



Icy view of Hood Canal from Hama Hama Oyster Farm



THE CONNECTOR WINTER 2021

OPERATIONS REPORT



Customers in the Union area may have noticed a lot of work occurring between Manzanita and Hwy 106. Two major projects were started at the end of 2020 and the contractors are wrapping up here in January. The first project was an overhead line conversion to underground from the PUD's property at the corner of Manzanita and Dalby Road to down near PUD 1's current Union Substation. This section of overhead transmission and distribution lines is in a steep area that was difficult to access during wet or snowy conditions. When we had trees come down here, it would take hours for our crews to make repairs since we cannot bring vehicles in there. By converting it to underground, we eliminated the tree issue. Also, while the ditch was open, we preemptively installed water main and

partnered with Hood Canal Communications to have fiber conduit laid so that way when properties in that area are developed, the infrastructure is already there. This is the first phase of this project. Wire still needs to be pulled and the former transmission portion of it will not be decommissioned until the new substation is built. This new substation will shorten outages that occur because the PUD will have the ability to feed it from other subs.

The second major project was a transmission rebuild and new distribution feeder from Manzanita down to Highway 106. This transmission line is fed from BPA's Potlatch Substation by Lake Cushman, down across the tide flats, and up the hill to the Union Substation. The old smaller line was replaced with much larger transmission poles and line, and parallels Tacoma Power's transmission line. This work not only improves reliability, but it is part of the groundwork that needs to be done to be ready for the new Manzanita Substation that is scheduled to begin construction sometime between 2023 and 2025. The Manzanita Substation will replace the old Union Substation. These projects all are part of our phased long-term planning to accommodate future growth in the Union area and increase reliability by replacing our aging infrastructure. Also, once all the projects, including the new substation, are complete it will eliminate over two miles of transmission line that is cross country and difficult to repair.

For the water business, we are moving forward with our grant-funded manganese treatments for Bay East and Lake Arrowhead

water systems. Our engineering firm and in-house staff are also working on the Agate Beach system upgrades to increase our storage capacity so property owners who have been on wait list for years can finally connect to the public water system.

As we hear back on our grant applications for power and water projects, we will keep customers in those areas updated on any impending projects. In the meantime, our crews have been plenty busy with vegetation management and responding to outages.



Darin Hall
Director of Operations



PUD 1 Receives Innovation Award for Pandemic Response



(Pictured L-R: PUD 1 commissioner Ron Gold, general manager Kristin Masteller, and commissioner Mike Sheetz. Not pictured commissioner Jack Janda.)

PUD 1 was honored by AT&T and Government Technology for the District's response to the COVID-19 pandemic at a national Special Districts Summit, held virtually on December 15th.

According to Government Technology's website, the Special Districts Awards Program is designed to recognize innovation and leadership within special district agencies across the country. This year, the program was looking for notable examples of how special districts applied innovative technologies and leadership to response and recovery efforts as they relate to COVID-19. Hundreds of submissions were submitted from agencies across the United States. Mason PUD 1's general manager, Kristin Masteller, was invited to be a panelist at GovTech's virtual Special Districts West Coast Summit this past August, joining panelists from Orange County Transportation Authority in California and Pinellas County in Florida. "I am very honored and proud that our small public agency out here on the Hood Canal

was recognized alongside giant metropolitan districts like Orange County and New York Power Authority. It doesn't seem now like the actions we took when the pandemic started were that innovative, but they were extraordinary at that time," Masteller said. "We closed our doors to the public for the first time in 85 years. That's a big deal, and although most other agencies have now taken the same precautions to protect their employees and customers, we were the first ones to do that in Mason County and it was scary to take that leap. We didn't know

how bad this pandemic would end up being and were wary of appearing like we were overreacting when we sent people home and split up our crews. It was absolutely the right thing to do though, putting the safety of people above operational norms, and we have reaped the benefits of it to-date with a healthy workforce and maintaining reliable utility services."

