



Bear Facts

The Winter 2010 newsletter of the Citizens' Utility Board of Oregon and the CUB Policy Center.

Letter from the Executive Director

Dear Member,

Many of us have had the experience of buying a wireless phone, signing up for a calling plan, and coming away unsure whether we really got a good deal. Since the only place we can get information is from a salesperson, it feels like we are being sold "something."

In the 1990s, Congress deregulated most of the telecommunications marketplace. The theory was that competition between service providers would drive innovation and keep prices affordable. But this unregulated marketplace has also led to rip-offs and unhappy consumers. For 7 of the last 8 years, telecommunications has led the list of the most frequent consumer complaints to the Oregon Attorney General Office. The year it wasn't ranked number 1, it ranked number 2.

At the supermarket we have unit pricing and ingredient labeling to provide consumers with good information to help us make choices. In the telecommunications market, we have lots of people trying to sell us stuff, and it often seems like they are not telling us the full story.



CUB is working to solve this problem by creating CUB Connects, a website and information source on telecommunications options in Oregon. It is an exciting project and will serve an important need by allowing customers to compare prices and products, without a salesperson pushing particular products. We hope to have this established and working early in 2011. You can meet the new staff we've brought on for this effort on page 4.

When my mother needs to buy a new wireless phone or other telecommunications product, she gives me a call and I offer her my best advice. When my wife needs a new wireless phone, she asks me to get one for her. But I can't provide this kind of service to everyone. CUB Connects should solve this problem by providing information about products and services in a manner that is accessible for all Oregonians, even my mother.

Of course, even after it is up and running, my mom is always welcome to give me a call.

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Making Sure Your Dollars Help Heat Your Home – and Don't Fill State Budget Holes

You've heard time and again from us about the importance of energy efficiency. You've read over and over how important those investments are to ratepayers. You've heard about how critical we think the work of Energy Trust of Oregon is to ensuring we continue to get savings from energy efficiency in order to keep rates under control and reduce carbon emissions.

It's not only us who are saying so. A couple of weeks ago, the American Council for an Energy-Efficient Economy (ACEEE) released its "State Energy Efficiency Scorecard," which showed that Oregon is number 3 in the nation for energy efficiency investments (up one spot from two years ago behind California and Massachusetts). As the executive summary of the report, which

also looks at energy use in the transportation sector, noted: "Governors, state legislators and officials, and citizens increasingly recognize energy efficiency – the kilowatt hours and gallons of gasoline that we don't use thanks to improved technologies and practices – as the cheapest, cleanest and quickest energy resource to deploy." Sound familiar? (You can read the whole report here: <http://www.aceee.org/sector/state-policy/scorecard>.)

As cooler weather sets in at this time of year, more people start thinking about ways to make their homes warmer and more comfortable...and save money on their utility bills to boot. But we want to make sure you're also thinking about energy efficiency come January when the legislature gets underway. Why? Because there's a very good chance that the next legislative session will try to re-direct ratepayer money dedicated to energy efficiency to fill holes in the state budget.

We've seen it before. In five special sessions in 2002 and the regular session in 2003, CUB members and other allies fought off many attempts by the legislature to divert "public purpose" dollars – money that is collected in rates specifically to fund energy efficiency projects. Most of these dollars are administered (very well, we might add) by the Energy Trust, but some also goes to weatherizing low-income homes and schools. Ultimately, it's not the legislature's money to allocate in the first place. Public purpose dollars are ratepayer funds, not taxpayer funds. That means that the money is collected in rates from the consumers of two electric utilities (Portland General Electric and Pacific Power) for a specific purpose (energy efficiency and some renewable investment). The money is not made up of tax dollars collected to meet the general needs of the state. As we all know, though, the state budget is a real mess. Legislators will literally be looking for every dime that is not nailed down.

We fully expect several attempted raids on the public purpose funds. And we're going to need CUB members to be willing to call, e-mail and talk to their local legislator about the need to continue these needed investments in energy efficiency and how it's improper (and probably illegal) to re-direct public purpose dollars. You can be sure to hear a lot more about this as 2011 dawns.

