



NW Energy Coalition

THE ENERGY ACTIVIST

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Region turns out for clean energy plan

Clean energy activism swept across the region this fall.

In city after city, state after state, hundreds rallied and spoke for a Northwest Power and Conservation plan to boost our use of energy efficiency and renewable energy both for meeting new demand AND for decommissioning coal plants to reduce the electric system's global-warming pollution.

Every five years the region's official power planning agency, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council, produces a new 20-year forecast of growing electricity needs and a prescription for meeting them. The plan is binding on the Bonneville Power Administration – the Northwest's major power player

– and thus sets a baseline for all the region's utilities.

The Council released its draft Sixth Northwest Power and Conservation Plan on Sept. 3. In it, Council members – two governor appointees each from Montana, Idaho, Oregon and Washington state – call for meeting new needs primarily (85%) with energy efficiency and the rest with the new renewable energy required by existing standards in three Northwest states. Unlike any previous Council plan, this draft foresees no increase in system-wide greenhouse-gas emissions.

While applauding that historic forecast, NW Energy Coalition member groups and allies were quick to note that in 2009 the aim isn't merely to steady

global-warming emissions but to reduce them significantly.

The draft Sixth Plan basically sends utilities the message that it's OK to keep running dirty coal plants just as they're running them today. Some 13 Western coal plants now produce 23% of the electricity consumed by Northwest families and businesses and nearly 90% of the power system's climate pollution. As the Council's own studies show, the system has absolutely no chance of meeting its emissions-reduction responsibility unless it phases out coal.

Clean energy and climate activists want the final Sixth Plan, due out in December, to steer a course toward coal-free energy production.

Efficiency counts many heroes



Thanks to ...

This Energy Activist account of the 6th Northwest Power and Conservation Plan hearings was assembled from Coalition staff and activists' first-hand reports and the site-by-site notes of Council staff.

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- Northwest Power and Conservation Council staff for the excellent individual site summaries and informal notes they prepared for Council members.

Any errors are the sole responsibility of this author.

-- Marc Krasnowsky



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Founded in 1981, the NW Energy Coalition is dedicated to the pursuit of clean and affordable energy. As a 501 (c) (3) nonprofit organization, all donations to the NW Energy Coalition are tax-deductible.

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The Northwest has plenty of untapped energy efficiency and increasingly affordable new renewable energy opportunities to more than meet increasing demands, to accelerate the transition to electrified transportation, to help protect and restore Snake River salmon and steelhead endangered by federal dams, and to fulfill our climate responsibilities.

From Day 1, activists across the region made those points perfectly clear to the Council.

Astoria frames the debate

Public hearings on the draft Sixth Northwest Power and Conservation Plan began Sept. 9 in Astoria, Ore., at the conclusion of the Council’s regular monthly meeting

A quick turnaround from release of the draft and uncertain starting time guaranteed low public turnout. But NW Energy Coalition and Sierra Club activists were there to sound the opening salvo.

Coalition senior policy associate Steve Weiss, who’s been monitoring and influencing plan development from the start, arrived from Salem to deliver a sobering message to the Council: Even though this is the best power plan you’ve ever put forward, it’s not near good enough.

“The plan still only stabilizes carbon growth,” he testified. “It doesn’t reduce it.” He called attention to a Council



study showing that coal can be phased out fairly cheaply.

Sierra Club “Beyond Coal” campaign organizers Cesia Kearns and Robin Everett arrived before the hearing was supposed to start, only to find it over. They and two Club volunteers met with Oregon Council members Joan Dukes and Melinda Eden, expressing appreciation for Eden’s and Duke’s support of the draft plan’s aggressive efficiency targets and calling for final plan to include strong carbon pricing, climate leadership and a phase out of the coal now producing Northwest power.

Science, facts take a beating in Pasco

The Sept. 14 hearing in Washington state’s Tri-Cities area drew a crowd of 21 and produced some predictable utility kvetching that the Council efficiency targets are too high and/or too expensive, even though Coalition analysis shows that the targets actually are too low, especially in the first five years, and even though the cost-effective energy efficiency the Council identifies is by definition cheaper than any generation alternative.

A few global warming deniers put forward their anti-science fictions. Others demonstrated their lack of knowledge about wind power and their ignorance of the unconscionable costs of nuclear energy and of the vast nuclear and fossil fuel subsidies that dwarf those for clean resource development.

But two of the 11 people who testified, including Washington State University economics professor Jim Timmons, praised the “achievable” efficiency targets and called for capping carbon emissions or rejecting coal power.

Two Council members attended: Washington’s Tom Karier and Oregon’s Melinda Eden.

Fish surface in Spokane

An issue only lightly touched upon in initial hearings on the draft Sixth Power and Conservation Plan – the costs of salmon-survival efforts – came to the fore Sept. 15 in Spokane, Wash.

