

# CONNECTED

The Newsletter of Cowlitz PUD

Volume 14, No. 8

## Enrollment now Open for Low-Income Senior & Disabled Discounted Rate Plans

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- PUD Employees Donate to CAP
- Federal Default Protection in Place

If you are a Cowlitz PUD customer who is 65 (or older) or disabled (and receive a disability income) – and meet the income standards listed in the chart below – you could qualify for a discounted electric rate.

Currently 703 PUD customers have applied for and earned a discounted rate, saving an average of \$15 a month on their electric bill.

**The low income standards are based on the most recent HHS poverty guidelines:**

Persons in Household	Gross Household Income		
	25% Discount	15% Discount	5% Discount
1 - 2	Up to \$14,710	\$14,710 - \$22,065	\$22,065 - \$25,743
3	Up to \$18,530	\$18,530 - \$27,795	\$27,795 - \$32,428
4	Up to \$22,350	\$22,350 - \$33,525	\$33,525 - \$39,113
5+	Up to \$26,170	\$26,170 - \$39,255	\$39,255 - \$45,798

The 2012 enrollment period is now open. If you believe you qualify, start the process by calling

Lower Columbia Community Action (CAP) at (360) 425-3430 to make an appointment to determine your eligibility. CAP will let you know exactly what information is necessary to bring with you to your appointment.

A five, 15 or 25 percent discount is available for qualified low-income customers who:

- Occupy the residence, have lived there for the past year and are legally responsible for payment of the PUD account.
- Are 65 or older, or are disabled and earn a disability income. Customers can only participate in one of the rate discount programs.
- Provide proof of age or provide proof of a disability, and proof of income.

More information is available at [www.cowlitzpud.org](http://www.cowlitzpud.org) or by contacting CAP or Cowlitz PUD.



**Call CAP at (360) 425-3430 before October 28 to apply for a low-income rate discount in 2012.**

### ***SAFETY FIRST –***

When using a ladder, working on a roof or climbing a tree, carefully inspect the surrounding area to ensure no power lines are in the vicinity.

If you need to work near a power line serving your home or business, start the job by calling Cowlitz PUD at (360) 423-2210 or (800) 631-1131. We can temporarily de-energize the power line, allowing you to work more safely.

## Cowlitz PUD Employees Donate Over Eight Tons of Food to CAP Help Warehouse



*(L-to-R) Treana Storie, Lois Shelton (CAP), Jim Rice and Shari Tomasi stand in front of a portion of the eight tons of food recently contributed by PUD employees to CAP's Help Warehouse. Photo courtesy of Michael Torres/CAP.*

Thanks to the efforts and generosity of our PUD employees, the shelves at Lower Columbia CAP's Help Warehouse were recently stocked with an additional 16,307 pounds of food and household items.

Earlier this year the PUD's 160 employees split into two teams and waged a friendly six-week competition to see which group could raise the most cash and food to donate to Help Warehouse, which is the central food collection and distribution center for Cowlitz and Wahkiakum food banks.

Besides food donations, the PUD teams also raised \$3,761—which was given to CAP to make purchases at reduced costs through food discount buying services. Combined, the PUD's gifts of food and cash resulted in over eight tons of food for area food banks.

"I am amazed by the enthusiasm of the PUD employees," said Lois Shelton, Help Warehouse Program Manager. "They really produce results. Because of their efforts we are better able to address hunger in our community."

This was the fourth PUD employee-sponsored food drive since 2007, which has now resulted in 18 tons of food to Help Warehouse in that time. PUD employees take a lot of pride in being able to help others in the community.

"The PUD food drive is our largest by any one company in the area," Shelton said. "Only the Walk n' Knock and Postal Carriers community food drives are bigger."

In 2010, Help Warehouse staff and volunteers distributed more than 1.5 million pounds of food. For more information about how to organize a food drive, call Shelton at Help Warehouse at 360-425-3430, ext 281.

## PUD Board Action Would Protect Customers in Event of Federal Default

By the time this newsletter reaches all PUD customers we hope the Federal debt ceiling issue is resolved and a special action our Board took in late July is now unnecessary. At our press time, however, Congress had not agreed on a solution.

On July 26, the PUD Board of Commissioners approved a plan to ensure the lights would stay on for customers who count on Social Security or Federal pensions. In the event there was a Federal default, one outcome could be a suspension of Social Security and Federal pension checks.

The Board action authorizes PUD staff to deviate from standard credit and collection policies and practices in that event, for customers who are impacted. Electric bills would be sent out as normal and the PUD would then work with those customers to defer payments without penalty.

"We took the action because we wanted to be prepared to best serve our customers as their local utility, just in case," PUD Board President Mark McCrady said.

At the same time the PUD Board said it could withhold the amount of any customer payments not received, from what it is billed for power purchases by BPA, a Federal agency. In this scenario once the Federal government resumes its normal distribution practice to its affected constituents, the PUD would repay BPA any monies it owes and resume normal bill payment practices.

"Essentially this was our statement to Congress and the President to do what the people expected of them and figure this all out, for the benefit of their constituents," McCrady said.

## What's Happening

### Harvest Classic – Run/Walk Saturday, October 1

The 31st annual Longview Early Edition Rotary Harvest Classic charity road race is set for Saturday, October 1. All proceeds benefit the Help Warehouse, our local food bank.

