, it makes the most sense for others to pay us a fee to attach their services to our poles.

Every few years we will conduct a thorough inventory of these poles. It will help us verify that our pole attachment records are accurate, plus will give a chance to carefully determine the physical integrity of each pole and the equipment on them.

Davey Resource Group is experienced in this work as well as mapping and Geographic Information Systems (GIS). Since the project will only take a few months, it makes more sense to use the services of a short-term contractor, rather than hire

and train an employee who would be on the job for less than a year.

The Davey representative will drive a clearly marked truck with the company's name, plus a sign that says “Cowlitz PUD Contractor.” If you have any questions, please contact our Engineering Department at (360) 577-7546.

## Wilson Construction is another PUD Contractor

The PUD has received a few calls from customers regarding Wilson Construction, who has been doing contract work for the PUD during 2007. Their work will continue in 2008.

There is a shortage of Journeyman Lineman available to Northwest utilities. Cowlitz PUD has been able to supplement its crews with the Wilson crews, during a time when construction is up in the county and we are busy with major system maintenance and reconstruction projects.

If you see a Wilson Construction crew working in your neighborhood, we just want you to know that they are legitimate and are working for the PUD. Again, feel free to call if you have any questions.

## Sign-up Period Continues for Low-Income Disabled Customers Rate Discount Plan

Applications are being accepted for the PUD's new discounted electric rate program for qualified low-income disabled customers. Of the 21 PUDs in Washington offering residential electric service, 11 also provide a discounted rate for low-income disabled customers. PUDs in Clark, Wahkiakum, Pacific and Grays Harbor Counties are among those also offering the lower rate.

To be eligible, PUD customers must:

- Have been signed up for residential electric service for the past 12 consecutive months
- Have documentation of a disability (handicapped parking permit or physician's certificate)
- Earn a disability income (SSI, SSDI)

- Meet a low-income standard: A 10 percent rate discount is available to customers with a combined household income of \$13,691 to \$20,535. A 20 percent rate discount is available to customers with a gross annual household income of \$13,690 and less.

Lower Columbia CAP will meet with each applicant to review all necessary documentation and determine if they are eligible. Appointments are available through March 31 and can be made by calling CAP at (360) 425-3430. Questions can also be directed to Cowlitz PUD.

## Invest in Green Power – Just \$2 a Month!

Cowlitz PUD's Renewable Resource Energy program lets customers voluntarily support development of environmentally friendly “Green Power” sources like wind, solar, low-impact hydro, geothermal and biomass. The cost is two dollars per 100 kilowatt hour block of electricity – added to your regular monthly PUD bill. Access [www.cowlitzpud.org](http://www.cowlitzpud.org), go to the Conservation and Renewables pulldown menu and look for Purchase Green Tags to find out more.

## Customer Information Available

Cowlitz PUD's Annual Customer Report and information about electric rates, customer policies and a fuel mix report are available on request or can be accessed on our website.



### Looking for gift ideas?

How about a good cause?

Cowlitz PUD thanks CAP and its entire staff for the many years we have worked together to help those who need assistance to pay their electric bill or to weatherize their home. You can support Lower Columbia CAP with a tax-deductible donation in a loved one's name. Call CAP at (360) 425-3430, ext. 280.

*As space is available in Connected, Cowlitz PUD offers the What's Happening column to provide public, non-profit groups with wide interest in Cowlitz County an avenue to promote their activities (on a first-come, first-served basis). Please send your request via email to: [whatshappening@cowlitzpud.org](mailto:whatshappening@cowlitzpud.org).*



### November highlights:

- Adopted a 15 percent water rate increase effective December 1.
- Authorized the General Manager to sign an Interlocal Agreement with the Beacon Hill Sewer District providing for the transition of the operations and maintenance of the PUD water system.
- Adopted the revised Line Extension Policy, Electric Service Conditions Policy and Electrical Facilities Sabotage Policy.
- Authorized the GM to execute agreements related to development of the White Creek Wind Project Phase III.

### Upcoming PUD Board meetings:

Tuesday, January 8  
Tuesday, January 22

These public meetings are held in the PUD Auditorium, 961 12th Avenue in Longview at 2:00 p.m. Please check our website for up-to-the-minute Board agendas, meeting dates and times.

