

The Energy Activist

NW Energy Coalition

Gas Plants Draw Fire

Activists mobilize for clean energy alternatives



photo by Corinne Hollister

Citizens across the region are fighting the harmful impacts of natural gas power plants proposed in their communities. Kootenai Environmental Alliance president Buell Hollister challenges the need for two new power plants proposed in North Idaho, within one mile of this recently opened facility. Story on page 10.

A Positive Agenda



This column traditionally explores the victories, the foibles, the inspirations and the fun of **coalition**. The rush to build gas-fired combustion turbines (CTs) and other fossil fuel power plants illustrates one of the difficulties of working in *our Coalition*.

About two years ago, this rush to build gas CTs confronted our coalition with two dangers. First, a hasty overbuilding could slow progress in energy efficiency and clean renewables. Second, CTs, even though they are much cleaner than coal or nuclear, devastate our climate through carbon dioxide emissions and they bring local consequences to water, air and quiet living.

The Coalition had to allocate resources between fighting the rush to gas and promoting our positive agenda: energy efficiency, low-income and consumer protection, clean renewables and salmon restoration. The full Board of the Coalition struggled with this allocation at both Board meetings in 2000 and resolved to 1) limit direct involvement in siting processes, 2) offer technical assistance to our member groups and allies fighting specific plants, and 3) devote the lion's share of Coalition resources to the positive agenda.

The Coalition's intervention in the **Sumas 2** siting process turned out just as precedential as the Board hoped it would. The Washington siting council used the work we did to impose carbon standards for two other plants. The council also denied the initial Sumas 2 application on environmental grounds, including carbon.

Over the last three years, Coalition staff has answered blizzards of questions from members and non-members alike on plants in all four states. The gas map originally published in November 1999 has been updated three times and continues to be a "bestseller." This issue of the *Activist* brings together some basic information on the rush to gas and highlights additional resources to help activists.

And the Coalition has been able to devote its resources to the **Citizens' Energy Plan** based on analysis by **RAND** and the **Tellus Institute**. We unveil it this spring and will use it in all four states and with the **Northwest Power Planning Council** to show the enormous environmental and economic benefits of a clean energy future.

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The Energy Activist

For a clean and affordable energy future

Founded in 1981, the NW Energy Coalition is dedicated to the pursuit of clean and affordable energy. As a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization, all donations to the NW Energy Coalition are tax-deductible.

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No Place Like Home

Clean energy opportunities abound as local communities debate energy choices

Ten years from now when the **Northwest** looks back on the energy crisis, what will our region look like? Will our communities and landscapes be burdened by unnecessary and unwanted power plants, or will we look back with pride on the year we transformed the promise of clean energy into the foundation of a new energy system?

Energy analysts offer natural gas as an affordable, reliable energy source for the future, but many also acknowledge the danger of becoming over-reliant on a single technology and a single fuel source. Last year's turmoil in the energy industry demonstrated that natural gas can take households and businesses on an unpredictable roller coaster ride of fluctuating power prices.

Some government agencies charged with granting permits to power developers are looking at the big picture. **Oregon** already requires developers to offset a portion of the greenhouse gas pollution produced by new power plants — offsets which include planting trees and investing in energy efficiency and clean, alternative energy sources.

State officials in **Washington** are looking at Oregon's pioneering rules as a model to set pollution standards for new power development in the Evergreen State. Activists in **Idaho** are lobbying for a state agency dedicated to siting energy facilities. On a region-wide level, the Northwest is looking for and finding ways to reduce the impact of new power development. But resolving concerns expressed by citizens and communities finding themselves hosts to new power plants is more difficult.

Local resistance to new power development raises broad concerns and highlights the trade-offs we make for the comfort and convenience our modern power grid affords. Debate over local impacts of fossil fuel-based energy generation forces a discussion of the alternatives. Every natural gas burning power plant built to satisfy our growing demand for electricity consumes precious

opportunities to build our energy future through conservation and clean, renewable technologies.

Dozens of gas-fired plants are currently planned or in the permitting process in the Northwest. Enough gas-fired generation to power more than a million homes (1,500 megawatts) is now under construction or newly on-line in the region. The Northwest will become more reliant on gas-fired generation. But we have a voice in deciding how deep that dependency will become and how the technology will affect our communities and our environment. Citizens all over the Northwest are challenging proposed gas plants and forcing debates over their impacts on local air and water quality and on the quality of life in communities like **Sumas**, Washington, and **Middleton**, Idaho.

