



View of the Olympics from Theler Wetlands Nature Preserve in Belfair.



THE CONNECTOR SPRING 2021

PUD 1 partners with Skokomish Indian Tribe & Bonneville Environmental Foundation on a Zero Emissions Vehicle Partnership

In 2020, the Skokomish Indian Tribe invited PUD 1 to partner with them to apply for a grant from Bonneville Environmental Foundation (BEF) for the installation of zero emission vehicle (ZEV) chargers at the Lucky Dog Casino. The PUD and Tribe were awarded an over \$23,000 grant because their proposal met two of the Zero Emissions Vehicle Innovation Program's funding priorities: developing electric vehicle charging infrastructure in rural and underserved communities, and community engagement to promote the benefits of electric vehicle ownership.

"Bonneville Environmental Foundation has been a clean energy partner of PUD 1 and the Skokomish Tribe for several years now, assisting with the solar project at the Skokomish tribal center and two community solar projects at the PUD," stated Kristin Masteller, general manager of PUD 1. "BEF's targeted outreach in this grant cycle to rural and underserved communities highlights their commitment to eliminating disparities in ZEV ownership and reducing carbon emissions."

This is the second grant the PUD has received from BEF and the third project they have partnered on with the grantmaking nonprofit agency. However, this is the first time the PUD, Tribe and BEF have worked together on a non-solar project. "Power in the Pacific Northwest is largely carbon free, thanks to hydropower. So, when we look for measurable reductions in carbon emissions in our state, electrifying the transportation sector is a large focus. Installing ZEV infrastructure is one way that low cost, carbon free hydropower can enhance and support ZEV ownership in Mason County,"

Masteller said. "ZEV owners that charge in Mason County are not only making the choice to use electricity instead of gasoline, but they're also charging up with energy that is already over 95% carbon free."

In the grant proposal, the PUD and Tribe highlighted the benefit to strategic tribal initiatives that also have far reaching benefits to all of Mason County. ZEV infrastructure encourages urban sprawl into rural areas for tourism, which supports the tax base and businesses throughout the county and is also a major source of income for the Tribe. The reduction of carbon emissions and decline in fuel usage result in cleaner air and less pollution for the Hood Canal and Puget Sound; both of which are crucial ecosystems for tribal fisheries and environmental initiatives. Situated on the highway at the gateway to the Olympic Mountains, the Skokomish Tribe's Lucky Dog Casino and adjacent Twin Totems convenience store are a major stop for locals and travelers on the Highway 101 corridor. The grant will fund 75% of the costs to install two Level 2 pedestal chargers, security lighting, and signage, with the Tribe assuming the other 25% of the project cost.

"We have been working towards offering electric car charging on the reservation and in this area for quite some time. We are excited to finally offer this service, and we continue to work towards developing businesses with convenience and modern amenities in mind," stated David Owens, CEO of Skokomish Indian Tribal Enterprise, Inc.

In past years, the American Public Power Association featured a partnership with



(Photos courtesy of Peter Robb, SITE Operations Director.)

Nissan for a rebate worth thousands of dollars off the purchase of new Nissan Leaf vehicles for customers who live in a public power community. "It is our hope that these types of incentives continue to materialize, and as more used electric vehicles begin to make their way into the market, that we can connect people with opportunities to make ZEV ownership affordable and accessible. It's a win for the environment, it's a win for household budgets, and it helps the Tribe and the PUD meet both of our missions to serve our members and customers," Masteller said.

The Tribe's charging stations were fully commissioned in March of this year.



COMMISSIONER CORNER

Seeing the Light

As I am writing this “Commissioner Report” for the PUD 1 Spring newsletter, I am thankful for the tremendous amount of extra effort that has been shown by everybody at the PUD this last year. Along with normal daily work plans and emergency repair work from the water and electric crews, to the office and administrative staff, your PUD has withstood the rigors of the pandemic.

Our crews and office staff have gone the extra mile, literally. We split crews and office staff setup to work from home on a rotational basis. We have stayed safe and continued to serve the customers with top notch service. Although the office is still closed to the public, we can take care of any issues that arise. This last year has been the

ultimate test for all of us, and we are starting to come out on the other side, albeit with many changes to how we do business. Some changes will be with us for good.

As commissioners, we have learned to have meetings and make decisions virtually and it is working. No, we don’t necessarily like the change, but change is inevitable. PUD 1 has been able to complete projects on time and in budget. We have saved by cutting back in certain areas, like travel to meetings, by using the virtual platforms like Zoom, Microsoft Teams, and GoToMeeting. These are things that will stay this way for good in some instances.