## Automated Metering - *First 1,500 Meters are Installed*

Cowlitz PUD is nearing completion of system acceptance testing on the first 1,500 new automated meters that were installed as part of the five-year Advanced Metering Infrastructure project.

By 2011, every customer will have a new meter that communicates on a real-time basis with computers in the PUD office, via a signal over power lines. It will allow us to read your meter automatically from the PUD office. One day you'll be able to monitor your electric usage online and set your monthly billing date.

The testing process confirmed that we are able to communicate via computer with over 95 percent of the new meters. We are now working with the manufacturer to diagnose any lingering problems, to ensure 100 percent success.

Once that is done, we will begin installing another 11,000 meters in April. PUD customers served by our 7th Avenue and Washington Way substations – including Downtown Longview, Broadway Addition, Lake Sacajawea area and Olympic addition – will receive a letter this spring with more details about automated metering and notifying them of a pending installation.

Every month in this newsletter space, the PUD will share information and answer questions about the automated metering project. If you have a specific question, drop us an email at the address below.

When we're close to installing your new meter, we'll send a letter a few weeks in advance. In the meantime, feel free to give us a call or email us with comments and questions at [customercomments@cowlitzpud.org](mailto:customercomments@cowlitzpud.org).

## From the General Manager's Point-of-View...

The White Creek Wind Project, which Cowlitz PUD helped develop, is built and has been producing electricity since mid-November. Cowlitz PUD will purchase 46 percent of the White Creek output for the next 20 years.



The project began six years ago as a vision of Aaron Jones, the former Executive Director of the Washington Rural Electric Cooperative Association. Aaron believed today's generation of utility leaders needed to step up and develop wind projects, much like their public power predecessors who developed hydro projects in the 50's and 60's. He was also concerned that investor-owned utilities and out-of-state independent power producers were tying up the promising sites for wind development.

That vision led to the negotiation of land-use agreements in eastern Klickitat County and the birth of the Last Mile Electric Cooperative (LMEC). Cowlitz PUD was not a part of LMEC initially. But our Cowlitz PUD Board recognized the potential for wind development and their constituents' desire for renewable energy development. They voted to join LMEC when the opportunity arose in 2003. Their foresight turned into a very wise decision.

White Creek's development began with environmental and wind studies performed earlier this decade, followed by applications for permits in 2004 and 2005. Later a plan was developed to allow the participating consumer-owned utilities to utilize Federal Production Tax Credits (thereby lowering the cost of power) and financial partners were solicited and selected. Arrangements were made with BPA to build a new substation, transmission lines were built, wind turbines were procured and contracts were negotiated.

Financial details were finalized last December and the final decision to move forward with construction was made by Cowlitz PUD, Klickitat PUD, Lakeview Light & Power (Lakewood, WA) and Tanner Electric (North Bend, WA).

We anticipated project completion in December 2007 at a total cost of \$361.2 million and predicted the 2008 wholesale power cost from White Creek at \$44.57 per megawatt hour.

In the end we did much better. Actual costs are about \$357.2 million, 1.1 percent under budget. First-year power costs are now expected to be \$39.49 MWh, well under projections. After the difficulty associated with rebuilding the PUD's Swift 2 hydro project, completing White Creek ahead of schedule and under budget sure feels good.

The decision to go forward with White Creek feels pretty good too. Since we started the planning and construction process, voters of the State passed I-937 requiring a certain percentage of our future power supply come from renewable resources. Cowlitz PUD's share of the White Creek wind power covers its renewable requirements until 2016.

Wind equipment costs are now soaring in a seller's market. By getting White Creek built today, we avoided tomorrow's higher equipments costs, making the project far more economical and a better deal for our customers. Our Board of Commissioners correctly foresaw these events when they voted to participate in the project way back in 2003.

Cowlitz PUD will sell its White Creek power on the market until 2012, since we can buy all the power we need today from BPA at less cost. The revenues from these market sales will help fund the PUD's operations, maintenance and system improvement programs, money that would otherwise come from Cowlitz PUD ratepayers. Starting in 2012, when I-937 kicks in and BPA can't meet our load growth needs, a small but increasing portion of your electricity will come from this economical, innovative and environmentally responsible project.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'B. Skeahan'. The signature is fluid and cursive, written over a white background.

Brian Skeahan  
General Manager

## Contact Information

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