

Carbon Free Campaign Facts Sheet

PSE owns four coal-fired power plants in Colstrip, Montana, and has committed to retire its two most toxic boilers at that location. This is a great first step. Now we want PSE to retire the remaining two plants in Colstrip by 2025 and to commit to replacing them with conservation and 100% renewable energy.

The WUTC will hear oral public testimony in February of 2018 regarding an Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) that has been submitted by PSE. This IRP sets out a 20-year plan, yet has only minimal commitment to conservation and renewables, while continuing a reliance on fossil fuels. It does not commit to a date for shutting down the existing coal facilities.

Natural gas power production has been proposed by PSE, but this option is equally damaging to the climate as coal. Natural gas carries significant risk of methane leakage as it is drilled and transported. Also, gas requires a large amount of water for hydraulic fracturing, refining, and pipeline and power plant operations. Today, “natural” gas means fracked gas.

Fracked gas is financially risky for PSE customers as gas fuel costs are prone to dramatic price swings. PSE’s corporate owners incur minimal risk associated with fuel or carbon costs, but customers stand to pay significantly when fossil fuel prices rise or clean-up is required.

Replacement of Colstrip power plants with 100% renewable energy and energy conservation is feasible now, as stated in the 7th Power Plan from the Northwest Power & Conservation Council. The Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission oversees PSE’s plan for replacing the Colstrip plants. They are charged with the responsibility to ensure regulated companies provide safe and reliable service to customers at reasonable rates, while allowing them the opportunity to earn a fair profit. They need to hear from us.

We would like to demonstrate how strongly the community feels about purchasing power from renewable energy sources and not financing new carbon-producing facilities.

Facts about PSE:

- Puget Sound Energy (PSE) is a utility that serves customers (without an alternative energy provider option) in a region stretching from Olympia to north of Bellingham.
- 59% of PSE’s fuel sources come from fossil fuels including coal and liquid natural gas.
- PSE has a one third ownership in Colstrip, Montana, a power generating facility that is one of the largest CO₂, SO₂ and mercury emitting coal plants in the US.
- Many technical experts believe that PSE is in a position to replace its aging facilities with renewable energy facilities over the next decade.
- PSE is owned by Macquarie Consortium, not only the largest Australian investment bank but also the 4th largest gas production and distribution company in the US.

PSE has proposed a (non-renewable) liquid natural gas powered facility to handle peak energy needs (utilized when demand is at its highest). Often these facilities end up not just handling peak needs but fuels energy at other times as well.

Natural gas is primarily composed of methane, a much more (25x) powerful greenhouse gas emitter than coal burning. Gas burns cleanly, but is significantly leaked in the production and transmission process.

The cost of wind and solar technology on a residential and commercial level is rapidly declining. Wind and solar are currently more affordable alternatives than either coal or natural gas according industry expert Lazard in their Levelized Cost of Energy Analysis 10.0 report.

We, the rate payers, would bear the cost of future decommissioned facilities when PSE's new gas infrastructure becomes more expensive to operate than building renewable source capacity.

A July 2016 Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative (RGGI) Outcomes Report showed that electricity prices across a 9-state region *decreased* by 3.4% between 2008 and 2016, while in states not establishing CO2 caps, electricity prices increased an average of 7.2%. The PSE increase was twice the national average, without caps, in the same time period. Note: RGGI is a consortium of nine NE US States formed to cap and reduce CO2 emissions.

Our Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (WUTC) is appointed by our state legislature with a mission that “regulates private, investor-owned electric and natural gas utilities in Washington. It is the commission's responsibility to ensure regulated companies provide safe and reliable service to customers at reasonable rates, while allowing them the opportunity to earn a fair profit.”

The written comment period is open now. We strongly encourage you to submit your comments before February 22nd, to ensure that they are read in advance of the hearing.

Email and letters must include the following docket numbers: UE-160918 and UG-160919.

Email (preferred):

records@utc.wa.gov

Snail mail:

Steven V. King, Executive Director and Secretary
Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission
P.O. Box 47250
1300 S. Evergreen Park Drive S.W.
Olympia, Washington 98504-7250

While it is not required, please consider including your phone number and address, and if you are a PSE rate payer, state that.

