

Power & Water watches for changes, continues work with the new federal administration

by **Cathy Ehli**, general manager
Warm Springs Power & Water

Warm Springs Power & Water Enterprises is working to support the sovereignty of the Confederated Tribes of Warm Springs by advancing opportunities for economic development through the energy industry.

We often must collaborate with the United States federal government, for example, to gain access to federal financial assistance. With the new administration, we are keeping a close eye on any updates that may affect our projects, especially the Bethel-Round Butte transmission line upgrade.

Overall, we are continuing to advance the Bethel-Round Butte transmission project planning with federal financial assistance that has been obligated to the tribes. Still, it is early in the administration and they have committed to a close review of existing programs.

It is still too soon to determine what lasting changes will be implemented in the U.S. federal government or how they might impact any aspect of our work.

As we monitor executive orders, budgeting for different agencies and programs, and staffing across the federal government workforce, we will share whatever we learn as quickly as we can.

But most importantly, while we wait to see what changes the U.S. federal government will make, we are not letting the unknown catch us unprepared.

First, Power & Water and the other enterprises are considering what projects and resources we can prioritize to ensure projects can



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continue—projects such as the resiliency centers at Kah-Nee-Ta and the casino. We are proactively exploring alternative sources of funding if federal dollars were to fail to materialize.

Also, we remain full steam ahead with upgrading the Bethel-Round Butte transmission line, for which we have already secured a \$250 million grant from the U.S. Department of Energy.

We know how important this project is to the tribes, as a way to fulfill the tribes’ vision for becoming an energy leader that responsibly cares for the Creator’s gifts while providing for the well-being of the community.

As a reminder, the line currently transmits power from the Pelton Round Butte hydropower project to the Willamette Valley. This project will increase the line’s capacity to transmit more power from more energy projects, including potential tribal projects.

We’ll make the upgrades in partnership with Portland General Electric, ensuring that we benefit from the increased transmission capacity to sell more energy to the Valley. With the tribes as co-owners of the new transmission capacity, new energy projects like solar development become possible, and revenues will increase for the tribes to invest in natural resource protection and more social services for members on the reservation.

Again, I would like to stress that even with some of the uncertainty related to new federal policies, the transmission line upgrade is currently proceeding on schedule. Our partners at Portland General Electric remain just as committed as we are.

For example, this week, PGE and the tribes plan to release a Request for Information to support our planned permitting activities which will begin later this year. Similarly, a Request for Proposal for engineering services is being prepared for release later in the year.

Power & Water is also doing research and analytical work evaluating how we can maximize the value to the tribes of the increased electricity transmission and fiber optic capacity provided by this unique opportunity.

If nothing else, please know this: even if the U.S. federal government makes changes that require WSPWE to adjust how we approach our work, our ultimate goal remains. We will always pursue opportunities to generate funds for the Warm Springs government to exercise its sovereignty and invest in important services like drinking water, jobs, housing and education for the reservation.

BPA staff departures raise concerns for power grid

The Bonneville Power Administration could lose nearly 20 percent of its workforce because of the federal administration efforts to shrink the federal government. This has raised concerns among some, such as Oregon’s U.S. Senators, about the agency’s ability to ensure the reliability of the region’s electrical grid.

The imminent employee departures include linemen, engineers, and power dispatchers, “posing a direct and immediate threat to the reliability of the electrical grid that serves millions of families and businesses in the Pacific Northwest,” Oregon’s U.S. Senators Ron Wyden and Jeff Merkley wrote in letters to the adminis-

tration late last week.

They wrote, “BPA is an entirely self-funded agency that does not rely on taxpayer dollars, meaning these workforce reductions do absolutely nothing to reduce the federal deficit.”

The senators pressed the administration to answer by late February its justification for these cuts; how it will address the operational and safety risks posed by the loss of experienced linemen, engineers and dispatchers; how it intends to prevent grid failures caused by understaffing; and how its actions align with its stated priority of strengthening U.S. energy infrastructure; among other questions.



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