Clean energy advocates are working harder and enjoying more success than ever before. Wind power has broken through the economic barrier that once kept alternative energy on the fringes of energy development. Wind, solar, geothermal and other renewable sources in the Northwest will expand. The economics of alternative sources improve every day. And local communities, by raising concerns about the local threats of traditional power development, will play a key role in motivating a transition to clean energy.



photo courtesy of Generations Against Senseless Power

Every natural gas plant built diminishes our opportunities to invest in a clean energy future with increased conservation and clean, renewable technologies.

Why gas?

Natural gas fuels 95 percent of proposed power plants in U.S.

Natural gas-fired combined-cycle combustion turbines (CCCTs) came into vogue in the late-80s as the new technology of choice for electricity generation. The heart of a gas-fired power plant — its turbine — is essentially a giant jet engine. The term combined-cycle refers to a plant's secondary turbine, powered by steam from the super-heated exhaust of its primary turbine.

The addition of the second generator boosts the efficiency of gas turbine technology. Gas-fired generators enjoy other advantages — they are cheaper to build than competing technologies and can be built in many sizes to better match needs. Coal plants, for example, cost more per megawatt of capacity to build and are only cost-effective to run if they are built on a large-scale at or near a source of coal.

Natural gas prices, which dropped to historic lows in the early-90s, also played a key role in vaulting combustion turbine technology to the forefront. This convergence of technical innovation and rock-bottom fuel prices prompted **Dick Watson**, now power planning director for the **Northwest Power Planning Council**, to declare at the time that CCCT technology was “the crack

cocaine” of the utility industry.

Natural gas also is significantly less polluting than other fossil fuels. Gas-fired plants release fewer particulates (linked to respiratory illness) compared to their coal-burning cousins and emit less of two other major power industry pollutants — sulfur dioxide (SO₂) and nitrogen-oxide (NO_x). But their emissions of those pollutants still cause serious concerns. Gas burners also produce enormous quantities of carbon dioxide (CO₂), a major contributor to global warming.

So-called clean-coal technology, which proponents hope will allow coal to compete with gas as a “clean” energy source, is still mired in the development phase.

Emissions Comparisons (lb/MWh)

Technology	CO ₂	SO ₂	NO _x
U.S. Average Coal	2,090	8.9	4.4
New Coal	1,960	2.8	.95
Comb. Cycle Gas	875	.004	.07

Source: *The Clean Air Task Force* (<http://www.clnatf.org>)

Questions for Power Plant Developers

Primary Information

1. Who are the developers — primary and partners?
2. Will it be built in an industrial area? Near neighborhoods, schools, sensitive or protected areas, waterways or aquifers, visual or cultural resources?
3. What is the developer's timeline to file applications, build the facility and begin operations?

Operations

1. What type of facility is proposed: combined cycle or simple cycle, for example?
2. Will there be a back-up system: diesel, liquefied natural gas, other? How often will it run?
3. What is the generating capacity of the facility and how often will it be running? What is the efficiency level of the proposed facility?
4. Will local transmission or gas lines need extensions?

Air Emissions

1. What are the expected annual air emissions, including greenhouse gases?
2. What are the characteristics of the airshed?
3. Does the developer propose mitigation, offset or control technology?