The PUD's pandemic response plan was developed in transition, as an offshoot of the existing emergency response plan. Ron Gold, president of the PUD 1 board of commissioners, said, "We knew we needed to keep our employees safe so they could continue to do their jobs and keep the power and water on, so the board approved a pandemic leave policy to allow people to stay home if they were exposed, and to also set up office staff to work from home." Gold also noted that staff has put extra effort into keeping the public informed, as well as working to bring in grants and assistance

funds to help customers who are struggling to pay their utility bills. "There are a lot of people that are struggling right now, and we are doing everything we can to keep their services on now and into 2021," said Gold. As part of the PUD's initial actions in March, the commission announced a suspension on disconnections and late fees, authorized the manager to allow long term payment plans, and postponed planned rate increases to help its customers who were impacted financially by the pandemic and statewide shutdown. The PUD also secured and disbursed over \$56,000 in CARES Act funding to 147 customer accounts in Mason and south Jefferson Counties.

In addition to the actions taken to protect employees and customers, the District also forged relationships with the local business community for critical supplies like hand sanitizer, personal protective equipment, bleach and peroxide for water system testing, and general supplies like paper products. "Our employees and commissioners really deserve the bulk of recognition for this award because of how quick and flexible they were to react to what needed to be done," said Masteller. "However, our community partners and customers also deserve credit because they have been integral in ensuring that our plan has been successful, and we can continue to operate. This award recognizes their efforts as well."

Formed by AT&T and Government Technology, the Special Districts Program is the first program designed for special district leaders across the United States. Special districts, such as port authorities, utility districts, transits and park districts, make up the largest portion of government agencies in the United States.

HELPFUL TIPS FOR AUTOMATED PHONE SYSTEM

For customers that use the automated phone payment system, we want you to be aware that the system will repeat the PUD's phone number instead of recognizing the customer's phone number. The easiest way to bypass that is to dial the automated phone payment system directly by calling (855) 875-7210 from the phone that is connected to your account.

The system should recognize your phone number and you can proceed to your account for billing information or to pay

your bill. You also have the choice of using your account number to make a payment by choosing option 2.

If you have both a water and an electric account with us, you will need to make the payments separately, as they are not linked together through the automated phone payment system. If you choose to call the system by dialing through the PUD and choosing option 1, you will have to enter your phone number once you hear the request from the automated system regarding phone numbers.

Not only do we offer pay-by-phone, but we provide other payment options such as paying online, though mail, or our drop

Call from your phone number

(855) 875-7210 ▶ 2

box at the office by the front door. If you experience any difficulty with one of these options, please call customer service for assistance or to pay your bill over the phone with them at (360) 877-5249 or toll free at (800) 544-4223.



Trish Martin
Customer Service Representative



COMMISSIONER CORNER

People Serving People, a Commissioner's Perspective

Commissioners of your utility write articles in the newsletter every quarter to inform the people we represent about the issues of the day, and especially public utility issues related to the services we provide such as electric power, potable water and sewer. However, I am going to vary somewhat from that this quarter to talk about the people that provide those services to you. Your public utility district (PUD) is made up of just 25 employees. Yes, we compensate them for their work, but as a commissioner of the utility, I can tell you that you are more than getting your money's worth. In many organizations you will see that if a person has a particular job then they only do that job. Not in your utility. Here they work together to help the organization accomplish the work necessary to provide the services.

Personally, I think we are understaffed, but in light of our current situation with Covid-19 and all, it is no time to raise rates to hire more people. As the situation we are in passes, your commissioners will have to look at what it takes to keep the lights on and the water flowing.

I also want to address what we ask of our employees 24/7. We ask them to drop what they are doing, pretty much at any time, and come to work in the harshest conditions (and sometimes dangerous conditions) in the middle of the night. Our management team takes calls all through the nights and weekends, on their vacations and personal time with their families to make sure that you all are not without your utility service any longer than possible. Who does that? Remarkable in my opinion. And it not just our

water personnel and line crews, but office staff as well, have come in on many occasions and manned the phones throughout the night that are ringing off the hook. So as the power goes off on a cold wintery night, just remember that the crews from Mason PUD 1 are on the way. They take pride in doing what needs to be done and doing it well.

I know my fellow commissioners share my opinion and we thank all our employees for being there when we need them. "People serving people," is what I say.



Jack Janda, Commissioner District 3

ENERGY ASSISTANCE

Winter has arrived and with it brings colder days and higher utility bills. Throw in the COVID-19 pandemic, and it can mean an even bigger struggle for many of our ratepayers. Families who continue to see reduced work hours or no work at all due to the pandemic are already struggling to pay their bills. Now that the colder, winter months have set in, utility bills are increasing to keep homes warm.

