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www.klickpud.com

Goldendale Office
1313 S. Columbus Ave.
(509) 773-5891
(800) 548-8357

White Salmon Office
110 NE Estes Ave. • P.O. Box 187
(509) 493-2255
(800) 548-8358

Greenhouse Gas and Energy Independence

Greenhouse gas (GHG) is the hot topic today. You can't turn on a TV or pick up a paper without hearing about global warming caused by GHG emissions. Our state is working on legislation to restrict GHG emissions. These emissions are mainly carbon dioxide (CO₂) from burning fossil fuels.

I personally believe in global warming. My second-grade teacher, Mrs. Wilson, told us we were coming out of an ice age and the earth is getting warmer. I never doubted anything Mrs. Wilson said. I am glad we now have scientific analysis to back her up.

I understand there is disagreement on whether cutting GHG emissions will actually reverse the trend. I am a staunch supporter of at least trying.

The main reason I support this effort has to do with another laudable goal: energy independence. Most everything we need to do to reduce GHG also helps free us from dependence on foreign oil imports.

Most of you are aware of KPUD's support for renewable energy. KPUD has developed a small fish-friendly hydro project in partnership with Northern Wasco PUD. We have built a generation plant that burns methane gas collected at the landfill near Roosevelt. Methane is an extremely potent GHG, 21 times more harmful than CO₂. Our power plant burns the methane and reduces the impact, at the same time offsetting emissions from other sources. The EPA states landfill gas generation is the only technology that actually removes pollution from the air.

Now we are building the nation's largest publicly sponsored wind project, White Creek, in eastern Klickitat County to take advantage of our abundant wind resource.

Most efforts to reduce GHG will fall on our ability to produce clean renewable energy grown at home. I envision more reliance on the electric grid. Plug-in hybrid vehicles, available in the future, are one example.

Next to transportation, power plants are cited as one of the biggest contributors to GHG emissions. This may be true for the country as a whole, but the Northwest is blessed with an abundance of hydropower. We want to keep our advantage.

There is only so much wind power we can integrate with hydro and only so much methane we can capture and turn into electricity. Consequently, new baseload generation will need to come from natural gas, coal or nuclear. From a GHG perspective, nuclear may be the best alternative.

I was at a meeting where it was said, "If you're against nuclear, that means you're for coal" and "if you're against coal, you must be for nuclear."

Unfortunately, we will be faced with this decision sooner than we want. Clean coal technology exists where you first turn coal into a gas, and then burn it in a combustion turbine. There is even work on sequestering the emissions to capture the GHG. This is a big step forward in controlling carbon emissions. We hope our efforts to reduce emissions will pay big dividends, helping us down the road to energy independence.

Tom D. Svendsen, General Manager

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