



By DAN WHEAT
Capital Press

INVASION OF THE POWER SNATCHERS

Huge electricity demands from cryptocurrency miners threaten low power rates and Central Washington's **agricultural economy**

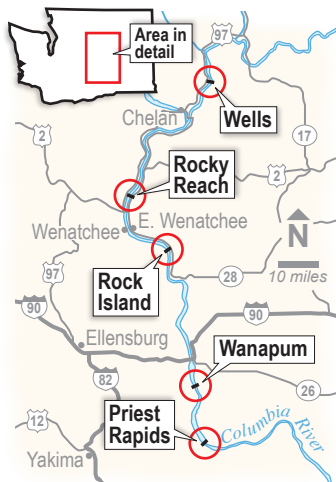
Cheap power in high demand

The relatively inexpensive hydroelectric power generated by five Mid-Columbia dams is a huge draw for cryptocurrency mining operations requiring vast amounts of power to operate profitably.

Power generation and demand, in megawatts*

County PUD	Average generation	Local use	Current crypto use	Requested crypto use
Grant	1,036-1,450	590	16.4	1,100-1,300
Chelan	1,100-1,500	200	9	220
Douglas	484	108	15	205
Total	2,620-3,434	898	40.4	1,525-1,725

*1 megawatt = 1,000 kilowatts and powers 500 homes.
Sources: Grant, Chelan and Douglas public utility districts



Dan Wheat and Alan Kenaga/Capital Press



“Our power rates are the baseline of our economy, and if you give that away to a few investors, you squander the baseline for the benefit of a few ...”

Dennis Bolz,
president of the board of commissioners of the Chelan County Public Utility District

EAST WENATCHEE, Wash. — The hum is loud and constant. It's from fans cooling the first of two dozen “Giga Pods” built at a cryptocurrency mining server farm in an East Wenatchee industrial park.

Attracted by some of the lowest electricity rates in the nation, computer servers mine day and night for bitcoins and other forms of cryptocurrency that can be worth thousands of dollars apiece. But because they require enormous amounts of electricity, the mines threaten to drive up the cost of power that is vital to the agricultural-based economy of Washington's Mid-Columbia region.

With cryptocurrency mining demand for power approaching 2,000 megawatts — two-thirds of the production of the Mid-Columbia's five hydroelectric dams — two of the region's three public utility districts have stopped approving crypto mining power requests until they update their rates and policies. The third PUD called a moratorium four years ago to do the same thing.

Mountain snowpack and spills for flood control and fish passage figure into the fluctuating power production of the five dams, which averages 3,000 megawatts. That's enough to power about 1.5 million homes.

Most of the power is sold under long-term contracts to utilities in Western Washington and beyond, helping keep local rates down. Less than one-third of the power, about 900 megawatts, is used locally at a rate of 2 to 4 cents per kilowatt-hour versus the national average of 12 cents.

Those low rates attract crypto miners, who need lots of power and say mining will benefit the region economically, making it a new technology hub and a cryptocurrency platform for the world.

But Dennis Bolz, president of the board of commissioners of the Chelan County Public Utility District, sees crypto mining as a get-rich-quick scheme for a few at the expense of the public. Some people even view it as immoral, unethical or illegal, since the currency is not federally issued or regulated, he said.

“Our power rates are the baseline of our economy, and if you give that away to a few investors, you squander the baseline for the benefit of a few instead

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Washington farmers get sympathy over elk problem

County official:
Damage can't go on

By DON JENKINS
Capital Press

OLYMPIA — Several Washington Fish and Wildlife commissioners agreed April 14 that state game managers should move elk that are damaging farms and ranches in Eastern Skagit County.

Commissioners offered no

tactics for pushing elk into nearby hills, but sympathized with farmers and ranchers who showed up at a commission meeting. The producers restated their frustrations with the North Cascades herd, also known as the Nooksack herd.

Randy Good, vice president of the Skagit County Cattlemen's Association, said in an interview that he welcomed support from the commission and would welcome results even more.

“We felt really good about the comments from the commission members, but we need to see some action,” he said.

The herd's population has approximately doubled in the past decade to an estimated 1,600. The Department of Fish and Wildlife and nine Native American tribes spurred the growth by limiting hunting and importing elk from around Mount St. Helens in Southwest Washington.

State lawmakers have directed Fish and Wildlife to minimize the number of elk on private land. The Legislature, however, has limited control. Fish and Wildlife commissioners are appointed by the governor, and the department has an agreement with the tribes to co-manage the herd.

“I do think we need some sort of a measurable plan (so)

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Don Jenkins/Capital Press

Elk graze near cattle in the Skagit River Valley in northwest Washington on March 30. Fish and Wildlife commissioners say they sympathize with farmers and ranchers suffering elk damage.

ODFW shoots two more Pine Creek wolves

Pack notches third depredation in April

By GEORGE PLAVERN
Capital Press

HALFWAY, Ore. — The Oregon Department of Fish and Wildlife shot two more wolves from the Pine Creek pack Wednesday morning in Baker County, following the latest in a string of attacks on livestock.

The most recent depredations were confirmed Sunday, April 15

and Monday, April 16 at Pine Creek Ranch in Halfway, Ore. The pack has now preyed on livestock five times in April, killing four calves and injuring another six at two different ranches roughly 5-6 miles apart.

The spate of incidents prompted the Oregon Cattlemen's Association to ask ODFW to kill more wolves from the Pine Creek pack to prevent further livestock losses.

“The wolves are being seen on the valley floor, and that's what's really disconcerting folks,” said George Rollins, a Baker County rancher and

co-chairman of the OCA wolf committee for Eastern Oregon. “So many people have seen them now, it's like daily sightings.”

ODFW quickly followed through with the request, shooting an uncolored yearling female and adult male from a helicopter as the wolves were spotted on private land where the latest depredations occurred. Wildlife officials previously shot one yearling female from the Pine Creek pack on April 10 as part of a separate lethal take permit.

OCA had asked to kill all wolves

in the Pine Creek pack, with Rollins stating that incremental take has not proven effective in changing the animals' behavior.

“They just keep coming back,” he said. “They are not following the herds of elk that are on the low hills area.”

Earlier this year, University of Wisconsin researchers released a study suggesting that government killing of wolves may benefit one farmer or rancher, but by fracturing the pack

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