Possible wording for written and/or oral testimony

- Renewable energy is **freedom and resilience**.
- Fossil fuels are a **dying industry**.
- Renewables will win, and **win faster than most people realize**.
- Renewables **run themselves**, gas plants **must be fed**.
- We want our **renewable energy investment dividend** now.
- The UTC can hear the **alarm bells** of climate change and the volatility of fuels.
- By being **stubborn** about fossil fuels, PSE is exposing us to **risk**.
- We are at risk of **losing our future**.
- **Unleash the jobs potential** of renewable energy.
- PSE is selling a product that is **nearing its pull date**.
- Gas is a **bridge to nowhere**.
- PSE is **fighting the future** at every turn
- The earth's most abundant resources are **unlimited and everlasting**.
- **Launch human innovations**, free us from dependency on an outdated mode of extraction/pollution.
- It is **too costly to delay** the transition to clean energy.
- Fossil fuels are a cost **albatross** around customers necks due to unknown future climate and environmental (eg: cleanup) costs.
- We are at a **crossroads**, renewable energy or more fossil fuel.

Key points you should consider including in oral testimony:

- I am a PSE ratepayer.
- I am not being paid to be here today.

In either written or oral testimony, speak generally about self-interest. Asking us to pay for fossil fuels is asking us to pay against our own self-interest. We have a right not to pay for our own destruction. We also have a right to have a power provider that buys into a good future instead of tethering itself to a dying model.

Sample Letters

1. This is the letter developed by the Sierra Club for supporters to sign and submit:
(It exists in this exact form at this site: [sc.org/DearUTC](https://www.sierraclub.org/DearUTC))

Dear Commissioners,

Puget Sound Energy's long-term plan lacks the vision for a carbon-free future that Washington residents expect from our state's largest utility. I call on you to use your existing authority to defend the public interest by rejecting any plan that does not address getting coal-fired electricity from Colstrip off the utility's grid by 2025 and explicitly exclude new fossil fuel infrastructure, including liquefied natural gas (LNG).

PSE's stubborn addiction to fossil fuels puts ratepayers at great financial risk. The spectacular drop in the price of renewable energy is already disrupting energy markets worldwide, and costs will only continue to fall. Continued investment in coal and other fossil fuels saddles the utility with debt that will hinder its ability to utilize new technologies that provide more reliable, cleaner power at lower cost. It also puts customers at risk of sudden fuel cost hikes. Fossil fuel prices are inherently volatile, and a carbon price is inevitable.

By continuing to invest in fossil fuels, PSE is also forcing its customers to pay for their own destruction. We cannot mitigate climate change's most disastrous effects if we lock ourselves into another 30 years of fossil fuels by building new gas infrastructure. Methane escapes at every stage in the gas life-cycle, and it is 87 times more potent than carbon dioxide at trapping the earth's heat over a 20-year span. Fracked gas is not a "bridge" fuel; it is a wall against clean energy.

PSE has responded to overwhelming customer demand for clean energy by offering "boutique" energy programs that allow customers with deep pockets to ensure that their operations run clean. This is not good enough. It is time for Puget Sound Energy to deliver a plan to make clean energy accessible for all and to fully decarbonize its grid: no coal, no fracked gas, and no LNG.

Signed,

[name, phone number, address, and if you're a rate payer, state that]

2. Basic sample narrative from Carbon Free Campaign, Vashon:

Dear Commissioners,

As a PSE customer I was surprised to learn recently that the majority of my family's electricity is still generated using the fuel sources of coal and natural gas. I am writing because of my concern regarding climate change and the pollution caused by burning fossil fuels. I have been inspired to learn more about my utility and our regional energy facilities. I believe that there are conservation and energy opportunities and technologies that PSE should utilize to the greatest degree possible in order to achieve 100% renewable energy as soon as possible. Because PSE's aging fossil-fuel power plants need replacement, our utility appears to face a crossroads. I implore PSE and the WUTC to seize the opportunity to be a regional and national leader in the transition to renewable energy sources as soon as possible.

