

Between the Lines

Benton PUD Customer Newsletter Spring 2016



Prosser is a little greener

Last summer when Benton PUD introduced the first community solar project in the Tri-Cities, we were pleased with the response. Customers requested more units than were available for purchase so we chose to build another project, the Old Inland Empire Project, in Prosser.

The cost of the second project, \$135,000, was completely funded by customer participation. The 493 units available for purchase were offered to the next remaining customers on the list developed from the first project. Forty-four more customers were able to participate. This project's size is 24.6 kilowatts with 88 solar panels manufactured by Itek, located in Bellingham WA. The project is expected to generate enough electricity to meet the energy needs of two average homes annually. The size of the project was chosen in order to meet state limits on utility ownership of community solar projects.



Jeff Hall
Commissioner

Today, the project is operational and I'm proud that Benton PUD built the first community solar project in Prosser.

Jeff Hall
Benton PUD Commissioner

You are invited to join us at the ribbon-cutting ceremony
9:00 a.m., Tuesday, April 26
at the project site located on Old Inland Empire and
Gap Road next to Benton PUD's Prosser facility



A look at our future

Each and every year since the start of this decade, Benton PUD has devoted time to look at both our future and the industry's future over the next three to five years. This planning regimen has helped us anticipate the direction of our industry so that we can begin to adapt before change passes us by.

Without a doubt, the pace of change has quickened. For a number of years, the electric sector lagged behind the degree of change experienced in other industries, such as telecommunications. However, the pace of change in the electric industry is now catching up, and in a big way. Over the next five to ten years, our industry is expecting more change than it has seen in a very long time. It is no surprise that technology is the key driver, particularly in the areas of solar, energy storage, outage and distribution management, electric vehicles and customer engagement. Industry regulation has been and will continue to be another key factor.



Chad Bartram
General Manager

To help us plan for this changing future, Benton PUD reached out to our customers back in 2013 to discuss some of the new things coming your way. We called those meetings **"Plug into Your Future."** Later this year, we would like to do that again. It is important for us to share some of these upcoming changes, and receive input from you concerning all aspects of our operations both now and in the future. We will let you know when those meetings are approaching and look forward to hearing from you. We always welcome input by e-mail at questions@bentonpud.org

Chad Bartram
Benton PUD General Manager

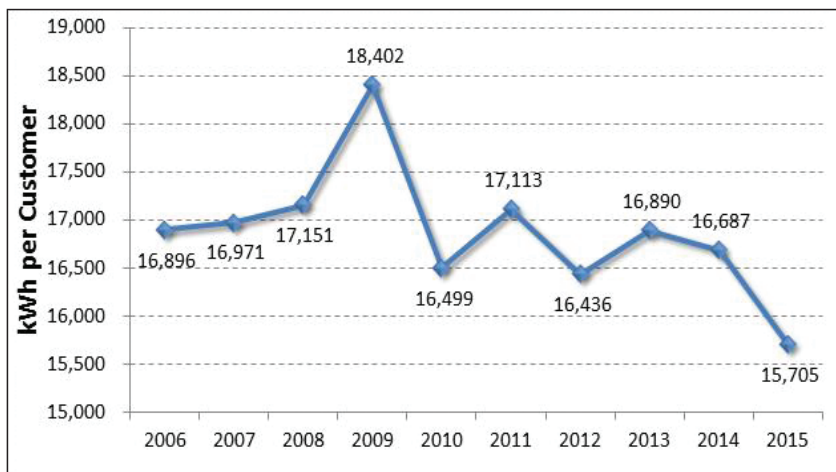
"Weather" or not, it impacts your bill

When our summer temperatures exceed 100 degrees and our winter temperatures drop below freezing, there is no doubt that your electricity usage will be impacted. With this in mind, you will notice how your bill fluctuates throughout the year. Only a few days of extreme temperatures can increase your usage and cause your bill to be noticeably higher.

The annual usage for our residential customers varies year to year, primarily based on our weather. While there were some very hot days during last summer, the winter months in 2015 were very mild. As the chart shows, in 2009, a very cold winter that year pushed our customers' annual average usage up to 18,402 kWh. Due to the mild temperature in the winter months, last year's average usage of 15,705 was the lowest in 10 years by a wide margin. As you compare your 2016 usage data throughout the year to 2015 data, please keep in mind how much lower overall energy use was during 2015.

In addition to weather, the length of daylight time, number of weekends during the billing cycle, energy efficiency measures, and added members to the household all contribute to the ups and downs of your usage.

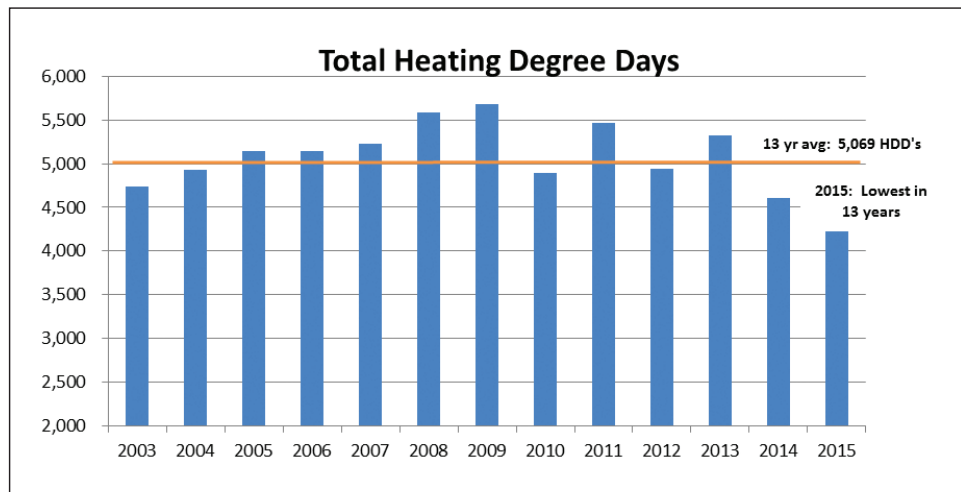
Annual Usage Per Residential Customer



Degree days – another way to track weather impact

For a more exact look at how temperature affects customers' bills, utilities track "degree days." Degree days are the difference between the actual average temperature for that day and 65° F. If it is warmer than 65°, "cooling" degree days will result. If it is cooler than 65°, "heating" degree days will result.

