

Over the past year, people throughout the Pacific Northwest have been fighting coal exports because of the impact transporting coal would have on our environment. At the same time, many of us pay electric bills to Puget Sound Energy and thus financially support electricity from coal-fired electrical plants. While not in our backyards and not immediately visible to us, those coal plants are doing irreversible damage to the natural and human environments too. According to the Department of Energy Staff Report to the Secretary on Electricity Markets and Reliability (also known as the Grid Reliability Report) published just last week: "Society places value on attributes of electricity provision beyond those compensated by the current design of the wholesale market".¹ That is nowhere more true than here in the Pacific Northwest. We value clean, renewable, sustainable electricity generation that will carry us into the future, not a system that keeps us tethered to technology of the Industrial Revolution.

You have heard some of the statistics associated with Puget Sound Energy's Colstrip Generating Station. It is the largest single point source of carbon pollution in the Northwest. It accounts for over 85% of the emissions for the entire state of Montana and is the single largest source of carbon emissions west of the Mississippi.² Colstrip emits between about 15 million metric tons of greenhouse gases annually, the equivalent emissions of about three million passenger cars. Fine particulate pollution coming from the plant includes soot and heavy metals like mercury, lead, arsenic, and strontium that lead to asthma and chronic bronchitis.³ In addition, for the last 30 years, approximately 200 million gallons of contaminated water each year has been seeping from the Colstrip ash ponds into the groundwater below.⁴ The groundwater is so polluted that the community now pipes in water from the Yellowstone River, 30 miles away.

Two of the four coal-fired boilers at Colstrip will retire in July of 2022.⁵ The two remaining boilers are set to retire in 2035.⁶ But we cannot wait until 2035.

Each day that facility remains in operation puts people, the natural environment, and the climate at significant risk. Puget Sound Energy needs to retire Colstrip 3 and 4 by 2025.

Thank you,

Kathleen M. Saul
Ph.D. Energy and Environmental Policy
PSE Ratepayer
3103 31st Court SE
Olympia, WA 98501

¹ U.S. Department of Energy, "Staff Report to the Secretary on Electricity Markets and Reliability," August 2017, p. 11.

² Edward O'Brien, "Report: Montana a Major CO₂ Emitter," Montana Public Radio, All Things Considered and Montana News, September 18, 2014, <http://mtpr.org/post/report-montana-major-co2-emitter>; "Coal Plants in Montana," Montana Environmental Information Center, <http://meic.org/issues/montana-coal-facts/coal-plants-in-montana/>

³ "Colstrip Steam Plant," http://www.sourcewatch.org/index.php/Colstrip_Steam_Plant

⁴ Tom Lutey, "Colstrip owners agree to stop pooling toxic ash sludge contaminating groundwater," The Missoulian, July 21, 2016, http://missoulian.com/news/state-and-regional/colstrip-owners-agree-to-stop-pooling-toxic-ash-sludge-contaminating/article_0bf1a703-229c-5c6e-bfdb-327ff7b38e37.html

⁵ Matthew Brown, "Colstrip plant to close 2 units," The Missoulian, July 12, 2016, http://missoulian.com/news/state-and-regional/colstrip-coal-plant-to-close-units/article_951942a1-973d-532f-907d-363f419f6d52.html

⁶ "It's time, Puget Sound Energy: Go Carbon Free!" Sierra Club, Seattle, WA.