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The Global Warming Debate

At this year's Washington PUD Association's annual meeting, global warming was the main topic of discussion. Pending legislation, both state and federal, will have far-reaching effects on our everyday life—at least the cost of our everyday life. Terms like cap and trade, carbon tax and renewable portfolio standards were bantered about as if they were already part of our daily vocabulary.

Whether you believe global warming will be an ecological holocaust doesn't matter. The cure is something we should all be able to agree on, importing and burning fewer hydrocarbon fuels.

We heard from a parade of experts who all agreed that global warming is an established fact. The earth is coming out of an ice age and temperature level averages are rising.

At the conference, there was debate over whether human activities associated with carbon dioxide (CO2) emissions are speeding up this warming. A presentation by Patrick Moore, one of the founders of Greenpeace and now an outspoken proponent of nuclear power as a way to save the environment, was very thought provoking.

Moore believes nuclear power is the only viable alternative for baseload energy that doesn't contribute to the greenhouse gas problem. He made basic observations about what really can and cannot be done to solve the problem. Even the most ardent dam removal zealot must have a hard time reconciling this.

Another recently released study talks about the CO2 effects of removing dams. Removal of the Snake River dams would add an additional 4 million tons of CO2 into the air each year. This is the equivalent of adding 800,000 cars to the highways.

Another large contributor to CO2 is summer dam spill for fish. Summer spill is not only a great waste of money, but also adds more than 2 million tons of CO2 a year into the environment.

What about renewable energy as the answer to global warming?

Renewable will play a large part in reducing greenhouse gas emissions, but they are not the entire answer. Wind power is intermittent. It is a good part of the energy mix, but must rely on other sources, such as hydro, to firm and shape the energy. Solar power has a better load profile by producing energy in the daylight hours when loads are greatest. Moore explained that one problem with solar is that the greenhouse gases produced in manufacturing solar equipment take 18 years to offset through the renewable energy produced.

Whatever the eventual outcome, it seems we are in for considerable debate and a slew of laws that will eventually affect all of our lives to one degree or another (pun intended).

Tom D. Svendsen, General Manager

WA-18