After a year like we have all endured, the PUD has continued to move forward. We

deferred rate increases for water and power since last April and have now decided we have to move forward so we can take advantage of the grants that have been awarded and are in the pipeline.

I would like to thank my fellow commissioners, Ron Gold and Jack Janda, for the support we have for one another. We have a great team at Mason PUD 1, and you, the customer/owners are the reason. Thank you for the support of your PUD.



Mike Sheetz, Commissioner District 1

CROSS CONNECTIONS AND YOUR WATER SUPPLY

Everyone wants safe drinking water. One way to protect the water that PUD 1 supplies to you is to identify “cross connections” or “potential cross connections”. Cross connections are physical or potential physical connections that could allow liquid, solid or gas to flow into the water system if the system lost pressure or if the pressure on your side was greater than the system’s pressure.

Potential residential cross connections include: irrigation systems, garden drip systems, swimming pools, decorative ponds, private wells, hose bibs and fire sprinklers. Cross connections can contaminate the water supply and make you and your neighbors ill and potentially cause death. Not only are backflow devices important to public safety, but the PUD is actually required by WAC 246-290-490 to have a Cross Connection Control Program and require our customers to have back-flow assemblies installed.

Several residential customers have filled out Water Use Questionnaires over the last few years and each year, we choose a couple new water systems to begin

inspecting properties to determine which customers need to install backflow prevention assemblies. If your property has not been inspected and you have any of the potential cross connections listed above or a home-based business that uses water, please contact the PUD to schedule an appointment for a free inspection with one of the District’s Cross Connection Control Specialists (CCCS).

The CCCS will determine the type of backflow prevention assembly that needs to be installed. Customers will be responsible for hiring a certified backflow assembly installer to install the device and perform the initial test. We have a list of certified installers and our own certified installer/ tester on staff. Once a backflow prevention assembly is installed, customers are required by law to have annual testing by a certified tester. PUD 1 will send you a reminder notice when it is time to test with a list of certified testers.

The Cross Connection Control Program is designed to protect you and your drinking water. We appreciate your efforts to help us



keep the water clean by reporting potential cross connections and having your property inspected. Please contact us with questions or to schedule your free inspection.



Brandy Milroy Water Resource Manager

GO TIME FOR GRANTS

It's "GO TIME!" for grant applications and state and federal budget requests to fund public works projects. Mason PUD 1 staff have put in a tremendous amount of time and effort over the last couple months to lobby for funding for power and water projects. Our federal congressional rally and our state legislative rally were all held virtually this year. While it was great to be able to still connect with our congressional and state leaders virtually, I'll admit that we lose something in the conversation when we're not in a room together. I'm looking forward to being able to meet with our leadership face-to-face again soon to advocate for policies, legislation and funding packages that benefit the community that we serve.

Some important pots of funding that the PUD is working on include:

- Federal appropriations to help cover the expense to relocate power lines from the Duckabush Substation down to the Duckabush Bridge along Highway 101. This project is part of the overarching Duckabush Estuary Restoration project that has multiple project partners such as the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (who are replacing two culverts to assist fish passage), the Washington Department of Fish & Wildlife (who are working on securing land for a public parking area adjacent to the estuary and working with the Hood Canal Salmon Enhancement Group on the wildlife passage portion of the project), and the Washington State Department of Transportation, who are replacing the old Duckabush Bridge with a new modernized bridge which will realign Hwy 101 and raise it up several feet to help restore the habitat in the estuary.

The total of these projects is over \$90 million in combined state and federal funding. The PUD's portion is about \$1 million, and while that seems small in comparison, that's almost two years of our electric capital budget that we use to do line rebuilds and conversions and vegetation management. Unfortunately, state law prohibits DOT to pay for utility relocations as part of their transportation projects; those are at the utility's expense. We have put in a request to Congressman Kilmer's office for both his Community Project Funding and for federal appropriations since this project is spearheaded by the Army Corps and the PUD would not otherwise be moving this power line if we were not required to as part of the highway relocation and fish culvert removal. If we do not receive federal funding, we will continue to work with our legislators on a state budget request

to support the state agencies' role in this estuary project. We appreciate the Corps and the two state agencies for bringing us into the planning at the early stage so we can seek funding, and coordinate drawings and activities, which streamlines costs and energies to save taxpayers and ratepayers. We hope to keep this interagency coordination going well into the future! It's a win-win for all parties.

- We are also assembling a list of our shovel-ready projects for the infrastructure funding that is coming down to the County level as part of both the COVID rescue package and the stand-alone infrastructure package that is being floated in D.C. We have several water projects that would benefit from some sort of match from these pots of money to help us complete large infrastructure projects that otherwise would take us years to do chunk-by-chunk and be paid for through rates. We are working with our local leaders to help scope projects appropriately and identify those that will also have a positive ripple effect on alleviating housing shortages, boosting economic development, and expanding the County's tax base.