Water Resources/Supply

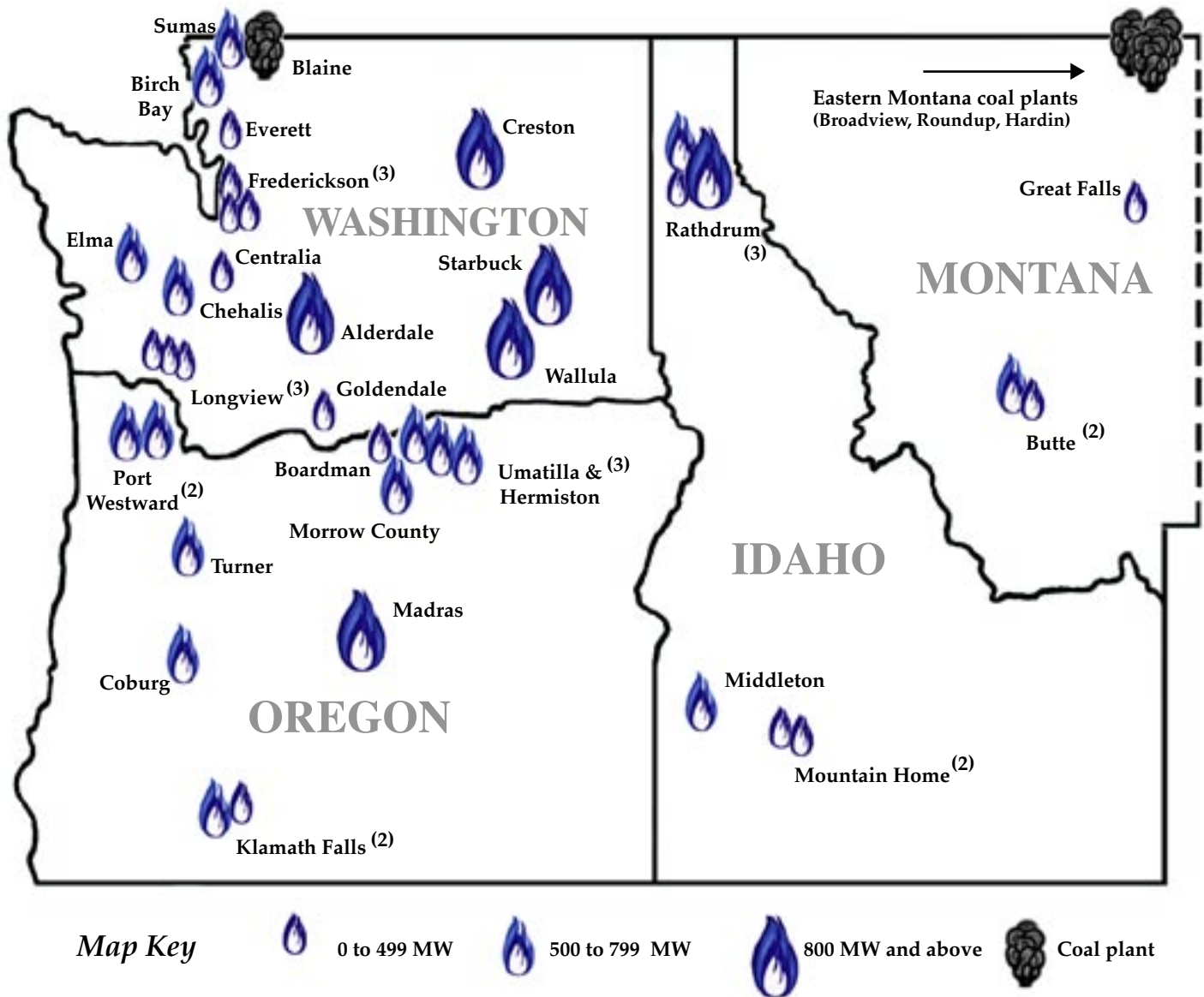
1. Does the developer plan to use primarily air or water for cooling?
2. How much water will be consumed and where will it come from?
3. Are there any concerns with local water quality and/or quantity? How does the developer propose to mitigate impacts?

For a more detailed list of questions, visit our Web site at www.nwenergy.org or call (206) 621-0094.

Issues

The Rush to Build Fossil Fuel Power Plants

New Merchant Facilities in Permitting Process or Sited for Future Operation



Map Summary

More than 9500 MW of gas- or coal-fired generation capacity are now sited or proposed in Washington, and more than 1600 MW are likely to be built in the next five years (probably 1600 – 2900 MW). More than 8300 MW of gas are now sited or proposed in Oregon, with more than 1300 MW coming on-line in 2001 – 2003. More than 3000 MW of gas are now sited or proposed in Idaho, with at least 270 MW coming on line in 2001. At least 1800 MW are proposed in Montana. See the NW Energy Coalition Web site or call our office (206/621-0094) for a complete chart with details on individual proposed plants:
<http://www.nwenergy.org>.

Updated January 2002 with best available information representing a snapshot in time.

Activist Tools

Citizens Make the Difference in the Battle Between Clean

Research

When confronted with the prospect of a new gas-fired power plant in your area, find out as much as you can about the three Ps: players, permitting, and proposal. Start by identifying key players, including plant developers and state and local officials who will participate in the permitting process along with the local residents who will be affected.

Power plant developers must apply for various local and/or state permits. First determine which permitting process applies in your case, then investigate opportunities for citizens to participate — testifying at hearings, submitting written comments, or formally intervening in a legal process.

Find out how the proposed plant would affect local air and water quality, land use, noise levels and other resources and whether the developer plans to mitigate any negative effects. Note the proximity of the facility to schools, residences, protected areas, waterways, and visual and cultural resources.

