

In Avista's 125 year history, the company has dependably served electricity to its Inland Northwest ratepayers, brought added shareholder value to market with ventures such as Itron and Ecova, and remained a dedicated community member with gifts such as its investment in Spokane's City Hall Plaza and Huntington Park. Given such a history, it is stunning to learn from Avista's latest 20-year electricity plan (known as an Integrated Resource Plan or IRP) that the company continues to commit itself to an energy mix that includes dirty strip-mined coal. Avista's reluctance to embrace clean energy is profoundly disappointing.

Avista owns part of a coal-fired power plant, Colstrip units 3 and 4, nearly 700 miles away in Southeastern Montana. According to their Washington State Department of Commerce fuel mix disclosures from 2008-2013, Colstrip provides more than 20% of Avista's annual electricity supply. The Colstrip operation is the subject of ongoing litigation over leaking polluted coal ash ponds, as well as new federal clean air regulations.

Earlier this year, another Colstrip owner, Puget Sound Energy, estimated that they could pay up to ***\$500 million or more*** to retire and clean up their share of units 1 and 2. Liabilities from this plant's ongoing air and water quality violations will only grow and Avista has ignored these costs and the costs of litigation in their IRP. It is past time to for Avista to act. The costs to Washington ratepayers, the environment and to Avista shareholders are too risky for another few years of cheap fuel.

All parties involved would be better served by an investment in deep-energy retrofits and smart grid technology. According to independent research by the Passive House Institute into the growing field of Building Science, ratepayers can save up to 75% on their energy bills with energy efficiency retrofits to what is known as the Passive House Standard. Businesses and Homeowners would be able to put these savings to use and install solar panels or windmills on their properties — and Avista too, can profit by distributing this surplus clean electricity throughout its grid.

The potential payoffs are vast. Recently, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council concluded that “wisely implemented energy efficiency” could save as much energy as produced by our region's vast hydroelectric system, hardly a modest statement from an Interstate Governor appointed body. The choice before Avista is whether to fight this powerful disruption to their business model, or embrace the opportunity to profit from clean energy solutions.

But what should be done with Colstrip? In their own IRP, Puget Sound Energy researches the possibility of using the plant's network of power lines and transmission tools to bring wind power from Montana to Washington. Plans such as this will be critical in our transition to a clean energy future. I am hopeful we will soon be hearing of such plans from our own utility here in Eastern Washington, whose forward-thinking founders so famously saw the potential in the water cascading over Spokane Falls.

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