

Update

What's Happening With the Sixth Power Plan

May 2009

The Council has decided to delay issuing the draft of its Sixth Power Plan until July. As Council member Dick Wallace said at the May meeting, "This is so important – let's take the time to do it right." I agree. In the last few months, as more pieces of the analysis underpinning the Plan have been unveiled, I see that we've made some headway, but I am still concerned about several aspects of the Plan and the information it presents.

One of PNUCC's main goals this year is to have the Plan synch up with what utilities are doing in a way that allows the public, regulators, and other policymakers to understand what's coming up in the region's electricity future. Recently, I've heard Council members asking some incisive questions that reflect our concerns, and the delay in releasing the draft Plan should offer a chance for those to be answered.

Here are some issues I think need attention:

- **The Surplus.** The Council's projection of a substantial (5,000-7,000 MWh) regional energy surplus is likely to confuse policymakers and the media. As Jim Yost asked, "How do we explain this surplus, yet many utilities are scrambling to build new resources?" Right question.
- **Conservation.** I am struck by the apparent disconnect in a Plan that says the region has lots of surplus energy, yet calls for utilities to acquire twice as much conservation as they have been able to achieve in the past five years. The good news is that a group of utility and BPA staff is diving into the numbers to ferret out the answers. Stay tuned.
- **Portfolio Model.** PNUCC has hired consultant Jim Litchfield to probe into the technical innards of the Council's portfolio model to ascertain whether the scenarios it spits out will be something ratepayers and policymakers will find useful and representative of power supply realities. It is challenging work and Jim has the right skills to do the job.
- **Will The Plan Meet Load.** So far, the analysis leading to a draft Plan has focused on meeting future energy needs and has been thin on assessing the ability to follow the hourly demand. Conservation programs and wind turbines may provide the needed energy, but raises the question of being able to provide the power during the hour it is needed. I am concerned that the Plan will not provide the complete picture.

- **Climate Change.** Much ado, but still no decision as to whether the Council will take an aggressive stance to push the region to roll back emission levels or wait and watch what Congress can accomplish this year. I am also curious to see what the Council's analysis that forces retirement of the region's coal plants will look like.

- **Abstract is for Art, not Planning.** We've been emphasizing the need for the Council's Plan to be written in clear and simple language. It's gratifying to hear Council members want this too. Chair Bill Booth has said repeatedly the Plan needs to be written in a way the layman can understand and that "makes sense in the real world."

- **The Need for a Vision.** The full Council has yet to hone in on this key element of the Plan. This month, PNUCC's Board decided to put together a "utility vision" to make it clear what we think should happen in the future. We anticipate having it ready for the region by the Fourth of July.

Your thoughts are most welcome...



Dick Adams, Executive Director
PNUCC
503.294.1268 phone
dick@pnucc.org