

# Replenishing our energy with Mother Nature's help

In November 2006, voters in Washington passed the Washington Energy Independence Act, or I-937. The initiative established a renewable energy standard that requires the state's largest utilities to use eligible renewable resources to supply 15 percent of the utility's electricity sales by 2020, and it includes requirements related to conservation.

According to the initiative, large utilities are defined as having more than 25,000 customers. Benton Public Utility District falls into this category; Franklin PUD and the city of Richland anticipate meeting the 25,000 mark around 2012, which means that they, too, will be required to use a certain percentage of renewables as an energy source for their customers.

And as a producer for 22 public utilities in the state, Energy Northwest is helping its members work toward the initiative goal.

A simple definition of renewable has stuck with me: Replenish. So renewables are sources that replenish themselves, such as sun, wind, biomass and water.

The sun is obviously steadfast, so we're able to draw upon it for solar power, without ever exhausting it. In fact, the sun is directly or indirectly the source of most renewable energy because it creates weather cycles.

Wind is, well, wind. I've lived here most of my life and I'm certain that the wind keeps renewing itself in the hills surrounding the cities.

And plants store up energy from the sun as they grow, which can be released in a biomass process. Biomass includes dead plant matter, dairy and municipal waste and wood pulp that can be converted into fuels.

And water, which is used for hydropower, is not covered



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under I-937, except for that which was built after March 1999.

According to the Washington Public Utility Districts Association, the state's PUDs use hydroelectricity to provide an average of 81.8 percent of their power. But again, this doesn't count toward the I-937 requirement.

Now you might be wondering how we harness some of these natural resources so we can keep the lights on. Richland-based Energy Northwest built and operates the Nine Canyon Wind Project south of Kennewick. It's been operating since 2002 and is one of the nation's largest publicly owned wind facilities.

Nine Canyon supplies power to 10 Washington public utilities, including Benton and Franklin. And Energy Northwest continues to broaden its development of wind projects with future sites across the state.

Benton PUD is taking other steps to meet the initiative's goal. It has contracts for renewable energy from the White Creek Wind Project and Harold H. Hill Landfill Gas Project, both in Klickitat County.

"Benton PUD is well on its way to meeting the I-937 first stage of 3 percent of its load from renewables three years before the 2012 Initiative requirement date," said Jeff Hall, Benton PUD commissioner.

Franklin PUD and the city of Richland aren't yet required to use a percentage of renewables as part of their supply, but that isn't stopping them from planning for energy conservation and meeting the first phase of

the I-937 requirement.

"Franklin PUD Board of Commissioners has a keen eye on the future. They have had the strategic vision to diversify the PUD's resource portfolio and have adopted a strategy for meeting future loads by acquiring additional renewable resources," said Debbie Bone-Harris, government and community relations manager for Franklin PUD.

Franklin PUD also has signed a contract to purchase up to 10 megawatts of wind energy from the White Creek Wind Project, in addition to buying power from the Nine Canyon Wind Project.

"We're in the evaluation stage and identifying the potential areas for conservation and renewable sources. Within the next couple of years, we'll know which programs and resources we should invest in and which will give us the most bang for our buck," said Ray Sieler, Richland energy services director.

"Richland supplies one megawatt of environmentally preferred power to PNNL and has similar power available to its Richland customers," Sieler added.

Benton Rural Electric Association, which serves less than 25,000 members, also is not required to comply with I-937. However, it is investing in renewables.

Our local utilities already have some similar — and some unique — conservation and renewable energy programs. To learn more about some of these programs, visit:

- ▶ [www.bentonrea.org](http://www.bentonrea.org)
- ▶ [www.franklinpud.com](http://www.franklinpud.com)
- ▶ [www.bentonpud.org](http://www.bentonpud.org)
- ▶ [www.ci.richland.wa.us](http://www.ci.richland.wa.us)
- ▶ [www.energy-northwest.com](http://www.energy-northwest.com).

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