- As part of a facilities clean up project where pressure-treated poles were previously stored since the 1950s, the PUD worked with the Department of Ecology to procure a \$125,000 grant to pay for the clean up of that site. That amount should cover the majority, if not all, of the soil sampling, cleanup action plan, and soil removal-and-replacement activities that are occurring this spring. The PUD extends a warm thanks to the Ecology staff for all their guidance and efforts to complete this project and secure the grant funding to offset the impact to our budget.

- We also applied for two grants through the Department of Commerce for COVID impacts. This would assist customer account arrearages and help offset the recurring expenses the PUD has for additional COVID-specific personal protective equipment and supplies, telework expenses, and ongoing

COVID testing to help keep our workforce safe. We should learn in April if we were selected for funding.

- Lastly, we received great news from FEMA that two of our electric projects are moving forward in their federal funding process. We have a line rebuild at the end of the Skokomish Valley on Eells Hill Road where a slide took out our power line and the cost to rebuild it is very expensive. FEMA has agreed to pay 87.5% of that rebuild because it is in a recurring slide zone.

We also have a treacherous section of cross-country power line that runs from just north of Hoodspport, through a heavily wooded area, across a ravine, and then back down to the highway by the Octopus Hole. This section of line is terrible to replace when it goes down because it's difficult to access and its dangerous for our line workers to walk equipment and line in there. FEMA notified us in March that our project funding request to relocate that section of line had advanced in their review process. This is great news! Not only is this project cost prohibitive without grants or assuming additional debt, but it is also the reason that outage restoration for that area takes several hours when that section of line goes down. Fingers crossed that the project is chosen for funding!

It takes lots of pre-planning and a healthy amount of hustle to bring these state and federal funds home to Mason and south Jefferson Counties. We are working hard to get this important work done on a timelier schedule, without impacting our operating budget. We will provide updates as projects are funded and move forward.



Kristin Masteller
General Manager





Operations Report

This is the busiest time in the PUD's history for engineering services. Both the power and water businesses are swamped with an influx of applications for new or altered services. The housing and real estate boom in Mason County has created a backlog of service applications. For the first time, our engineering departments are four to five weeks out on processing applications, where historically, it's been a week or two to get them processed, engineered, and the crew work completed.

For perspective, the water department has already taken in 28 new service applications in the first 90 days of this year, compared to 10 in total for all of 2020. The electric department has taken in 50 new service applications in the first 90 days, compared to 111 in total for 2020. These new applications are in addition to our service work and regular projects.

We thank our current and impending customers for their patience as we work overtime to try to move the applications through as quickly as we can. We are a small utility with a small staff and this increase in applications is overwhelming. We are plugging away at it though and will endeavor to whittle that lead time down as quickly as we can!

NEW RELIEF FUNDING AVAILABLE FOR RENTERS

A new funding source through the Treasury Rent Assistance Program (TRAP) is available for households who are struggling to pay rent and utilities due to the pandemic. In order to be eligible for this funding, a renter must qualify for unemployment or have experienced a reduction in household income, have incurred significant costs, or a financial hardship due to COVID-19, demonstrate a risk of experiencing homelessness or housing instability, and have a household income at or below 80% of the area median. The household income is determined as either the total income for calendar year 2020 or the monthly income at the time of application. For more information on eligibility and how to apply, please call (360) 438-1100 and press 8 for "Housing". The PUD is working to partner with Crossroads and Mason County to get PUD 1 customers signed up for rental and utility assistance through this TRAP program.

We've now passed the one-year mark since the start of the COVID Pandemic. While the economy is slowly opening back up, many folks are still without jobs, or working reduced hours with a limited income. There are still several options for PUD 1 ratepayers to seek assistance with paying their utility bills. CAC of Mason County and OlyCAP of Jefferson County are still accepting applications for their 2020-2021 fiscal year, with additional funding available for COVID related hardships through the recent COVID relief package. Even if you

didn't qualify in the past, it's highly likely that your change in circumstances make you eligible for assistance now.

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

As always, we are here to help. If you are struggling to pay your bill, please reach out to our customer service team and let them know. It's important that you communicate your situation so that we can direct you to assistance that's available and also work to set up a payment plan on your past due balances. Though the disconnect moratorium is still in place, the balance owed on your account will eventually have to be brought current. Customers who have satisfactory payment plans set up will not be subject to disconnection when the moratorium is lifted.



Katie Arnold
Director of Business Services



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.

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- District 2**
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- District 3**
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