

Between the Lines

Customer Newsletter Fall 2020 BentonPUD.org

Benton PUD provides customer support during COVID-19

As our community continues to deal with the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic emergency, we understand the challenges our customers are facing and that many are experiencing financial hardship. Our staff is prepared to provide information on payment arrangements and assistance.

Benton PUD commissioners approved an extension of the temporary suspension of late fees and disconnections for non-payment for residential and general service customers. This extension ensures customers will remain connected to essential services during COVID-19. For the latest on the temporary suspension as well as customer support programs, please visit **BentonPUD.org/COVIDCustomerSupport**

Benton PUD offers low-income discounts for qualified senior, disabled, active military and veteran customers. Qualified customers may receive a 10%, 15% or 25% monthly discount based on total annual household income.

Benton PUD's Helping Hands funds are available for qualified low-income customers. Eligible customers may receive \$125-\$225, based on the number of people in the household and annual income. The Helping Hands program is administered by Benton-Franklin Community Action Connection (CAC). Please contact CAC at (509) 545-4042 for information.

The Washington State Department of Social and Health Services offers emergency programs. These programs can include emergency funds to help cover basic needs such as food, housing and assistance paying utility bills. For information, go to WashingtonConnection.org or call (877) 501-2233 to complete your application.

Washington 2-1-1 has the latest information about assistance that may be available, including utility assistance, diapers, transportation, food and shelter. Dial 2-1-1 from any phone or go to **wa211.org** for more information.

Customer Service staff is available to assist you Monday-Friday, 8:30 am to 5:00 pm. Please contact us at (509) 582-2175 or at **customerservice@bentonpud.org**.



Wind power development questioned

Benton PUD commissioners recently approved a report, *Wind Power and Clean Energy Policy Perspectives*, intended to provide a utility view of the impacts of the state's clean energy policies and to raise concerns about the life-cycle environmental and economic costs of further development of wind power. The report provides an in-depth review of Benton PUD's over 92% clean power supply portfolio and the background supporting our commission's conclusion not to support further development of wind power in the Pacific Northwest.

Among other considerations, Benton PUD's commissioners and staff continue to voice serious concerns with investing in wind farm development at a time when Northwest electric utilities are facing the real possibility of power grid blackouts precipitated by rapid retirement of coal-fired power plants. While wind power can be a substitute for some of the annual energy produced by coal, it cannot provide the dependable capacity required for balancing electricity supply and demand on an around the clock basis, and under a wide variety of weather conditions.

Thanks to abundant hydroelectric power, coal plants have not historically played a big role in meeting the annual energy needs of Northwest utilities, but they have been an important contributor to meeting regional electricity demand during the coldest days of winter and hottest days of summer. Benton PUD's report asks what urgent "dirty energy" problem are we attempting to solve through the aggressive timelines and technology restrictions of Washington State's Clean Energy Transformation Act that is worth sacrificing vast amounts of our natural landscapes to industrial wind turbines and risks blackouts that jeopardize the health, safety and wellbeing of Northwest electricity customers?

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For more information  BentonPUD.org or call Customer Service 509.582.2175

Wind power continued:

Unlike the narrower focus of some wind power interests, utilities must balance environmental benefits and concerns with costs and power grid reliability. Before Benton PUD customers and citizens throughout our region accept further sacrifice of the natural beauty and open spaces that are part of our way of life, we want them to know there are other options we should be asking our legislators and utility industry leaders to urgently and seriously consider.

Benton PUD believes the best long-term, sustainable and environmentally responsible strategy to meet our state's 100% clean energy aspirations is to keep our clean hydroelectric power in place and to replace the relatively small amount of coal power in our region with cleaner burning natural gas. This will keep our power grid reliable in the near and mid-terms while setting the stage for a possible future transition from natural gas to nuclear power.

We encourage you to read the report to gain a better understanding of our commission's perspective on wind power in the Northwest. *Wind Power and Clean Energy Policy Perspectives* can be found at BentonPUD.org/WindPower



Hydroelectricity helped us recover from the Great Depression almost 100 years ago. Today, that same power is helping us recover from the climate crisis. For more on how hydro is leading the charge for the Northwest to realize its clean energy potential go to nwriverpartners.org

Energy 101: battery powered by hydro

Hydroelectric power is considered a renewable energy source, meaning its fuel is replenished by nature, or more specifically by the water cycle. Precipitation that falls as rain helps keep the rivers flowing in the winter and spring, but it's the melting snow that carries us through the dry summer months.

Summer flows are dependent on water in storage reservoirs or large pools behind hydroelectric dams. These reservoirs act like giant batteries that provide water when it's needed. Following dry winters with little snowpack, it may be difficult to refill the reservoirs, and there may not always be enough water to meet all demands on the system. By controlling the flow of water through turbines, hydro operators can store or release water to generate electricity depending on demand. Stored water can also be released through spillways, rather than turbines, to increase river flows and help fish migrate downstream to the ocean.

Operating the Columbia River hydropower system to support all these needs is quite the balancing act and having the storage capacity of reservoirs is critical to its success.

For more on how hydroelectric power works go to BPA.gov

Safety tips for students back to school

Get a head-start on the coming year by teaching your children some basic electrical safety practices. Knowing these things can result in a life-saving skill.

Teach young children never play with electrical outlets or stick anything in them. According to the Electrical Safety Foundation International, nearly seven children are hospitalized each day for electrical injuries caused by messing with a wall outlet. Remind young elementary children not to play near power lines and to stay away from transformers and other electrical equipment when outdoors. If your high school students are driving, ensure they are obeying traffic laws and practice safety where utility crews are working.

Before your students start driving alone, educate them on what to do if they're involved in a car accident involving a downed power line. Teach them to assume the line is energized, remain in the vehicle, and call the Benton PUD Outage Line at 1(888) 582-2176. If they must exit the vehicle, jump with both feet together and avoid contact with the vehicle and ground at the same time. Then shuffle away with both feet on the ground to reduce electrical shock risk.

Visit BentonPUD.org for more electrical safety tips you can use.

Energy savings rebates

Conserving electricity is good for the environment and your wallet. If you are planning to complete a home improvement project this fall or make upgrades to your business, consider taking advantage of some of our rebates. Benton PUD rebates are offered to help you improve the efficiency of your home and reduce your overall energy usage.

Benton PUD offers rebates for various appliances, insulation, windows, doors, heat pumps and water heaters, and smart thermostats. We also offer rebates for your business that include HVAC systems and commercial/industrial lighting.

Benton PUD also offers our customers a \$250 rebate for the purchase of a new all-electric vehicle. For more information about our rebates, to see if you are eligible, or for year-round energy savings tips, go to BentonPUD.org/EnergySavings

Vines & power poles don't mix

Vegetation is a frequent cause of accidental disruptions to your electrical service. One of the causes of those disruptions are vines.

Vines are typically planted for their landscape characteristics, but many are voluntary invasive plants. Vines can grow rapidly around utility poles, power lines and pose several serious risks. As these plants encroach into utility equipment, they can cause power outages and increase power restoration times. Vines also create a hazardous situation for our line workers.

While trees can be pruned, vines are very aggressive and should be removed. For this reason, we discourage anyone from planting or allowing them to grow on power poles.



If you notice existing vines around power poles, please call Benton PUD's Tree Coordinator at (509) 585-5399. If you have questions about planting the right plants or our Tree Program, please visit BentonPUD.org/TreeProgram

Where does your power come from ?

Hydro	79.6%
Nuclear	9.8%
Wind	5.2%
Market Purchases	3.1%
Other	1.8%
Natural Gas	.5%