We have worked really hard over the last several months to secure assistance for our ratepayers. Both Mason and Jefferson Counties were able to share a portion of the CARES Act money they received from the federal government for COVID assistance. Because of this, we were able to help 147 of our ratepayers and apply just over \$56,000 to their accounts. We are so appreciative for both counties and their willingness to help Mason PUD 1's ratepayers.

Despite the struggles so many of you have faced over the last year, we still continued to receive Canal Comfort Fund donations from generous PUD 1 customers. We collected a total of \$6,607.03 in 2020 which will help 44 families in need.

In addition to the Canal Comfort Fund, both CAC of Mason County and OlyCAP of Jefferson County still have appointments available for their regular LIHEAP season, on top of potential additional COVID-related funding. Please reach out to them if you are struggling to pay your bills. You may not have been eligible before, but a change in circumstance could change your status. It's worth it to contact them, using the information listed below:

CAC of Lewis, Mason & Thurston Counties
807 West Railroad Avenue, Shelton, WA 98584
(360) 426-9726
www.caclmt.org/

OlyCAP (Jefferson County)
Port Townsend Office
(360)385-2571
www.olycap.org/get-help/energy-assistance-program



Katie Arnold
Director of Business Services

2019 FUEL MIX SUMMARY*

	HYDRO	84%
	NUCLEAR	10.88%
	COAL	0%
	NATURAL GAS	0%
	BIOMASS	0%
	OTHER	5.12%

*2019's data reported at end of 2020

Winter Readiness IS IMPORTANT FOR YOUR PIPES

'Tis the time of year where many of our water customers experience high water usage on their bills due to outdoor and indoor leaks. PUD 1 encourages customers to make preparations this season to prevent water leaks and ice hazards. If you are unsure how to winterize your home or building, consult with a plumbing or winterization specialist or give us a call.

Water expands when it freezes and puts tremendous pressure on metal or plastic pipes. No matter the strength of a pipe, expanding water can cause them to break. Pipes that freeze most frequently are those that are exposed to severe cold, like outdoor hose bibs, swimming pool supply lines, water sprinkler lines, and water supply pipes in unheated interior areas like basements and crawl spaces, attics, garages, or kitchen cabinets. Pipes that run against exterior walls that have little or no insulation are also subject to freezing.

■ IF YOUR PIPES DO FREEZE

If your pipes break due to freezing, contact us immediately to have your water shut off for repairs. The District cannot "unfreeze" or repair customer pipes that are broken, but we usually can be out the same day to shut off your service.

■ IF YOU NOTICE A POOL OF WATER THAT WASN'T THERE BEFORE

We highly recommend that customers install a shut off valve on their side of the meter so that way they can shut their own water off anytime they like. Customers are prohibited from shutting off or turning on the District's equipment. If you shut off the valve at your house and the meter is still spinning, you likely have a leak in your distribution line. If it's on your side of the meter, you will have to call a professional to repair it. If the leak is on our side of the meter, we can send out our crew to make repairs.

If you experience unusually high water bills in these cold months or suspect that you may have a leak, give us a call and we can help you troubleshoot the issue.



Insulate outside faucets, above ground pipes and hose bibs to prevent against leaks caused by freezing. Use rags covered in plastic, fiberglass, or preformed foam.



Consider relocating exposed pipes to provide increased protection from freezing. Pipes can be relocated by a professional if the home is remodeled.



If you are going away during the winter, leave the heat on in your home no lower than 55 degrees and open kitchen and bathroom cabinets so warm air from the room circulates around pipes.



Remember to shut off irrigation. Yes, we actually see sprinklers going in the middle of our rainy season. It's a waste of money and it can cause slip hazards when it freezes on sidewalks and driveways.



Add insulation to attics, basements, and crawl spaces. Insulation will maintain higher temperatures in these areas.



Turn on a faucet to let water dribble in the plumbing where pipes run through cold spaces since running water doesn't freeze as quickly as still water.

THE BOARD OF COMMISSIONERS regularly meet the 2nd and 4th Tuesday of each month at 1:00 p.m. Meetings are held remotely due to COVID-19 and the call-in instructions for the public are posted on the PUD website along with the meeting packets. For more information on meetings, please visit mason-pud1.org or call the PUD office.

MASON COUNTY PUD 1 COMMISSIONERS:

District 1

Mike Sheetz (360) 898-7934

District 2

Ron Gold (360) 490-1560

District 3


Jack Janda (360) 490-1800

General Manager

Kristin Masteller..... (360) 877-5249



www.mason-pud1.org

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