Signed,

[name, phone number, address, and if you're a rate payer, state that]

3. Sample narrative from Carbon Free Campaign, Vashon:

(Assumes basic technical understanding)

Dear Commissioners,

I am writing because I want to influence a positive change in the future of my utility, Puget Sound Energy. I thank you for the opportunity to voice my opinion regarding my wish to see replacement of the outdated infrastructure of the coal-burning plants in Colstrip, Montana. For the future of our planet, we can accept no less than full replacement with 100% renewable energy and conservation (wind, solar and other technologies). Renewable energy is ready to harness with technology that currently exists. It is less expensive, cleaner and creates more jobs than fossil fuel sources. Renewable energy will free customers from the cost volatility of fossil fuels and its unrelenting pollution and destruction. The climate change implications of continued fossil fuel burning plants are clear and the economic injustice of these impacts falls most heavily on the poor and disadvantaged. Please insist that PSE consider the full range of potential detrimental (financial and environmental) impacts on customers should PSE replace Colstrip with liquid natural gas. I believe that the most environmentally responsible choice (renewables) is also the most financially wise choice.

Signed,

[name, phone number, address, and if you're a rate payer, state that]

4. Philosophical-style sample narrative from Carbon Free Campaign, Vashon:

Dear Commissioners,

Our most valued freedoms are the ones that we, in privileged societies, most take for granted. They are physical, they are basic and they most silently slip away amidst the noise of dramatic headlines, quick convenience and profit. We rely quietly, breath to breath, on a fragile interdependence of natural systems. To sustain our freedoms we must raise the volume on the importance of protecting our inherited assets for all life and for our individual communities. Fossil-fuels can no longer be viewed as a safe resource for energy production in an era of technology at the ready to harness the constant and unlimited non-polluting resources of solar, wind and related technologies. Fossil-fuels are not renewable and permanently draw against the

earth's ecological balance. Extracting, transporting and burning these fuels is incremental but direct deprivation of our own freedom to have confidence in a livable future. Science shows us the causal relationship, what we do with this information is up to us.

I want to invest now in our collective knowledge and innovation that will set us free from reliance on fossil fuels. The abundance of clean energy sources will relieve us of the burden of uncertain fossil-fuel costs. It will give us energy independence and freedom from the weight of unknown future clean-up costs. Renewable energy protects our future.

Signed,

[name, phone number, address, and if you're a rate payer, state that]

5. Health effects narrative from Carbon Free Campaign, Vashon:

Dear Commissioners,

The danger to health caused by the practice of hydraulic fracturing or “fracking” is alarming. Puget Sound Energy (PSE) proposes to transition from coal to natural gas, citing natural gas as a healthier and cleaner alternative, it is not.

Respiratory and cardiovascular symptoms in individuals near fracking sites are common. Carcinogenic benzene, arsenic, hydrocarbons, endocrine disrupting chemicals and heavy metals have been found within hazard mitigation levels in both ground and surface water at fracking sites. In addition to headache, dizziness, disorientation, ear nose and throat symptoms and seizures, these chemicals can effect blood and bone marrow and lead to anemia and immunosuppression. The long term neurologic and neurodevelopmental impact on infants and children is of special concern. Exposure to endocrine disrupting chemicals can alter developmental pathways in ways that may not be evident for decades or generations.

Fracking emits massive amounts of methane, a gas that contributes much more significantly to global warming than carbon dioxide and is extremely flammable. It seeps into drinking water.

There is growing disagreement between the scientific community and the natural gas industry about whether natural gas is indeed a “cleaner” alternative to coal in terms of environmental impact. There is certainly disagreement about the impact on the health of those people who live near fracking sites. Unfortunately a federal law exempted the fracking industry from compliance with the Underground Injection Control provisions of the Safe Drinking Water Act. An Energy Policy Act of 2005 exempted fluids and chemicals used in fracking from protections under the Clean Air Act, Clean Water Act, Safe Drinking Act and the CERCLA or Superfund.

The companies that extract natural gas by fracking are not required to disclose the chemicals used thus it is very difficult to assess the short and long-term impact on public health.