Ask local and state permitting agencies for help in deciphering the plans. Question the accuracy of statements related to the need for the facility and the chosen site. Pay attention to news coverage about the facility. The more facts you have, the better you will be able to analyze the potential effects and formulate your response to a new power plant planned in your neighborhood or town.

State Permitting Authorities for Thermal Power Plants

Idaho	Local county authorities plus Department of Water Resources for water allocation and Department of Environmental Quality for air emissions and water discharge permits. (http://www2.state.id.us/deq/)
Montana	Department of Environmental Quality issues air emissions and water discharge permits. (http://deq.state.mt.us/pcd/emb/fs/mfs.asp)
Oregon	State Energy Facility Siting Council (EFSC) for energy generation facilities greater than 25 MW; some exemptions apply. (http://www.energy.state.or.us/siting)
Washington	State Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC) for stationary thermal plants 350 MW or larger and floating plants 100 MW or larger. EFSEC includes state agency and local government representation. (http://www.efsec.wa.gov) Local county authorities plus departments of Ecology and Fish and Wildlife for smaller facilities.

Evaluation

Every action creates a reaction. Make sure you evaluate the consequences of every action you take. The process of evaluating a power plant is often long and drawn out. Few people are paid to fight power plants or lessen their impact. Your effort to be flawless. Mistakes will be made. Things may take unexpected turns. Thorough evaluation leads to vital knowledge for the next step.

Try to follow significant meetings, hearings, and public comment periods. Consider what went well, what didn't, and what actions require follow-up. It is much more effective to continually engage people in collectively evaluating the process. Evaluation should lead to research and organizing for the next step.

By following this cycle of

Plan and Dirty Power

organizing, action and evaluation, and by being strategic about how you use your limited resources, you can maximize your impact.

Organizing

One of your best weapons to influence the outcome of a project proposed by a powerful gas developer is organized people. Early in the process, begin organizing citizens and existing groups who share your concerns.

Start with the people and organizations you know. Think also about neighborhood, environmental, low-income, consumer protection, good government, business, or religious groups or any organizations that also have a stake in the process. People will join your cause and stick with it if they have a compelling self-interest, if there is hope for a favorable outcome, and if the fight is well organized.

To be most effective, express clear directions and goals. Make sure meetings are well organized with a clear purpose to keep people engaged. Build a list of interested people to attend critical meetings or hearings, sometimes on short notice.

When you evaluate the results of permitting a natural gas project, specialists are trained and impacts, and no one expects mistakes made and your campaign situation will turn mistakes

Hearings, or events with an audience could be improved and easier to do this if you route your actions. Each evaluation leads to the next action you

of research,

Action

Once armed with the facts about the proposed facility and a well-organized response team, it's time to decide how and when to act.

Your research and organizing revealed avenues for affected communities to engage in the permitting process. Evaluate your resources — finances, time, and people — to determine which avenues will lead to the best results. If you have some money to work with, consider consulting experts or hiring an attorney to intervene in legal processes. Motivated citizen activists can make a major impact on decisions by attending and testifying at public hearings and by submitting written comments. Informally, activists can raise awareness and generate public pressure with rallies, canvassing, petitions, signs and posters, letters to local newspapers, and news reports.

Consider meeting with the developer of the proposed project to express your concerns and identify solutions where possible. Be creative and strategic to maximize your resources.

Without Borders

Proposed Sumas 2 plant faces strong opposition from activists in B.C. and Washington

The battle began in a community meeting of 30 people concerned about a proposed electric transmission line. It grew to involve some 90,000 people, from both sides of an international border, who signed petitions opposing the proposed 660 megawatt (MW) **Sumas 2** gas power plant near **Bellingham, WA**.

With buttons, signs, T-shirts, letters to local newspapers, flyers, petitions and a Web site, **Candace Ambrosio**, a leading member of **Generations Against Senseless Power (GASP)** explains, "We got very close to our neighbors." Those neighbors, including **Whatcom County** officials and the premier of **British Columbia** along with help from the **NW Energy Coalition**, convinced the **Washington Energy Facility Site Evaluation Council (EFSEC)** to deny the initial application.

The developer, **Sumas Energy 2**, submitted a revised application for the plant. That application is under review and a decision is expected by March.

This is simply the wrong place for another power plant, Ambrosio argues, because it sits in a flood zone and on a seismic fault line, uses a tremendous amount of water and feeds air pollution into the **Frazier Valley**, a boxed canyon in British Columbia.

