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PUD considers green operation methods

By KATHY GRAY
of The Dalles Chronicle

Sustainability and environmental issues were much on the minds of the Northern Wasco County PUD board of directors when it met Tuesday night. Four separate agenda items had ties to the subject.

Paul Titus, director of engineering, briefed the board on a new kind of transformer oil made from soybeans called Cooper FR3, that the PUD plans to begin using to replace the mineral oil currently in use.

The soy oil is entirely biodegradable, Titus said, and provides better fire-resistance.

"As of right now, I think anything we order we will have filled with this fluid," Titus said.

The computer presentation Titus showed the board was from a specific vendor, but he said other sources of the oil are also available. Cooper also sells a transformer made specifically for this kind of oil, which is smaller and lighter than the variety currently used by the PUD.

While the new transformers and the oil are more expensive, Titus said they use less of the oil, which may mitigate costs. They are also about 50 pounds lighter than the PUD's current 350-pound transformers, he noted.

Soy-based transformer oil may become the industry standard, Titus added, when the U.S. Department of Energy revises its rules in 2010.

"A lot of people are already going that way," Titus said, showing a long list of Pacific Northwest utilities that use the oil.

Titus also presented the PUD with two requests for proposals to explore small power generation opportunities with the city of The Dalles.

The board approved a \$9,775 proposal from GDS Associated, Inc., in partnership with Black Brook Environmental, to look into a micro-hydropower turbine that could be used in conjunction with the city's potable water transmission line. The water line runs from the Wicks water treatment plant along Mill Creek into the city.

"We're trying to find different alternatives within the district," Titus said.

A separate \$5,000 contract was awarded to C.F. Malm Engineers LLC for an economic review of methane power generation opportunities at the city's First Street wastewater treatment plant.

At present, surplus methane produced by the wastewater plant is burned off as a waste product, but the PUD wants to know if it could be used for power generation.

If the economic review looks promising, Malm could produce a final report for an additional \$10,000.

The PUD and city will share the cost of the studies. The city council approved the plan Monday night, followed by the PUD on Tuesday.

The PUD's final environmental consideration was a mission statement on global warming, which the board has discussed at previous meetings.

Dwight Langer, the PUD's executive director, presented a draft statement to the board, but said he is still not comfortable with the language. The statement is one being considered by the Oregon PUD Association, of which Northern Wasco board member Howard Gonser is president this year.

The statement acknowledges that combustion of fossil fuels has adverse effects on the environment and is potentially detrimental to "health, social and economies within all communities." It cites public entities' responsibility to take

a leadership role in adopting good business practices “that increase efficiencies and reduce the emission of greenhouse gases.”

The statement lists a set of principles that federal policy and legislation on the subject should include. It says policy should:

- be economy-wide,
- consider financial impact and the ability of consumers to pay,
- protect world industrial competitiveness,
- allow credit for early action to reduce greenhouse gas emission,
- maintain reliability, protect national security and avoid over-reliance on a single fuel,
- enhance economy-wide focus on energy efficiency,
- ensure incentives for development and deployment of renewable and clean energy facilities for all utility sectors,
- address regional differences,
- expand federal support for research and development,
- ensure emission targets are consistent with commercially available technologies,
- ensure generation portfolio requirements allow all low emission technologies.

Board members addressed specific details of the statement, then sent it back to Langer for revision.

Gonser suggested the expectations include “sound, scientifically-based principles, practices and research.”

Clay Smith suggested that a listing of energy sources include the words “environmentally responsible coal” rather than just “coal.” He added that he doesn’t like inclusion of nuclear, but Gonser and Milt Skov both differed with him on the subject