



# CONNECTED

The Newsletter of Cowlitz PUD

Volume 11, No. 6

## Every Drop Counts



Living in a community surrounded by trees, mountains, and rivers, it might seem far-fetched to consider our drinking water supply ever running low. But that's exactly what Longview, Lexington, and parts of the surrounding area could face again this summer – or anytime of the year.

Cowlitz PUD owns the water system that serves about 3,800 customers in the Columbia Heights, Lone Oak, Beacon Hill, Lexington and Ostrander areas. We are in the process of transferring the water system to Beacon Hill Sewer District, which is now operating and maintaining the system. We are partners with the City of Longview in the Regional Water Treatment Plant (RWTP).

### Silt problems in the Cowlitz River

Water from the Cowlitz River is filtered and treated at the RWTP and then delivered to City of Longview and Beacon Hill Sewer District customers. There is plenty of water in the Cowlitz River. But as we have experienced over the past four years, a large amount of silt washing down from Mt. St. Helens is clogging the RWTP intake facility and that limits access to the river's water supply.

The RWTP has struggled both summer and winter due to the increased silt. Our water supply becomes vulnerable when you couple increased water use with the silt problem,

and a 60-year old treatment plant that has experienced filter failures.

### What we've done to help avoid a water emergency

Beacon Hill Sewer District and the PUD have developed a four-step plan which includes a public information campaign and a water rate surcharge, should a Stage 2 emergency be declared by the City of Longview. The plan is outlined on the PUD's website. The City of Longview's four-stage water emergency plan is posted at <http://www.mylongview.com/publicworks/RWTPMain.htm>.

The long-term fix is a new City of Longview groundwater supply at the Mint Farm, which is now in the planning stages after being approved by the Longview City Council in June. But the best case scenario for completion of such a plant is nearly three years away.

Although this newsletter is sent to PUD electric customers, most who do not have water service supplied by the City of Longview or Beacon Hill Sewer District, we think it is worthwhile to share the Longview-area water situation with all our customers. No matter where you live in Cowlitz County please use water wisely, especially during the summer and when we experience hot weather.

### Inside This Issue:

- Automated Metering Update
- Budget Plan Payment Changes
- A Message From the General Manager

**YOU CAN PAY YOUR PUD BILL ONLINE**

[www.cowlitzpud.org](http://www.cowlitzpud.org)

Debit or credit card (Visa/MasterCard)

# Come join Cowlitz PUD employees and their families at two big community events

**Cowlitz County Fair**  
**July 30-August 2**  
**PUD Charity Bingo**  
**Daily: Noon to 10:00 p.m.**



Don't miss the 3rd annual Cowlitz PUD Charity Bingo event at the Cowlitz County Fair. The last two years we raised over \$7,000 for charity and have had a lot of fun doing it.

We welcome all PUD customers to join us at the 2008 Cowlitz County Fair as our employees volunteer their time to raise funds for the Warm Neighbor Program. It's great family fun...bingo at the County Fair!

Stop by our tent during the fair, say hello and enjoy a game or two of bingo. You can play for 50¢, there are cash prizes and the proceeds go to charity.



**American Cancer Society's**  
**Relay for Life®**  
**August 9-10**  
**10:00 a.m. to 10:00 a.m.**  
**Cowlitz County Expo Center**



Relay for Life is a fun-filled overnight event designed to celebrate survivorship and raise money to help the American Cancer Society save lives, help those who have been touched by cancer, and empower individuals to fight back against this disease.

Over 60 Cowlitz PUD employees and family members are ready to take part in our local Relay for Life event this summer. Last year PUD employees teamed up to raise over \$16,000 for this worthy cause.

Overall, 67 Relay for Life teams have signed up so far in the community and have a combined goal of \$220,000. If you would like to participate and/or contribute please call Sherry at (360) 575-8980 or Janet (360) 423-6988.

## *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.

## **Did your budget plan monthly payment just change?**

Every year between April and August, most PUD's residential customers on the Budget Payment plan see a change in their monthly payment. In some cases the payment goes up and in others it goes down. Some stay the same.

When the payment amount changes we quite often get phone calls asking if electric rates have increased or decreased. The short answer is "no" our rates have not changed, but the level of electric usage in your home has. The amount of your payment is set based on electric usage for the past year. Many factors can make that usage vary in the coming year – hotter or colder weather, more or less people living in your home, habit changes, etc. So every 12 months the PUD reviews all budget pay accounts and adjusts

the monthly payment accordingly, based on past electric usage and the balance on the account.

If you have a credit after 12 months you will likely see your next year's budget payment drop. If you have a balance on your account, that means you used more electricity than we estimated and the budget payment will likely increase in the coming year. After another 12 months we'll review it again and change the payment if necessary.

If you are not on Budget Pay and would like to consider it, you can sign up through August. Find out more about Budget Pay at [www.cowlitzpud.org](http://www.cowlitzpud.org) or call the PUD to sign-up or to find out if you qualify.

## What's Happening

### Sign Up for Head Start

Fall signup is underway for Lower Columbia College Head Start and Early Childhood Education Assistance Program (ECEAP). Children must be age 3 by August 31 and meet income qualifications.