Michael Kaufman, also a leader in GASP, agrees. "We are not against all power plants," Kaufman says. He points to the proposed **British Petroleum** co-generation project at **Cherry Point**. That 750 MW project, he argues, sits in an industrial zone, includes offsets and reduced air emissions, and protects jobs at the adjacent oil refinery.

"Continued research and numerous appearances by involved people to educate the public remain our main strength. Education with facts and direct quotes from reliable sources are probably the strongest tools in a fight that is often political and sometimes twisted in the facts."

— Marlene Noteboom, a founding member of GASP in Whatcom County, Washington.

GASP members maintain a Web site at <http://se2-gasp.org/>



photo courtesy of GASP

Both Kaufman and Ambrosio were active in **NOPE (Neighbors Opposing Power Encroachment)** which formed in the early 1990s in response to a proposed power transmission line. The organization helped pass a county initiative limiting major power lines to industrial zones or existing corridors. Kaufman was instrumental, too, in developing the county comprehensive plan five years ago and chairs the county utility planning committee. This foundation of experience provided momentum for the GASP effort.

Unfortunately, according to Kaufman, the county comprehensive plan does not apply because the proposed plant lies inside the Sumas city limits. "If this plant was just on the other side of the (city) border, it wouldn't be allowed."

Kaufman's solution: a state, if not a regional, energy plan to identify appropriate sites for power plants and to promote energy conservation and clean renewable technologies. "We don't have to go knocking heads," he argues. "The Sumas 2 process wasted resources and time at the state, local and citizen level."

Getting all stakeholders at the table to develop a regional energy plan — or even specific plans for individual plants — is a big commitment, Kaufman admits, but he is ready to set that table. "You grab a hold of what interests you and follow it . . . My interest has always been in the utility issue," says Kaufman. "This is my volunteer effort to my community."

Finding a Voice

Proposed plant turns neighbors to activists in Idaho

“I think I can safely say none of us have ever done anything like this before,” says **Penny Steadham**, president of **Citizens for Responsible Land Use** in Southern Idaho. In less than a year’s time, Steadham’s role in her community transformed from a mother volunteering at school to an activist battling the construction of a gas-fired power plant within half a mile of her home.

It started last February, Steadham recalls, when **Ida-West Energy**, an affiliate of **Idaho Power Company**, sent a handful of letters to neighbors near **Middleton**, a town of about 3,000 on the **Boise River**, announcing a small new substation. “When they told me the first facility would take up 11 acres with 110-foot tall buildings, plus the stacks, I realized these are not the greatest things to live next to,” she says.

The **Garnet Energy Facility** — a 535-megawatt plant proposed in two phases — is one of six new gas-fired power plants in the works in Idaho (see map on page 5). The company argues the power is needed to fill an anticipated electricity shortfall. *The Idaho Statesman* reports the proposal includes preparations for selling power outside the region. Steadham and her supporters claim the current site is simply a bad place for a big power plant because of its proximity to a populated community. Steadham lists noise, pollution, chemical storage and water consumption as key reasons for concern — the plant, if built as planned, will double

Middleton’s annual water use of approximately 110 million gallons.

Because Idaho does not have a state siting council for power plants, concerned citizens find themselves in different forums

on separate issues: before county commissioners or local planning and zoning boards on land-use matters; before the state **Department of Water Resources** on water use; and before the state **Department of Environmental Quality (DEQ)** regarding emissions and pollution discharge permits.

Citizens for Responsible Land Use, now 300 members strong, recently appealed permits granted by DEQ and **Canyon County** for the first phase of the project. The organization has spent approximately \$30,000 on process fees and community education so far, with numerous hours invested in phone calls, Internet searches, newsletters and fliers, and monthly meetings.

City officials support the plant because of increased tax revenue and one of the Canyon County commissioners is selling the land to Ida-West. Yet Steadham maintains the fight is not over. “We are very optimistic,” she says. “We still think that we can keep this plant out of our community.”

These new activists are now meeting with state representatives to talk about establishing a power plant siting council. “It wouldn’t help our case, but we are still pushing it so the next community wouldn’t have to face what we did,” Steadham explains. “This is so technical and so far over everybody’s head that we need a special council.”