Appendix M of the draft Sixth Plan correctly applies federal law mandating equal treatment of fish and power needs by the Northwest power system. That means any resources needed to replace electricity generation “lost” to helping migrating fish survive the dams must be calculated at the average system cost – the “preferred rate” that public utilities pay BPA for federal power. That preferred rate is the average of the prices for energy efficiency and generation from dams, natural gas, coal, nuclear, wind, etc., that make up BPA’s resource mix.

For years, Bonneville has grossly inflated fish costs by using “foregone revenues” based on market price – the high price it must pay for spot purchases or the high income it receives for market sales of surplus power. The difference between the two calculations is striking: The draft Sixth Plan says foregone revenues from aiding fish migration comes to \$274 million a year; Bonneville says \$434 million a year.

At the Sept. 15 Spokane hearing, a few public utility representatives – while generally praising the draft plan’s conservation focus – insisted that fish operations costs should be calculated using Bonneville’s discredited market price methodology. The point, of course, is to make it sound like saving salmon that dams have brought to the edge of extinction is too much of a financial burden for those who benefit from federal hydropower.

But much of the testimony focused on strengthening rather than weakening fish recovery language. Several speakers

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stressed the need to remove the four fish-killing lower Snake River dams and replace their power with clean energy. Save Our wild Salmon organizer Sam Mace of Spokane noted the additional threat climate change poses to Columbia basin salmon and asked for the final plan to include the Council analysis that shows dam removal would have little effect on rates.

Dr. John Osborn, a physician and Sierra Club member, said any 20-year power plan has to take Snake River dam removal into account. Other Sierra Club and SOS members raised similar points.

NW Energy Coalition Efficiency Works! coordinator Kim Drury thanked the Council for all the conservation in the draft plan. However, she wondered why the draft doesn't call for all the bill-reducing energy efficiency the Council has identified and criticized the lower efficiency targets for the first five years of the 20-year plan.

Leaving cost-effective energy efficiency on the table will cost the region billions of dollars, she noted, while getting more would help wean the region from coal.

Drury and others urged the Council to show leadership on reducing climate emissions. Notably, Larry La Bolle of Coalition member Avista Utilities wanted the final plan to analyze the costs of meeting carbon reduction targets.

Council members Tom Karier of Washington, Joan Dukes of Oregon and chairman Bill Booth of Idaho attended the session.

Rock n' rollin' n' rallyin' in Eugene

The Eugene, Ore., hearing on the draft Sixth Power and Conservation Plan was the first accompanied by a rally for a coal-free Northwest. Sierra Club organizers dubbed Sept. 28 the "Oregon Coal Day of Action."

Before the evening hearing, about 30 people rallied outside the hearing site. Lane County Commissioner Pete Sorenson addressed the crowd, extolling the clean-energy accomplishments of the local utilities (the area is served by longtime Coalition members Eugene Water & Electric Board and Emerald People's Utility District).

It's time to raise the bar and achieve a coal-free Northwest, Sorenson said.

Ralliers took that message into the hearing room. Twenty people testified, almost all on the imperative of creating a coal-free and salmon-friendly power system. Save Our wild Salmon organizers brought several supporters to the session.

Continuing the theme of the Spokane hearing, Karl Mueller of Trout Unlimited's Eugene chapter stressed the need to



keep staff's dam removal analysis in the plan, particularly the calculation of replacement power costs.

"Do whatever it takes to protect salmon, because extinction is forever," area resident Catherine Koehn told council members. "The economic repercussions of losing the salmon would reverberate through the entire economy."

Roger Hamilton, former Oregon Public Utilities Commission chair and energy advisor to former Oregon Gov. John Kitzhaber, noted the tie between salmon preservation and increased energy efficiency achievement, which he termed a real bargain.

The Eugene hearing coincided with the Sierra Student Coalition's national day of action, and several students attended and spoke. University of Oregon senior Katherine Philipson told ralliers: "It's our responsibility to humanity to do all we can now to avoid the most catastrophic effects of climate change."

May college graduate Nick Engelfried of Hillsboro, Ore., warned that "the great danger for my generation is that we won't go all the way to a clean future. It's not enough to not build new coal plants; we need to phase out existing coal plants to protect the future that my generation will inherit."

Oregon Council members Melinda Eden and Joan Dukes attended.



Dick Wallace (by phone) and Bruce Measure, who came out from Montana for the event.

Around 200 people attended, shuttling between the ballroom and hearing room throughout the evening. Testifiers struck similar notes to those heard at previous hearings ... with a couple of new twists.

NW Energy Coalition executive director Sara Patton again complimented the Council for its commitment to meeting growth with clean energy and called for keeping efficiency goals at least as strong as those in the draft plan. Her testimony included the point that small utilities' cost concerns can be addressed without affecting the goal of capturing all cost-effective efficiency.

