

Church comments on power battle

By KATHLEEN MONJE
Of the Emerald

In a scenario of a developing Pacific Northwest battle over cheap federal electric power, it is unlikely Congress will pass any legislation until the Pacific Northwest states agree upon a workable plan for allocation of power, said Sen. Frank Church, D-Idaho, Tuesday.

Any plan for distributing energy generated by the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) must spread the power more evenly in the region, Church said at a Senate Energy and Natural Resource Committee hearing he chaired in Boise.

A provision of the Bonneville Project Act gives public bodies and cooperatives the first chance at low-cost BPA hydropower.

Because the state of Washington has more public utility districts than Oregon or Idaho, it receives more BPA power allocation.

In Lane County, the Eugene Water and Electric Board customers receive preferential power as a public utility district and consequently pay among the lowest bills in the nation. The rest of the country is served by the Pacific Power and Light, a private utility not eligible for preference power.

Idaho Gov. John Evans said some people believe allocating BPA power among the states threatens to divide the region and pit the states against one another.

"While the issue may have that potential, I believe it can be resolved in a reasonable and responsible manner," Evans said.

Church said Idaho, "a latecomer by its own choice," cannot become a full participant in the BPA system by shouldering out its neighboring states. Idaho's 1978 Legislature defeated Evans' proposal for establishing domestic and rural public utility districts in Idaho.

Although Sen. James McClure, R-Idaho, agreed with Church's statement, he added, "We don't want them to shoulder us aside either."

Evans said Washington's Gov. Dixy Lee Ray is defending the industries of her state from being cut off from cheap power, but he feels Idaho farmers and homeowners should receive their share of the region's federally produced electrical supplies.

"It is neither fair nor reasonable for a

major share of that resource to be dedicated to profit-producing private industries in Washington because of archaic statutes, regulations and institutional arrangements," Evans said.

BPA Administrator Sterling Munro said recently he sees a growing consensus favoring a major BPA role in meeting the region's future power supply through a program of conservation and acquisition of new resources.

However, he stressed the preference clause for public utilities "must be kept. We do not need to abandon the preference clause in order to increase the region's power supply and help all consumers."

Munro feels the low-cost power should principally — "but not exclusively" — benefit domestic and rural customers.

Wood: heat or "decorate" with it — or eat it!

(AP) — Wood waste from logging operations that once went up in smoke or kept down weeds in someone's garden is now being developed into products that could heat a school, decorate a home or flavor food.

Researchers around Oregon are tinkering with experimental factories to see if the tons of bark and scrap wood produced every year can be used profitably.

- In Albany, a company working for the federal Department of Energy is using a \$3.8 million testing laboratory to squeeze heavy fuel oil out of powered wood chips.

- A 50-year-old Brownsville entrepreneur turns out about 125 tons of wood pellets per day, described as more efficient than coal. The pellets, dubbed "Woodex," have heated a hospital for two years.

- An old sawmill about ten miles north of

Eugene produces a form of wax from Douglas fir bark that can be used in furniture polish, carbon paper and plastic moldings.

Rudy Gunnerman's Brownsville factory sells Woodex, which looks like rabbit food, to about a dozen institutional customers in the Pacific Northwest. He said pellets costing \$1.20 to make provide the heat output of coal costing \$2.40 or oil at \$3.

His process starts with bark delivered to the plant from local lumber mills. It is ground to the consistency of face powder and then compressed at pressures of more than 30,000 pounds per square inch.

Western State Hospital has used the pellets for heating since 1976. Jim Spangler, hospital plant manager, said the fuel saves about \$500 per day in heating costs, reduces maintenance and eliminated spending \$200,000 for anti-pollution equipment.

Gunnerman, who improved the decades-old pelleting process, is being sued by three former associates over who profits from the technique. They accuse him of copying their invention and getting an exclusive patent on the process. But Gunnerman's critics concede that he deserves credit for getting Woodex on the market.

A barrel of oil produced, however, is "about as expensive as turning out a barrel of Chanel No. 5 perfume," according to project manager Tom Lindemuth.

In Albany, a private company, Bechtel National, Inc., has been turning out thick, black oil from wood chips for nearly a year in a project funded by the federal government. Company officials say the plant is the only one of its kind in the world.

The process begins with wood chips

trucked to a testing station and ground to a consistency slightly coarser than flour. The flour then is blended with anthracene oil, a coal tar distillate to produce a black paste the consistency of peanut butter. The mixture is baked for 20 minutes and then pumped to a reactor where it is held for about an hour at 650 degrees. At that temperature, a chemical reaction occurs and the wood turns into oil.

Only about 30 gallons a month are made, but Lindemuth said the plant, "was never intended to be a major production factory." He said its purpose was to test the wood-to-oil conversion process and to determine how the process can work cheaply.

The process still requires an outside ingredient — the anthracene oil — but Mark Mihalik, plant operations supervisor, said the process is now 68 percent self-sufficient. The goal is 100 percent, he said.

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