The Bear Facts is the periodic newsletter of CUB and the CUB Policy Center.

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CUB's board meets 8 times per year.

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CUB is a member of the National Association of State Utility Consumer Advocates (NASUCA) and the Consumer Federation of America (CFA).



Biglow Canyon Wind Farm Tour by John Sturm

When PGE generously offered to take staff from CUB and the Public Utility Commission on a tour of their wind farm at Biglow Canyon in late September, we were happy go. Besides, field-trips are fun!

Nine of us from CUB and the PUC piled into a PGE van in the morning and headed east on I-84. Biglow Canyon is on the Oregon side of the Columbia Gorge, about two and a half hours east of Portland, a small part of a larger section of the gorge. The area is almost entirely dedicated to agricultural use, mostly wheat farms. Because a completed wind tower has a relatively small footprint, the vast majority of the farm land remains undisturbed, so local farmers have, by and large, enthusiastically supported this and other wind projects in the area. Though the individual turbines occupy very little

space on the ground, the wind farm as a whole covers a considerable area – some 25,000 acres.



There was significant wind on the day of our visit, which allowed us to see the turbines operating at near full capacity. In fact, it is quite possible to have too much wind for a turbine to operate. When winds exceed a threshold gust speed or a threshold sustained speed, the turbine will automatically alter the pitch of its blades to provide less resistance until the wind slows down. We were pleased to note that, other than a small amount of noise generated during the high wind events, the turbines produced very little noise. In fact, even when standing directly beneath

them, they were barely audible over the background noise produced by the wind itself.



Oregon utilities are required to meet the requirements of the state's Renewable Portfolio Standard, which seeks to have 25% of the state's electricity derive from renewable resources by the year 2025, with interim goals of 10% by 2010 and 15% by 2015. Thanks to the Biglow project, PGE is well on its way to satisfying this goal –currently about 9% of the company's portfolio comes from renewable sources. The cost of this project was about \$1 billion and it consists of over 200 turbines with a total generating capacity of around 450 megawatts. But PGE is not stopping there. In 2009 the company announced plans to build an even larger facility about 20 miles to the east. Known as the Sheperds Flat Wind Farm, it will include over 330 turbines with a combined generating capacity of around 850 megawatts, and will be the largest wind farm in Oregon.

To the right: Catriona McCracken, CUB's attorney, Karen Jaffe, CUB's membership director and John Sturm, CUB's law clerk, pose under a not so friendly looking bear cub!



Meet CUB's New Staff!

John Sturm, CUB's new law clerk, moved to the Great Northwest from Oklahoma in the mid 90's and fell in love with Oregon and Oregonians from the start. After working at Oregonlive.com and the Multnomah County Purchasing Department, John spent a few years in Panama doing environmental work with the Peace Corps. He returned to Portland where he graduated from Lewis and Clark Law School in 2010. While at Lewis and



Clark, John worked with the Pacific Environmental Advocacy Clinic and was exposed to the good work being done at CUB. Studying energy law and receiving a certificate in environmental law made work at CUB a great match for his desire to protect the public's interest in the clean and cost-effective use of energy resources in Oregon. When not working at CUB, John is probably hiking or playing Scrabble.

The CUB Connects Project Team, pictured to the left:

Andrea Crosby, the new Project Manager for CUB Connects, is originally from New Hampshire. She happily finds herself on the West Coast after 3+ years living in Ecuador where she was a Peace Corps volunteer and then a Project Coordinator for an international conservation

foundation. Before taking off to South America, Andrea researched global climate change models at NASA and the University of New Hampshire. She has a BS Degree in Environmental Sciences from Duke University.

Ghassan Ammar, the new Project Support Coordinator for CUB Connects, grew up in Pennsylvania, earned a BA Degree in both Writing and Media Arts from Emerson College in Boston, and spent the past few years atop a mountain in upstate New York, working as a manager for a Tibetan Buddhist retreat center. He is very happy to now be enjoying the fresh air of the Pacific Northwest.

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