

LOCAL GREEN ENERGY PROJECTS COMPETE

Solar or hydroelectric? Veneta or Cottage Grove? Seniors or youth? Either way, a massive grant for renewable energy is going to an organization with a worthy cause.

Two nonprofit organizations are competing for a grant of up to \$40,000 from the Emerald People's Utility District (EPUD) to build renewable energy infrastructure. The Branch Road Farm School in Cottage Grove wants to establish a hydroelectric power system on its 73-acre property, and Mid Lane Cares in Veneta wants to put solar panels on the roof of its Fern Ridge Service Center. Both projects passed a technical feasibility test from EPUD to ensure their viability.

The winner is decided by EPUD's customers who have signed up for their Green Program, where they pay \$5 to \$10 more on their utility bill to contribute to green energy projects in the Northwest. These customers get to vote on their preferred project on EPUD's website until June 12.

EPUD, a utility company servicing more than 20,000 customers in Eugene and surrounding areas, is going into its fourth year of awarding this grant. The past winners are the Creswell Food Bank, Pleasant Hill School District and the Lost Valley Education and Event Center.

"The costs of renewable infrastructure kept going down, but the prices for our customers stayed the same and we really wanted to support projects in our communities," says Rob Currier, energy services coordinator at EPUD. "If we can get more customers, maybe we can do two projects."

Ponds and Microturbines

The Branch Road Farm School's proposal is to build a water storage and hydroelectric power system that would generate 8,000 kilowatts of electricity per year.

"I believe that our project is worthy of voting for because we are a growing educational and resource center that can also serve to help with the very real needs to develop greater renewable energy resource understandings beyond solar," says Andhi Reyna, owner of Branch Road Farm.

The plan, if they succeed in getting the grant, is to build three large ponds on their property ranging from 150,000- to 200,000-gallon capacity. Water from the highest pond will travel down through a pipe that is rigged with a microturbine system to generate electricity. The water stored in the lower ponds will be used for gravity-fed irrigation.

During the summer, energy generated from solar panels will be used to pump water from the lower ponds back up to the higher pond to keep the hydroelectric system going. The farm school proposes that the electricity generated in this system will be enough to meet their needs for machinery, refrigeration, lights and irrigation, thus eliminating a large cost for the nonprofit.

Branch Road works with the South Lane School District to provide field trips for most schools in the district as well as other regional school districts. They also participate in the Farm to School initiative to supply produce for school lunches.

They host teaching workshops, hands-on demonstrations, field trips, children and adult cooking classes, farm camps and after school programs. They also have a state licensed commercial kitchen for their own use and for use by the public for local food production and processing.

Solar Power in Veneta

Mid Lane Cares proposes to install forty 3-by-5-foot solar panels on the roof of the Fern Ridge Service Center for an annual production of 13,275 kilowatts of electricity.

The solar panels were a part of the initial design of the service center. Due to budget constraints, however, that idea had to be scrapped. Many energy saving design features remained, such as large windows to let in natural lighting, windows that can be opened to reduce the need for air conditioning and motion sensing light switches in all of the offices and meeting rooms. These features ensure that the energy created is reserved.

The Fern Ridge Service Center facilitates programs for vulnerable residents of Veneta. Mid Lane Cares operates the Love Project Food Pantry from the service center, which distributed 3,532 boxes of food in 2015. The center also houses Café 60, a place where seniors can get a free nutritionally balanced meal, as well as Meals on Wheels, which delivers meals to seniors and checks on their safety. Mid Lane Cares provides senior recreation, health and social activities at the center such as a memory loss group and tai chi. Emergency services and youth services, such as the SANTA program, which gave Christmas gifts to 602 children in 2014, also operate from the center. ■

Want to help decide who gets the grant? Go here: bit.ly/2qll0CH.

IT'S ABOUT TIME

BY DAVID WAGNER

RIVERBANK LUPINE
LUPINUS RIVULARIS



The frenetic flowering rush of spring is tapering off as nature settles into the languorous days surrounding the summer solstice. The sun rises early, before most people wake up, and sunset punctuates a late evening. For two months, the change in day length varies by barely an hour.

The meadow and woodland flowers will use the mix of long days and a reservoir of moisture in the soil to begin seed production and dispersal. Grassy hillsides transition from their brightest green to the beginning of brown over this stretch of time. Flower watchers will be setting their sights higher up the mountains in search of fresh bursts of color. Those gorgeous mountain ridges are dancing with butterflies seeking mates.

Nesting season is well underway, nowhere more obvious than on the ponds near the Willamette River.

Goslings and ducklings provide some of the most relaxing entertainment in town. Songbirds are active in the trees. Once the nestlings are fledged, young bird families will be seen in mixed foraging flocks again. Watch your home feeders and fill often.

Some city streets and sidewalks take on a black, varnished appearance after several sunny days in a row. This is a sticky coating of aphid droppings. We see it mostly under oak trees, favored by aphids. Aphids will be active throughout the summer, releasing their honeydew in highest amounts on sunny days. It is harmless but a nuisance to clean off when a car is left parked under an aphid tree on a hot day.

David Wagner is a botanist who works in Eugene. He teaches moss classes, leads nature walks and makes nature calendars. He can be contacted through his web site: fernzemosses.com.

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