The 10K run/walk and the 2.7 mile run/walk begin at 8:30 a.m. near Life Works, 906 New York Street in Longview. Pre-registration cost is \$30 with a long-sleeve t-shirt and \$14 without. Registration the day of the race is \$35, or \$18 without a t-shirt. A Pee Wee fun run starts at 9:45 a.m.

#### **ALL PARTICIPANTS ARE ENCOURAGED TO BRING CANNED FOOD DONATIONS.**

Prizes include lodging at the Oregon Coast and a Willamette River cruise for two. You can register at [www.active.com](http://www.active.com). Get more information by email at [harvestclassic@live.com](mailto:harvestclassic@live.com) or call Dave Coons at 360-431-4630.

### Ethnic Support Council International Dinner & Auction Friday, September 16

You can help benefit the Ethnic Support Council by attending the 15th annual International Dinner & Auction on Friday, September 16 at the Cowlitz County Expo Center. This year's event runs from 6:00-9:00 p.m. and will celebrate the culture of Vietnam.

Individual tickets are \$40 in advance or \$45 at the door. Save \$20 by purchasing a table for eight for \$300.

Contact Cindy Lopez Worth for more information:  
[cindylopezworth@comcast.net](mailto:cindylopezworth@comcast.net) or 360-751-4427.

*Each month Cowlitz PUD offers this space to a non-profit group in Cowlitz County as an avenue to promote its activities (on a first-come, first-served basis). Send your request to: [whathappening@cowlitzpud.org](mailto:whathappening@cowlitzpud.org).*

## Commission Activities



### July 2011 highlights:

- **Approved the low-income senior citizen and disabled citizen discount rate programs for 2012.** During 2011, 703 PUD customers applied and qualified for a low-income rate discount. The net cost of the discounted rate programs over the past year was \$116,650, which is funded through electric rates.
- **Approved a resolution to temporarily waive utility bill collections for those customers not receiving a Social Security check,** in the event the Federal government fails to honor its payment obligations as a result of a Federal default. See more on page 2.

### Upcoming PUD Board meetings:

Tuesday, September 13

Tuesday, September 27

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



## Go Green!

You can support the development of environmentally friendly "Green Power" sources like wind, solar, low-impact hydro, geothermal and biomass. The cost is as low as \$40 a year and may be tax deductible.

1. Log on to [www.cowlitzpud.org](http://www.cowlitzpud.org)
2. Go to the **Conservation and Renewables** menu
3. Click on **Purchase Green Tags**

### Save the Date:

## PUD Senior Fair

Thursday, October 13 - 10:00 to 3:00

John Searing Auditorium at the PUD

More details coming in next month's newsletter

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

The Bonneville Power Administration has announced a 7.8 percent wholesale electric rate increase, effective October 1.

Power supply makes up 70 percent of our total budget and nearly all that power is purchased from BPA. The BPA rate increase will add over \$11 million to our budget.



We saw this coming a year ago and shared that news in our newsletter and local media, so hopefully it's no surprise to you. As we have communicated, this will cause local PUD rates to increase in October. We'll announce how much soon.

No one likes higher bills – for food, gas, tuition, rent or electricity. And it frustrates me when our rates increase. A good share of my time and our Board's time is spent pushing back on the things that increase your rates. Often times it feels like we are pushing a big boulder up a steep hill.

So now let me get on my soapbox...

**Item 1:** One of those big boulders is BPA's costs associated with salmon protection. About one-fourth of your PUD bill goes to pay mandated fish costs and it keeps going up. In my opinion much of that spending is wasted.

Yet a semi-retired Federal judge in Portland continues to drag out the biological opinion, (which dictates much of what is spent) and now the Obama Administration has nominated a candidate for Assistant Secretary in the Department of Interior, who in her past has advocated for removing dams on the Snake River.

I shake my head just thinking about our Federal government considering someone for a key position who supports eliminating a source of low-cost, clean energy and also says the biological opinion is not tough or expensive enough. We'll watch to see how many Pacific Northwest senators oppose this nomination.

**Item 2:** A significant new cost driver for PUDs is state voter-approved Initiative 937, which requires an increasing percentage of our power supply to come from renewable resources and cost-effective conservation. This is required whether we need the power or not – and right now we don't. The new law takes effect in 2012.

Cowlitz PUD has taken steps to comply with this law, most notably with its investment in wind power. But it comes at a cost. Our wind power costs less than other wind generation in the region, but still is about double the cost of hydro power.

**Item 3:** Many new regulations have been imposed on electric utilities. We now employ a full-time staff member to keep up with ever-changing Federal requirements addressing system reliability and operational security. Our electric system, computer hardware/software and general security of our buildings and grounds are all subject to growing regulations.

Safety and security is a priority for us, but it's costly. As is the case with most regulations Congress hands down, there are some good ideas – and others that are overkill.

**Item 4:** And then there's the Federal deficit and debt ceiling discussion. Hopefully by the time you read this it's been resolved. But it has the potential to raise future costs to borrow money to build and maintain our infrastructure and new generation projects. Raising those costs raises your rates.

On one hand these are complicated and quite often frustrating issues. However, I appreciate the opportunity to work on them on your behalf.

I ask you to keep in mind that many of the costs responsible for driving up your electric bill are borne out of state and Federal decisions – on which our board and staff have no control. When you stay informed and understand the implications of these decisions, it helps us help you.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Brian Skeahan', written in a cursive style.

Brian Skeahan  
General Manager

## Contact Information

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