Then she raised the legal issue. The Northwest Power and Conservation Act requires the Council to factor in full environmental costs and benefits when choosing resources. The draft plan does not do so.

"Although the Council cannot order coal plant closures or set the price of carbon emissions, it can embrace the power system's climate-change responsibilities as well as its responsibilities to fish and wildlife already endangered by the power system whose plight is worsened by climate change," she concluded.

Wildlife roam through Seattle hearing

Seattle's Sept. 30 hearing on the draft Sixth Power and Conservation Plan had the air of an environmental festival. A giant polar bear prowled the ballroom – site of an enthusiastic coal-free rally – and even stuck its nose into the tightly packed hearing room, where 40 people testified.

A large wild salmon (actually Save Our Wild Salmon communications director Natalie Brandon) strolled through the hearing room itself. But the highlight had to be Seattle's Raging Grannies, who sang their "No More Coal" testimony to Council members Tom Karier, Melinda Eden, Joan Dukes,



Into the ether: A hearing experiment on the Web

Seeking new ways to involve the public and to lower travel costs (and emissions!), the Council tried a teleconference hearing on Oct. 5.

Only two callers testified, but one was Steve Marquardt, research director for the Northwest Region of the Laborers International Union of North America. Marquardt said his union estimates that basic home weatherization in the four Northwest states could create more than 12,000 jobs in the 20 years.

"Our members remain happy to build power plants, if energy planners are unwise enough to choose that option," he said. "But I am testifying today in support of energy conservation, not energy production From the point of view of job creation as well as climate imperatives, we must move more quickly on residential energy efficiency."

Marquardt criticized the draft plan's lower 5-year conservation target, saying it would result in lost savings and many lost jobs.

Washington Council member Dick Wallace and Oregon's Melinda Eden were on the line.

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Montana energy activists turn out in force

On Oct. 13, a standing-room-only crowd of about 125 attended the Missoula, Mont., hearing on the draft Sixth Power and Conservation Plan – a testimony to the organizing efforts of Sierra Club’s Brad Hash and the Montana Environmental Information Center.

Of the 32 people who testified, 25 spoke on the need for the plan to address climate change by phasing out coal-fired power plants, reducing regional CO2 emissions, setting a strong carbon emissions price and maintaining the draft’s strong energy efficiency targets.

Commenters included a half dozen members of the Club’s University of Montana student group UM CAN. Student Zack Porter stressed the need not just to stabilize but to reverse the growth in greenhouse gas emissions.

“None of us in this room will feel the impact of climate change that our children will experience,” Porter said.

Several UM professors spoke, including

Who’s on the Council?

The Northwest Power and Conservation Council has eight members – two governor appointees each from Idaho, Montana, Oregon and Washington state.

Idaho: Bill Booth (Council chair), Jim Yost

Montana: Bruce Measure (Council vice-chair), Rhonda Whiting

Oregon: Joan Dukes, Melinda Eden

Washington: Tom Karier, Dick Wallace

For contact information, visit www.nwcouncil.org/contact/members.asp

noted economist Dr. Thomas Power, who explained that the needed carbon reductions can be achieved at modest costs to consumers, the power system and the region.

State Reps. Sue Malek and Dick Barrett called for Council leadership on reducing carbon emissions. Montana Public Service Commission member Gail Gutsche told Council members, “we need you folks to lead, and we will help guide our utilities through your leadership.”

A few speakers, including Bob Decker of Missoula’s Policy Institute and local builder Steve Loken pointed to Montana’s weak energy codes and lax enforcement and asked for Council help on those issues.

As the hearing proceeded, people filled out comment cards in Club’s hospitality suite next door.

Council members Bruce Measure and Rhonda Whiting of Montana attended, as did Oregon’s Joan Dukes.

Idaho hearings span the state

Boise and Idaho Falls hosted hearings on the draft Sixth Power and Conservation Plan on Oct. 13 and 14, respectively, thus competing for Council attention with the Missoula and Portland hearings.

Council members Melinda Eden of Oregon and Jim Yost of Oregon attended the Boise session, which was notable for commenters’ interest in having the plan lay out carbon-reduction scenarios.

Pacific Northwest Utilities Conference Committee (PNUCC) executive director Dick Adams asked the Council to calculate how many millions of tons of CO2 would have to be cut to meet various carbon-reduction targets, then pick one target and assess the implications of meeting it.

Snake River Alliance energy policy analyst Liz Woodruff of Boise called for a realistic assessment of carbon costs and for stringent carbon-reduction goals, lest Idaho get left behind as the nation moves to a low-carbon economy. In a like vein, Idaho Conservation League attorney Betsy Bridge warned that carbon emissions will carry a heavy price in the future, and utilities need a projected climate pollution cost to use in their resource planning.

