

Olympia's Publicly Owned Electric Utility Would Protect the Climate by Reducing Our Carbon Emissions from Electricity

Puget Sound Energy (PSE) is the biggest obstacle to reducing Olympia's carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions rapidly in the next decade.

PSE's current (May 2019) energy mix is 37% from coal and 22% from natural gas, for a total of 59% from fossil fuels. Research conducted in 2014 by Johnson and Samstag of Friends of Island Power (Bainbridge Island WA) found that PSE was producing more than 11 million tons of carbon pollution per year. This was massively more than any other utility in Washington State.

Washington's *100% Clean Electricity Act*, signed in 2019 by Governor Inslee, requires investor-owned utilities like PSE to be 80% free of fossil fuels by 2030 and 100% fossil free by 2045. We can do better. **With our own municipal electric utility we plan to achieve 95% clean electricity within five years, *twenty years* before PSE is forced to abandon its fossil fuel habit.**

Since October 2018 when the U.N. Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change (IPCC) warned us that we have only 12 years to transition to renewable energy, scientific study after scientific study has shown that the IPCC report is too conservative, that the oceans are warming 40% faster than the IPCC predicted ¹; that 1,000,000 species are threatened with extinction and as many as 30 to 50% of the planet's species may be extinct by 2050 ²; that the insects we depend on to fertilize our crops are going extinct eight times faster than mammals, and could vanish within a century ³.

We do not know how many years we have before amplifying feed-back loops take climate change beyond human control⁴, but we do know that the actions we take in the next three or four years may be determinative.

At a time when every reduction in greenhouse gas emissions counts, and every year, month and hour that we speed the transition is crucial, public power is the logical solution in Washington State. We are lucky that we live in the Northwest where we have abundant hydropower as a legacy from Roosevelt's New Deal and a clean energy

1 [Hausfather, Trenberth et al](#); study published in the journal SCIENCE, Jan. 2019.

2 [U.N. Intergovernmental Science-Policy Platform on Biodiversity and Ecosystem Services \(IPBES\)](#). May 6, 2019.

3 [Sanchez-Bayo, Wyckhuys](#); study published in the journal Biological Conservation, 2019.

4 [Steffen, Rockstrom et al](#); Trajectories of the Earth System in the Anthropocene, August 6, 2018.

base from which to branch out to wind and solar when they become more available. We will also benefit in additional ways when our electric utility is locally owned and democratically controlled.

Because cities have the power of eminent domain, Olympia can legally acquire Puget Sound Energy's electric facilities through condemnation proceedings, or by negotiating with PSE in lieu of condemnation proceedings. Once we have acquired or have a contract to acquire electric lines and facilities, we will have a preferential right to purchase low cost hydropower from the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA). "Public bodies," like PUDs and municipal utilities, are entitled to both preference and priority for purchase of that power pursuant to the Bonneville Project Act, Sections 16 U.S.C. 832c(c) and 832c(d) and the Northwest Power Act, Section 16 U.S.C. 839c(b) (1). The BPA also sells public utilities low cost power from other clean energy sources, such as solar and wind. This is a tremendous opportunity.

Our immediate neighbors, Tacoma, Centralia, Steilacoom, Chehalis, and Mason County already benefit from low cost electricity derived primarily from fossil free sources. Here are the 2016 fuel mixes for public electric utilities near Olympia as shown in the Washington State Electric Utility Fuel Mix Disclosure Reports:

- **Tacoma Power:** 97% fossil free with 84.23% hydroelectric, 10% nuclear, and 1% biomass
- **Steilacoom:** 98.48% fossil free with 89.53% hydro, 8.87% nuclear and .08% biomass
- **Centralia City Light:** 98.61% fossil free with 90.6% hydro, 7.9 % nuclear, and .08% biomass
- **Lewis County PUD:** 94.66% fossil free with 83.58 % hydro, 10.51% nuclear and .57% wind
- **Mason County PUD #1:** 98.16% fossil free with 87.79% hydro, 10.27% nuclear, and .10% biomass
- **Mason County PUD #3:** 97.52 fossil free with 78.73% hydro, 10.12% nuclear, and 9.21% wind