When the negative consequences of these chemical exposures are under study it is unacceptable to risk workers' and fracking communities' lives. We urge PSE to reconsider their plan to rely increasingly on natural gas and to refocus their efforts on increasing use of renewable energy sources with minimal disruption to climate, air and water quality and human health.

Signed,

[name, phone number, address, and if you're a rate payer, state that]

[Angela London Op Ed in the Beachcomber 12/6/2017](#)

Puget Sound Energy (PSE) customers have a right to voice our opinions on how power is generated. For a short time, the Washington Utilities and Transportation Commission (UTC) is listening. We must speak up and implore PSE and the UTC to make a bold and essential commitment to a 100% fossil free grid. The counter forces, however, are significant. PSE is working hard to project an identity as a green company. Its website provides images of blue skies and windmills. *“At PSE, we're putting our energy into clean power solutions that help our customers and the environment.”* If we do not question the language of PSE's marketing euphemisms, we will remain complacent.

A couple of things that Ratepayers may not be aware of: When you flip on the lights or plug in your electric vehicle, 60% of that energy is generated by coal and gas. This is the case despite the fact that we live in a region that has a surplus of hydropower and resources prime for harnessing wind and solar. Also, PSE is suing Washington State over the Clean Air Rule which was enacted last January. This Rule joined ten other states to cap and reduce greenhouse gas emissions on utilities and large polluters. PSE is also pushing for a delay in the Clean Power Plan that was proposed by the EPA to combat climate change. Customers can provide the countervailing pressure.

Our utility's coal plants are closing and plans are under development for replacement energy sources. A replacement proposal called an Integrated Resource Plan (IRP) written by PSE was recently released. PSE is seeking approval to build a new gas plant that has a 30 to 40 year life span but new technology and laws limiting fossil fuel will make it obsolete long before its natural death. We now have a rare opportunity to flood the UTC with letters during an “open comment period”. They must hear that the true cost of a new gas facility is too great.

“Ecofriendly natural gas” is not the green solution PSE touts. Gas from fossil fuels are predominantly composed of methane which is a potent greenhouse gas, especially when leaked. Compared to coal, burned methane emits only about ½ the amount of carbon. This argument favors methane. However 3.8% (conventional gas) to 5.8% (fracked) of gas is leaked into the atmosphere before it is burned. The point at which leaky methane gas surpasses coal on greenhouse gas emissions affecting our climate is 3.2%. This means that as a greenhouse gas emitter, gas from fracking is likely worse!

PSE’s statements about gas as the most viable replacement for coal should be cause for concern. Here’s why:

- PSE promotes environmentally sustainable values to their ratepayers in apparent contrast to the motivations of its private shareholders of Macquarie Consortium, an Australian investment company that holds the fourth largest gas production and distribution company in the US!
- The CEO of PSE is Kimberly Harris and this year she has been named Vice Chair of the American Gas Association.
- The cost of wind and solar are rapidly declining. In the past few years, the cost of solar has dropped 40% and wind has dropped 66%. PSE’s plan does not take this cost curve into account. Over 100 pages of the IRP analyzed gas, where only a six page addendum addressed solar and wind cost. The IRP looked only at established (past) wind and solar facilities and did not seek competitive bids.
- By the time a gas facility would be built, it would be with the backdrop of an era of new renewable energy laws and technologies that could easily take its place. We, the ratepayers would bear the cost for early decommissioned facilities while the majority of the profits will end up with PSE’s private shareholders.
- The Regional Greenhouse Gas Initiative Outcomes Study investigating carbon caps on large power plants with carbon output restrictions showed electricity prices decreased 3.4% while in states with no carbon output restrictions electricity prices increased an average of 7.2%. PSE’s prices increased 14.8% in the same time period in an economy where oil and coal have dropped substantially.
- External cost to society including financial and human costs of climate change, otherwise known as externalities, must be considered.

My favorite sign at the Women’s March was “If you stick your head in the sand, your butt will get burned”. PSE has built a pile of warm sand for us to stick our heads in. Good news is that we can take action by writing our UTC to say we do not want to pay for more stranded assets. Externalities and future financial costs of a decommissioned plant must be considered. We can be proactive, diversify our grid and demand renewable energy. Think of it as an investment in your utility future and the future of our planet.