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Water, Water Everywhere, Not a Drop to Drink

That expression seems to be the cry of more communities all across the state of Washington. I never envisioned my efforts as general manager would be so consumed in dealing with water rights for Klickitat PUD's (KPUD) eight water systems.

These systems have been around forever, and the water rights were acquired a long time ago. However, water laws are constantly changing and new rules are making it difficult—if not impossible—to keep the water rights you think you have, much less prepare for expansion and growth of our systems.

Water rights were the topic of conversation at a June 13 meeting in White Salmon between our 15th District legislators, Lieutenant Governor Brad Owen, Klickitat County officials, including Commissioner Don Struck, Klickitat PUD representatives, Department of Ecology representatives from Yakima and Olympia and the three mayors of the incorporated cities.

In conjunction with the county, Klickitat PUD initiated the meeting when the water rights from KPUD's newest water system at Cliffs were seen as a possible solution to stabilizing economic development in Klickitat County.

KPUD formed this new system and named it after the once flourishing town of Cliffs, Washington, which is now the site of the Columbia Gorge Aluminum Company. KPUD stepped in to form the system with the primary goal of the water resource being preserved for restarting the smelter. Our secondary goal was securing the water rights for industrial commercial development, first at the industrial complex around the smelter and then for other areas in Klickitat County.

The most pressing need for water in Klickitat County is in the city of White Salmon. A building moratorium restricts new growth in the city due to a shortage of water rights. This is one of the reasons Lieutenant Governor Owen was invited to the meeting.

Lieutenant Governor Owen is making economic development a priority. Miland Walling, working with Klickitat County's Economic Development Department, proposed the meeting after talking with Owen in Olympia. He recognizes the need to bring a rational and reasonable decision to the water rights issues in our county.

We left the meeting with an assurance our issue would be addressed. It is now up to participants to followup on commitments made to put this problem behind us and get White Salmon the water it needs.

Along those same lines, I also would like to see Columbia Gorge Aluminum's smelter back in operation.

WA-18