Each degree over or under 65° is considered a degree day. For example, if the average temperature on April 1 was 55° degrees, you subtract 55 from 65 to get 10 so that day had 10 heating degree days. By adding the degree days for all the days in a month, it provides a way to compare the months to see how much colder or warmer each month was. In the months with a larger number of heating degree days (or cooling degree days), customers will likely have a higher bill. During 2015, heating degree days were the lowest we've seen in over a decade. Note on the chart below just how low total heating degree days were in 2015.



Budget Payment Plan available

Benton PUD offers the Budget Payment Plan to help balance the seasonal highs and lows of your energy bill. Your monthly bills are averaged over the year so you pay the same amount each month.

Your Budget Payment Plan amount is calculated by adding your bills for the past 12 months and then dividing by 12. Periodically, your usage is reviewed and your monthly payment may be adjusted based on changes in usage or rates. Credit or debit balances on the account are also considered during the review process. If you are a new customer, it is best to live in the home for at least six months to ensure an accurate Budget Payment Plan payment amount is determined. To enroll, the account needs to be at a zero balance.

Improper tree planting

Black locust. Mulberry. Tree-of-heaven. Russian olive. Siberian elm...these are all trees growing in our area that can be invasive in our landscaping and yards. These trees reproduce by prolific seed production and can go unnoticed or untouched until it is too late. These trees have very little landscape value when compared to nursery trees that are slower growing, provide shade and are easy to maintain.

These examples of invasive trees have the potential to cause serious damage to Benton PUD's electrical equipment. If they continue to grow into our power lines they could even result in an outage and be a public safety hazard.

We need your help identifying these trees so they can be removed before they become a larger issue. If you have a tree growing on your property near any electric equipment or in a utility easement, contact Benton PUD's Utility Tree Coordinator, Brian Cramer, at (509) 585-5399 or cramerb@bentonpud.org. He will work with you to remove them.



Siberian Elm



Since 1946, Benton PUD has provided reliable and low cost power and related services to our community. A lot of changes have occurred over the years but one thing that has remained constant is Benton PUD's commitment to be a trusted energy partner to our customers.

This might be a call you don't want to miss !

There are times when things happen and you may not get your bill paid. When this happens, we make every effort to work with you to prevent disconnects from occurring. Prior to disconnecting service Benton PUD attempts to make an automated pre-recorded call with a message to contact us regarding the status of your account. As of May 1, 2016, Benton PUD requires your written consent for us to continue to provide this service to comply with the Telephone Consumer Protection Act.

We need your permission

A Courtesy Call Authorization form is available on our website (BentonPUD.org) and on the back of Urgent Notice and Pay Plan letters. If you would like to receive an automated courtesy call, please complete the form and return it to Benton PUD. You may discontinue this service anytime by simply notifying us.



Please be assured Benton PUD does not sell customer information and only shares phone numbers with parties who are contracted to conduct essential business for Benton PUD. Please call Customer Service with any questions.

Kids safety around electricity

Sparky speaks for Benton PUD in reminding you to teach your kids to be safe around electricity...indoors and out.

- Don't overload outlets by plugging in all of your electrical items, like your computer, tablet, video games and cell phone, into one outlet.
- Keep items – especially those that easily ignite and burn rapidly - away from heaters, light bulbs and other sources of heat.
- Keep hair dryers and other items that use electricity far away from water. Water and electricity don't mix.
- Never insert anything metal, like a fork, into a toaster without unplugging it first.
- Don't climb trees near power lines or fences near substations. If you lose a ball in a substation call Benton PUD for help. Never try to retrieve it yourself.
- Keep kites, balloons and other flying objects away from power lines. Never try to retrieve anything tangled in a power line.
- If you see a power line on the ground, stay far away and call us at 1-888-582-2176 or call 911.



May is Electrical Safety Month. We have activity books, brochures and other materials for kids of all ages that teach them to be safe around electricity. For a supply, contact our Communications Department at (509) 582-1276.



P. O. Box 6270 Kennewick, WA 99336



Low Income Assistance

Are you eligible for assistance from Helping Hands ?

If you are in need of assistance paying your bill, help may be available. You may qualify for Helping Hands. Helping Hands is a program for low income customers, funded by Benton PUD customers and employees and administered by Community Action Connections. Eligible customers may receive a maximum of \$125 once every 12 months. For more information, contact Customer Service.



Energy Efficiency Projects

Did you know? Benton PUD has an energy efficiency program specifically for low income families to use on weatherization projects, heat pumps and ductless heat pumps for their home. For more information call (509) 582-1234. We will send you information on qualification requirements and can also set up a home audit to determine what measures you may be eligible for and that fits your needs.

Benton PUD power is nearly 90% carbon-free and 81% renewable

The Benton PUD Fuel Mix as calculated by the Washington State Department of Commerce:

	Biomass	0.18%	Nuclear	8.31%
	Coal	5.86%	Waste	0.12%
	Hydro	78.60%	Wind	2.51%
	Natural Gas	4.26%	Other	0.11%