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Opinions, Oregon

‘Renewable’ requirements make no sense

Neill Woelk, Hermiston Herald, www.hermistonherald.com 20 May 2011

I’m still waiting for someone to give me a legitimate reason as to why hydropower generated up and down the Columbia River isn’t classified as “renewable” in Oregon.

The question arises because the Umatilla Electric Cooperative is on the cusp of being forced to buy 25 percent of its power from “renewable” sources (i.e. wind) in the next few years.

The crazy thing is that UEC currently buys almost all of its power from the Bonneville Power Authority. The vast majority of Bonneville’s power is hydro, which is just about the cleanest — and cheapest — way there is to generate electricity.

But the wind power lobby in Oregon has managed to prevent hydropower from being classified as renewable. Thus, unless UEC can get an exemption from state regulations, the company could be forced to buy much more expensive wind power (which, of course, will mean higher rates for its customers).

“We’ve raised a lot of awareness as to how unfair this is,” said UEC general manager Steve Eldridge. “We’re world class when it comes to conservation.”

UEC is still attempting to get some legislative help that would give the cooperative an exemption from the renewable requirement.

But if UEC doesn’t get that help, it could mean the cooperative’s rates could double four or five years down the line. That would be a huge hit for its customers — and a very unnecessary one to boot.

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