“The cost of mitigating climate change now will be much lower than adapting to climate change in the future,” Bridge said.

The Snake River Alliance’s Ken Miller, who chairs the NW Energy Coalition, stressed that meaningful CO2 reductions cannot be made while keeping current coal production intact. “If a utility such as Idaho Power, which relies on coal-fired generation to meet 40% of demand, can commit to reducing emissions, so can the Council,” Miller said.

Salmon concerns were sure to arise in the state whose stocks are directly harmed by the four lower Snake River dams.

Though Will Hart of the Idaho Consumer-Owned Utilities Association repeated the dismissive falsehood that dam removal will lead to more carbon emissions, Bert Bowler of Snake River Salmon Solutions in Boise congratulated the Council for modeling the economics of dam removal. He said the model is “a big first step necessary to engage the region in a dialogue about the efficacy of removing dams, replacing power and recovering salmon and the Northwest economy.”

The scene moved to Idaho Falls the next afternoon and evening. Yost was the only Council member in attendance. Nine people testified, including several from the municipal utility who wanted the Council to go on record in support of keeping the lower Snake River dams and of building new nuclear plants. Local state Rep. Erik Simpson went even further, saying “only one thing can replace (carbon-emitting plants), and that is nuclear.” Ken Miller had effectively rebutted that argument the previous night, noting the

unresolved waste problems and high costs of new nuclear facilities, as well as the fact that plants cannot be effectively deployed over the Sixth Plan's 20-year timeframe.

In Idaho Falls, Miller's Snake River Alliance colleague Beatrice Brailsford of Pocatello implored the Council to stick with its aggressive conservation goals and to deal with carbon. "The three other states in the region have set carbon limits; Idaho has not," the SRA program director said. "If you can help Idaho move in that direction we would appreciate it."

Crescendo: Finale in Portland

Hearings on the draft Sixth Power and Conservation Plan came to a rousing conclusion Oct. 14 in Portland. Some 150 people attended, about half of them first attending a Sixth Plan teach-in organized by clean-energy advocates. Many donned yellow T-shirts and waved signs conveying the "No Coal!" message.

The hearing itself featured all the main issues raised at previous hearings: the draft's aggressive energy efficiency goals, the need to address climate goals, the costs and benefits of saving endangered salmon. Thirty-two people spoke, with about a dozen others having to leave before their turns came up.

Several utility representatives and Terry Flores of the pro-dam Northwest River Partners group said the Council should inflate the draft plan's estimated costs for replacing the power lost in aiding salmon survival by basing those costs on high-priced market power, apparently unaware that doing so would violate the federal law that created the Council.

Longtime Umatilla Tribal Council member Jay Minthorn and Save Our Wild Salmon policy analyst Rhett Lawrence of Portland set the record straight by citing the Northwest Power and Conservation Act's requirement for equal treatment of fish.



Minthorn also said the Council must take the lead in cleaning up coal plants, which load fish with mercury and contribute to the climate change that will affect tribes' treaty-guaranteed fishing rights.

Portland State University faculty member and NW Energy Coalition Oregon caucus chair Jeff Hammerlund warned Council members that the draft plan violates the Northwest Power and Conservation Act by failing to include the environmental costs of carbon emissions.

Bonneville Environmental Foundation president Angus Duncan and Climate Solutions Oregon director Lisa Adatto asked the Council to incorporate Oregon's and Washington's climate goals into the final Sixth Plan and to calculate the impacts. Adatto also urged the Council to acknowledge the importance of state renewable portfolio standards (RPS) in aiding renewables development.

Renewable Northwest Project research director Ken Dragoon urged the Council to take a more active role in addressing transmission needs and urged removal of draft plan language that incorrectly suggests contradictions between wind development and salmon recovery, and between renewable energy and energy efficiency.

Both clean energy solutions will bring

much-needed jobs to the area, as IBEW Local 48 business agent Joe Esmonde explained. Esmonde said he has 1,700 people training to install solar equipment and hundreds of others trained to work on hydropower projects and wind and wave technology.

Oregon has a highly skilled workforce facing 30-35% unemployment, he said, adding that energy efficiency projects would put many people back to work.

Those soon to enter the workforce made their feelings known. "We are the generation that will be affected by the decisions you make," said Lewis and Clark College freshman Allison Curtis, a member of the Sierra Student Coalition executive committee. "Please end our reliance on coal and replace it with clean, renewable power."

Reed College student Joel Batterman, a member of the student environmental group Greenboard, told the Council members to "keep our generation in mind. Remember us, we'll remember you."

Council members Joan Dukes and Melinda Eden of Oregon and Dick Wallace of Washington state attended the final hearing.



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