The program serves 416 children from the communities of Castle Rock, Kelso, Longview, Toutle, and Kalama, providing free preschool, health and nutrition services, services for children with disabilities, social services, limited transportation, and parent training.

#### Head Start/ECEAP (LCC campus)

1724 19th - Longview  
(360) 442-2800



*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).*

## Commission Activities



May-June highlights:

- Adopted a resolution authorizing direct negotiation with turbine manufacturers for the procurement of wind turbine generators at the Harvest Wind Project, waiving the competitive bidding requirement. Harvest Wind represents a possible expansion and next phase of the White Creek Wind Project in Klickitat Co., WA.
- Attended the dedication of the White Creek Wind Project. An estimated crowd of 300 – including Klickitat County residents, local governments officials, federal and state legislative members and staff and regional utility leaders attended the event, which was held on May 8 at the project site.
- Met in a workshop with the Beacon Hill Sewer District Board to review progress of the transfer of the PUD's water system to BHSD.

#### Upcoming PUD Board meetings:

- Tuesday, July 22
- Tuesday, August 12
- Tuesday, August 26

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 - 2008 meter installation work is underway

Cowlitz PUD has moved into the second year of its 5-year Advanced Metering Infrastructure (AMI) plan. We are installing 11,000 advanced electric meters in 2008 mostly in Longview – including Downtown, the Broadway Addition, Lake Sacajawea area and the Olympic addition. New meters may also be installed in parts of Castle Rock and Kalama later this year.

The PUD launched AMI in 2007. When completed in 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. Meters will be read automatically from the PUD office. One day you'll be able to monitor your electric usage online and set your monthly billing date.

#### PUD installers carry photo identification

The meter technician who comes to your home or business

to install a new meter will be driving a PUD vehicle and will carry photo identification. If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to ask to see their ID.

The PUD meter technician will knock on your door before changing the meter. Expect a 5-10 minute disruption of power during the meter change. In extreme situations, or if we experience an equipment problem, the outage could be longer. If no one is home, we will change the meter and leave a notice at your front door.

If you have a question about automated metering, just email it to us at [customercomments@cowlitzpud.org](mailto:customercomments@cowlitzpud.org) and type "Automated Metering" in the subject line. If you don't have email access, send your question to Cowlitz PUD, 961 12th Avenue, Longview, WA 98632. Please write "Automated Metering" next to the address.

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

We made the news recently in two stories that addressed vandalism and theft of PUD facilities and electricity. As you can imagine, the Board, our employees and myself are angry the PUD and all its customers are victims of these crimes.



In separate incidents, thieves tore down over 10,000 feet of PUD overhead wire in a rural area north of Castle Rock. They caused a power outage in one case and the damage resulted in PUD crews being called out four times to make repairs in the middle of the night.

The price tag for all related costs for repair and replacement was \$20,000. As a customer of a consumer-owned utility, that is money being stolen from you. Further, your safety and the safety of our workers was compromised by these criminals.

Wire theft has become rampant in America as the price of copper rises. Thieves looking to make a quick buck are targeting utility lines containing copper. To protect PUD assets, we have taken steps to tighten the security of our property and resources. We have also helped successfully push for new state laws to make recycling copper and other valuable materials more difficult.

Your help is needed. Please watch for suspicious activity near PUD properties – wire, transformers and our vehicles – and call 911 if you see something that could be a crime. Cowlitz County covers 1,144 square miles. Neither the PUD nor local law enforcement can be all places at all times. We need your assistance to help protect your investment in the electric utility, and to protect your safety and the safety of your neighborhoods.

### **Power theft is an on-going problem**

In early June, local law enforcement found and identified two major marijuana growing operations in Longview. During the investigation it became obvious electricity was illegally

diverted around the PUD meters to power dozens of high-wattage lights and high-powered fans at both homes.

It appears electricity was stolen for about one year at each house. Cowlitz PUD was recently supplied with a count and wattage of the lights and equipment used. Our first estimate valued the electricity stolen at over \$25,000. Again, as a customer of a consumer-owned utility this was stolen from you.

Cowlitz PUD is always on the lookout for power thieves. We found 21 cases in the past year where people were stealing power or tampering with PUD equipment. When it happens, we shut the power off at the transformer and assess a \$250 tampering fee. The customer will not have power restored until all bills and the tampering charge are paid. We also forward information to local law enforcement to pursue criminal action.

When we do find instances of power theft, we also have the right to estimate the value of the power stolen and charge the customer for it. We make every effort to do so, and then follow-through to collect the bill if it goes unpaid.

### **How does this affect rates?**

A few customers called to ask if these major thefts will raise rates. My short answer is “no.” Cowlitz PUD’s 2008 operating budget tops \$200 million, so \$45,000 in theft-related loss, while significant, is not financially large enough to require a rate adjustment to absorb its impact. But that’s not the point.

Whether rates are affected or not, these criminal incidents are a big deal to us. With your help we will strive to minimize theft losses. We will work closely with law enforcement to identify and prosecute the offenders, doing whatever we can to make sure our justice system imposes the appropriate penalties.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Brian Skeahan". The signature is fluid and cursive, written on a white background.

Brian Skeahan, General Manager

## Contact Information

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