

...TransAlta shuts first of two coal-fired power plants in Centralia

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"It's not like it's a surprise," Grove said. "Everybody's known this was coming since 2011."

With closure on the horizon, a lot of the plant's workers have already moved on to other utility jobs in the region, Grove said. Since 2011, the workforce at the two plants had fallen from 238 to about 179 workers.

Grove himself will stay on until the second plant closes in 2025. He says he and others appreciate the transition fund, but he's concerned about the loss of 670 megawatts of base load power that keeps the electric grid reliable, and he worries that Lewis County will suffer when the last of the well-paying jobs goes away. The area previously suffered the loss of 560 jobs in 2006 when TransAlta shut a nearby coal mine that used to supply the plant.

Dan Fugate, a 20-year TransAlta employee, is part of

another set of layoffs that will take place in April.

"It's a sad time for someone like me that sees an end of an era," Fugate said. "This is a facility where you could go to work, make a family wage, and send your kids to college. That's going away."

That \$55 million coal transition fund will pay for \$25 million in clean energy projects, \$10 million in grants to businesses, nonprofit organizations and local governments for energy efficiency and weatherization, and \$20 million for economic and community development. The community development part of the fund includes \$8 million for the payouts to displaced workers, plus \$1 million for education and retraining. Displaced workers — or alternatively their spouses — can apply for education grants of up to \$15,000. Funds are dispensed as grants overseen by a board composed of company and local leaders.



"I'm very proud of the money we put forth," says Bob Guenther, who sits on the grant committee. Guenther, a former mechanic at the coal plant, was a

lobbyist for IBEW Local 77 in 2011 and worked with Sierra Club to negotiate the delayed closure and transition fund deal. "We have not replaced what

we're losing," Guenther said, "but we're doing ancillary work that will help replace those jobs as time goes on."

—Don McIntosh



Alabama Amazon warehouse workers file for union

Amazon warehouse workers in Bessemer, Alabama, are asking the National Labor Relations Board to hold a union election. The warehouse just opened in March. Now, about 1,500 workers will vote on whether to join the Retail, Wholesale and Department Store Union, a division of the United Food and Commercial Workers.

Amazon, owned by the world's wealthiest person, Jeff Bezos, is vigorously anti-union and has so far successfully fought off employees at its U.S. facilities, though many Amazon warehouse workers in Europe belong to unions.

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