

c nnected

COWLITZ PUD CELEBRATES 90 YEARS OF POWERING COWLITZ COUNTY

continued from January's Connected

Powering a Community: How Bold Vision Shaped Cowlitz PUD's Future

When crews began building Bonneville Dam in the 1930s under President Franklin D. Roosevelt's Works Progress Administration, many people couldn't imagine a world that needed so much electricity. Dubbed the "Dam of Doubt," the project was criticized as extravagant—yet history proved it transformative. That same spirit of bold planning would later guide the young Cowlitz PUD as it worked to secure a prosperous energy future for our growing community.



Building photo: Identifiable individuals are listed from left to right as follows: Alan Luff, Jim Valentine, Sid Nelson, Hap Hendrickson, E.A. Gordon, Art Symonds, Danny Jacobs, and Leo Teig.

Location: Main Street, West Kelso, at the intersection of 3rd Avenue.

Expanding Service to a Growing County

After slower growth during World War II, Cowlitz PUD moved quickly to unify electric service across the county. In 1946 the PUD acquired Northwestern Electric Company, bringing 1,800 more customers in Kalama, Woodland, and nearby rural areas into the district. That same year, the PUD added water service for hundreds of households in Lower Columbia Heights, Beacon Hill, and Lexington.

The county's electricity service was a patchwork at the time—up to 47 different rate schedules—and long range planning was nearly impossible. That changed by 1948, when Cowlitz PUD acquired the last privately owned utility in the county. By 1949, the district, now under new general manager Glenn "O.G." Hittle, was the sole power provider for Cowlitz County, selling 282 million kilowatt hours in a single year.

The Penny Per Kilowatt Revolution

As post war construction boomed and copper became scarce during the Korean War, Cowlitz PUD became one of the first utilities in the nation to switch almost entirely to aluminum. But one copper emblem remained—the penny.

By 1953, Cowlitz PUD customers were paying less than one cent per kilowatt hour, among the lowest rates in the country. The average household paid just \$6.13 per month, compared to \$10.58 in Butte, Montana, and \$14 in Chicago. Cowlitz County quickly became a leader in all electric homes—complete with

televisions, dishwashers, stoves, and electric heating—paying only 0.8 cents per kilowatt hour by 1961.

Looking Ahead: The Need for New Power

Even with abundant hydroelectricity from Columbia River dams, PUD leaders recognized that relying solely on federal power wasn't enough. By 1955, commissioners warned that without new energy sources, the region risked "being left in the backwash of progress." Growing industries, expanding neighborhoods, and a rising quality of life demanded long term planning.

To prepare for the future, Cowlitz PUD secured contracts with Grant County PUD for power from the Priest Rapids Project—but even that wasn't enough. The district needed a resource of its own.

A Bold Partnership on the Lewis River

In the mid 1950s, Cowlitz PUD took a major leap by joining a new hydroelectric project on the Lewis River. Pacific Power & Light had already developed Merwin (1931) and Yale (1950s) dams and planned a third facility farther upstream—Swift.

Under the Federal Power Act's "public preference" clause, Cowlitz PUD challenged for a share of the project. The Federal Energy Regulatory Commission ultimately approved a unique partnership: PacifiCorp would build the Swift No. 1 dam and reservoir, while Cowlitz PUD would build the canal and the Swift No. 2 powerhouse. The two utilities would jointly own and operate the system.

Construction began in 1957, and by 1959, the Swift project was generating power—an engineering achievement and a long term financial asset for Cowlitz County.

A Legacy That Still Benefits Customers Today

For many years, Cowlitz PUD didn't need the electricity from Swift No. 2 and sold its share back to PacifiCorp. But that ownership was a strategic safeguard—a "sleeping beauty" waiting for the moment the community needed it.

Retired Communications Director Dave Andrew explains, affordable rates in Cowlitz County came not from large industries subsidizing residential customers, but from smart decisions made decades ago. Power purchases from Grant County and the construction of the Swift project laid the foundation for the low, stable rates that continue to benefit customers today.

In the words of Andrew, "It was the right people at the right place at the right time."

Continued in next month's Connected.

Details for this article were made available thanks to former Daily News Editor Cathy Zimmerman.

Have a story, photo, or artifact to share?

Send it to adietz@cowlitzpud.org and tell us how public power has touched your family, neighborhood, or career.



CYBERSECURITY

Taxes and Cybersecurity

With the arrival of tax season, the FTC published a consumer alert on January 15th, 2026, warning people about tax-related scams on the rise. Scammers use all avenues to reach potential targets, including phone calls, text messages, emails, and pop-ups on your devices. They often try to scare you or create a sense of urgency to make you act quickly. Remember, the IRS and other government agencies will never contact you directly demanding payment in unusual ways, such as bitcoins or gift cards. Keep these simple tips in mind to avoid falling for these scams:



- Never provide any personal or financial information to unexpected contacts or urgent appeals—especially if they pressure you to act immediately, threaten legal action, or request payment through odd methods like gift cards or cryptocurrency.
- Take advantage of IRS and other services’ security options, such as two-factor authentication (where you use both a password and a code sent to your phone for extra protection) and passkeys (secure login methods that don’t rely solely on passwords).
- Always contact the IRS and other agencies and services through their official websites and channels, such as IRS.gov, to ensure you are interacting with legitimate representatives.

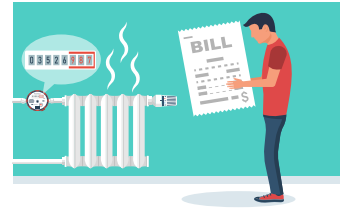


CUSTOMER SERVICE

LIHEAP – ENERGY ASSISTANCE

What is LIHEAP?

A federally funded program administered by Lower Columbia CAP to help low-income households with heating bills. *Cowlitz PUD does not manage or set requirements.*



How to Apply:

Complete pre-application and schedule an appointment at lowercolumbiacap.org

Contact:
Lower Columbia CAP – Energy & Housing
1526 Commerce Ave, Longview, WA
360.425.3430

Discounted Rate Program

Reduced electric rates for qualifying customers.

Eligibility:

- Income up to 200% FPL or 80% AMI
- Age 62+, permanent disability, active military, or veteran

Discounts:

- 20% (up to 200% FPL)
- 30% (up to 150% FPL)

How to Apply:

[Online](#) or at our office. Submit application with required documents. All forms available in Spanish and Chuukese.

WARM NEIGHBOR PROGRAM

Short-term assistance funded by customer donations.



Eligibility:

- Income up to 200% FPL or 80% AMI
- Must have disconnect notice
- Applicant must be on PUD account

Assistance:

- Up to \$300 per 12 months
- One application per household

How to Apply:

Get packet [online](#) or at PUD office. Return with income verification. All forms available in Spanish and Chuukese.

FREE TAX PREPARATION

AARP Foundation Tax-Aide provides Free Tax Preparation



Longview/Kelso area residents can get their taxes done for free from January 31st -April 11th. AARP membership is not required, and there are no age or income limitations. To make an appointment with IRS Certified AARP Tax-Aide volunteers, call the Longview Library at 360.442.5300 or Lower Columbia CAP at 360.425.3430

Celebrating 90 Years

Connected is published by Cowlitz PUD

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Board of Commissioners meets the second and fourth Tuesday of each month at 2pm.

To attend contact mpetterson@cowlitzpud.org