

THE HIGH COST OF NUCLEAR POWER

One of Oregon’s two nuclear reactors is a noncommercial one at Oregon State University that is training a new generation of nuclear specialists, some with commercial aspirations (the other is at Reed College). However, local utility EWEB gets power from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), which in turns gets electricity from the Columbia Generating Station (CGS) nuclear reactor in Washington on the Hanford site.

CGS is under fire thanks to a new study that says ratepayers could save at least \$1.7 billion over the next 17 years if the reactor was closed. McCullough Research of Portland was commissioned to do the report by Washington and Oregon Physicians for Social Responsibility.

CGS is located near the Columbia River, about 350 miles from Eugene, and nuke opponents point out that the design of the plant is similar to that of the Fukushima Dai-ichi plant damaged in the 2011 Japanese earthquake and tsunami (see *EW* cover story 11/27). Groups such as Heart of America Northwest point out that CGS sits on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation, leading to concerns that in the event of an earthquake or dam failure, dealing with a problem at the plant could be complicated by releases of radiation at Hanford.

According to Robert McCullough, the author of the report, BPA paid \$418.9 million for operating the plant in 2013, and if BPA had purchased the same energy from the Mid-Columbia market at Dow Jones daily on-peak and off-peak prices, it would have paid \$218.5 million. “In sum, BPA paid \$418,939,000 for \$218,515,000 worth of energy.”

Energy Northwest, which operates CGS, disputes the study and cites a 2012 study that it did with BPA, and it says that the agencies “overwhelmingly concluded that Columbia’s continued operation is the most cost-effective option for consumers — to the sum of billions of dollars.”

Meanwhile an OSU-spinoff company called NuScale Power thinks it can make money from nuclear power plants built on a small scale. Up to \$226 million in funding was given to NuScale by the U.S. Department of Energy for its power module that can generate 45 megawatts of power. The modules are designed to be factory-built and transported to the site for use. The company says the modules use “natural forces to operate and cool the plant” and that they safely shut down and self-cool, indefinitely. Sen. Ron Wyden and Rep. Peter DeFazio congratulated NuScale and OSU in a recent press release about the funding windfall.

NuScale is headquartered in Portland and its technical team is in Corvallis in Benton County. Lane County is a “Nuclear Free Zone,” according to Chapter 17 of the Lane County Code, which means that work on nuclear weapons is banned and subject to a fine of \$50 to \$750 a day, but the code does not mention the use of or work on nuclear power. — *Camilla Mortensen*

O&C FORESTS AND THE D.C. COURTS

In a November *EW* Viewpoint, Congressman Peter DeFazio brought up a talking point he’s mentioned almost every time he discussed his controversial O&C trust plan: cases in the U.S. Court of Appeals for the District of Columbia Circuit that he says could affect what happens to the publicly owned O&C forests.

DeFazio argues that a plan needs to be put in place before the Supreme Court winds up deciding how the O&C forestlands would be managed. With the recent end of the Senate filibustering of President Barack Obama’s appointments to the D.C. Circuit, one question that has arisen is whether Democratic appointees might affect how the O&C lands play out in that court.

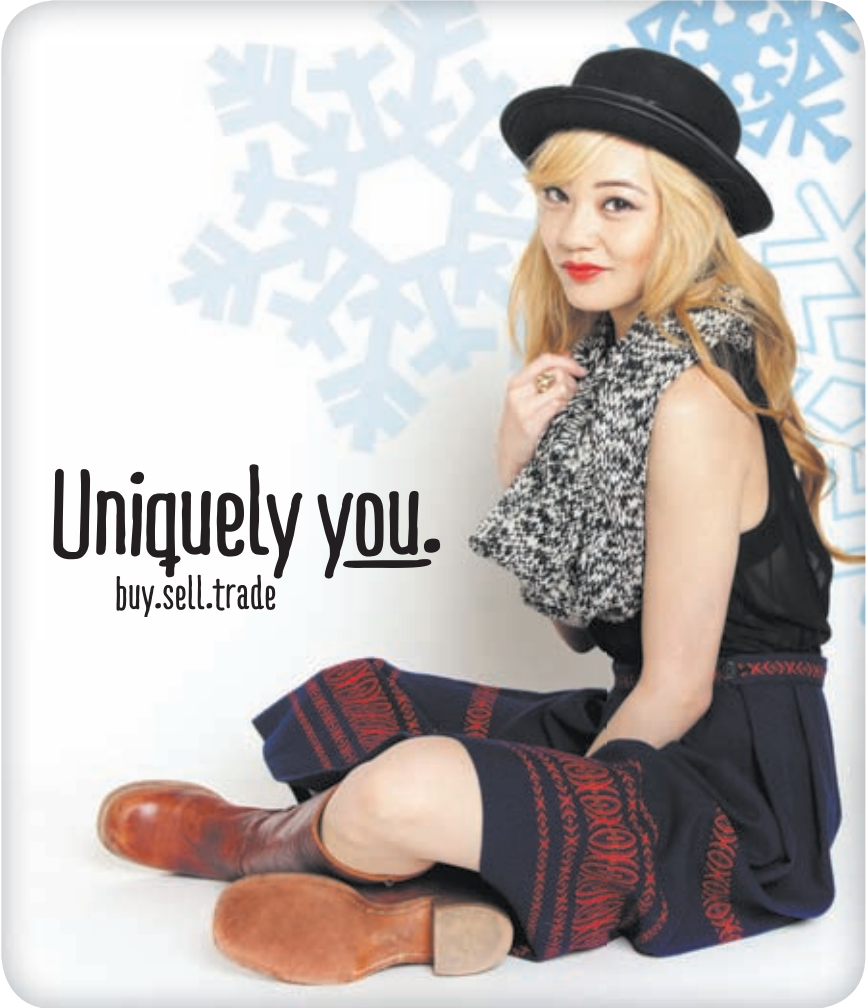
The D.C. Circuit Court has been dominated by Republicans, but within three days of ending the Senate’s ability to filibuster nominees, the balance became 6-4 in the Dems’ favor. Patricia Millett and Cornelia “Nina” Pillard were appointed last week, and the nomination of Robert Leon Wilkins is expected to be voted on later this week — all had been blocked by Senate Republicans.

The primary forces behind the bipartisan House (DeFazio) and Senate (Ron Wyden) O&C plans are also Democrats, but Andy Stahl of Forest Service Employees for Environmental Ethics says that the most recent D.C. court decision on the O&C issue in June wasn’t about politics but about the word “shall.”

Stahl says the case hinged on a portion of the 1937 O&C act that says “That timber from said lands in an amount not less than one-half billion feet board measure, or not less than the annual sustained yield capacity when the same has been determined and declared, shall be sold annually, or so much thereof as can be sold at reasonable prices on a normal market.”

U.S. District Judge Richard Leon ruled the BLM failed to comply with timber harvest requirements under the federal O&C Act. (Judge Leon also notably ruled Dec. 16 that the National Security Agency’s bulk collection of phone records violates the Constitution’s ban on unreasonable search.) “I don’t think that interpreting the word ‘shall’ is

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