Steadham offers this advice to people concerned about fossil fuel-fired power plants: get involved early, educate yourself, document all meetings and start raising money. Citizens for Responsible Land Use maintains a web site at: www.cfrlu.org



photo courtesy of CFRLU

The Good Fight

Coalition member challenges two of region's biggest proposed power plants

The **Kootenai Environmental Alliance (KEA)** is challenging two power plants proposed near **Rathdrum, Idaho**. If permits are granted, four gas-fired power plants would operate within a radius of about a mile, with a collective capacity to generate more than 2,500 megawatts (MW). (The city of **Seattle** consumes about 1,200 average MW.) The site attracts developers because gas and transmission lines and water are close.

"We are challenging this assurance that there is an unlimited amount of water," explains **Buell Hollister**,



KEA president and **NW Energy Coalition** member. KEA was charged to submit written comments protesting the proposed plants to the **Idaho**

Department of Water Resources. The \$25 fee for each set of comments is perhaps a small amount compared to the \$10,000 to \$15,000 required for expert witnesses at upcoming hearings, but nonetheless surprising to environmental watchdogs and civil libertarians.

If constructed, the two plants would use 17 million gallons of water a day from the local aquifer — the sole source of drinking water for 400,000 people in **North Idaho** and **Eastern Washington**. **Idaho Department of Fish and Game** analyses show that rainbow trout populations also rely on the aquifer as it mixes with and cools the water of the **Spokane River**.

But water is certainly not the only concern. Air pollution and waste produced by the plants alarm local activists as well. After a recent tour of a smaller existing gas facility, Hollister learned that every 10 days that facility hauls 14,000 pounds of calcium, magnesium and silica, and 14,000 pounds of salts to the local landfill.

"Because there is no forum to deal with the question of whether or not the region needs these power plants, I think this is going to be a tough battle," he explains.

Clearing the Air

Montana power plant will include offsets for greenhouse gas emissions

Imagine a power plant built with full offsets of greenhouse gas emissions linked with global climate change. The **Montana Environmental Information Center (MEIC)** not only imagined it but helped make it happen.

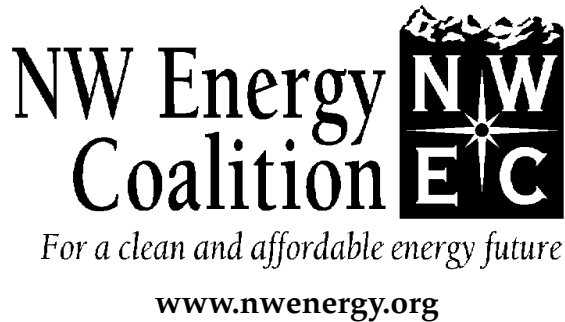
MEIC negotiated with **Northwestern Corp.** for a "carbon neutral" power plant now under construction in **Great Falls**. Montana activists herald the agreement as historic, one that sets the standard for all energy producers in the state. "This is one example where citizens and industry were able to work together cooperatively, to craft an innovative strategy for addressing the critical issue of global climate change," says **Patrick Judge**, MEIC's Energy Policy Director.

The company will offset carbon dioxide (CO₂) emissions at its 240 megawatt facility by investing in

projects that remove CO₂ from the atmosphere, such as planting trees. The details of the agreement have not been finalized, but the company may plant as many as 100,000 trees in Montana. In addition, it plans to distribute at least 50,000 energy-efficient light bulbs to promote energy conservation with a focus on reaching low-income consumers. NorthWestern also agreed to install carbon monoxide control technology before operations begin.

"We need to ensure that any new generation is climate friendly, and that conservation and renewable energy are prioritized."

— Patrick Judge, MEIC's Energy Policy Director.



Yes! I want to join the fight for clean and affordable energy to protect consumers and the environment.
 I want to support the NW Energy Coalition.

The NW Energy Coalition is a regional alliance of 100 businesses, environmental and low-income advocates, progressive utilities, community action agencies and consumer groups working for a clean, affordable and reliable energy. By joining the NW Energy Coalition, you're supporting an effective advocate with 20 years of success bringing communities together to make energy policy that makes sense for our air, our water and our pocketbooks.

Sponsors and members of NWECA receive the monthly *Report*, our insightful policy publication, in addition to the *Energy Activist*. Members can also make use of our e-mail lists to announce events and spotlight issues in their area. As a member you'll also receive action alerts and invitations to our conferences, board meetings, and special events.

I'll volunteer in the following ways:

- | | |
|--|---|
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| <input type="checkbox"/> Write letters to my local newspaper | <input type="checkbox"/> Educate legislators/testify |
| <input type="checkbox"/> Join an email alert list (my address is below) | <input type="checkbox"/> Phone other concerned citizens |
| <input type="checkbox"/> I can offer my expertise in _____ | |

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