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WHOOPS! Nuke Presentations on Tap as Power Council Comes to Boise

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It was by almost any measure the most spectacular and most expensive failed energy decision in U.S. history: Build a fleet of *five* utility-scale nuclear generating stations across the Pacific Northwest. Only one is operating today; everything else either never got built or has long since been imploded before operating.

Nuclear power is not and never has been a viable source of electricity generation in Idaho or anywhere else in our region. The lesson was a hard one, and many Pacific Northwest utility customers are still paying for it decades later. Now attention is once again focused on the Washington Public Power Supply System (WPPSS) unit 2, the 1,170 megawatt nuclear generator known as the Columbia Generating Station (CGS) and owned by what is now Energy Northwest. The Columbia Generating Station sells its power to the federal Bonneville Power Administration and its output provides about 4 percent of the power consumed in the Northwest.

WPPSS is known around the region as “Whoops” to reflect its reputation as the largest public bond default in U.S. history after plans for the other nuclear plants collapsed in the 1970s. WPPSS continues to be an albatross for Northwest utility customers still paying for its failure.

On May 6 and 7, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council (“Power Council”) will hold its monthly meeting at the Grove Hotel in Boise. One focus of the meeting will be contrasting economic analyses of the Columbia Generating Station.

The Power Council is a regional entity created by Congress in 1980 to coordinate planning on how Idaho and the three other Pacific Northwest states will meet the region’s future energy needs. Idaho, like the other states, has two Council members appointed by the governor. Every five years, the Council produces a Northwest “Power Plan” that shows how the region may meet its electricity needs for the coming 20 years. The Council is in the process of developing its “7th Power Plan” for our region, and like those before it, the plan is expected to show our region will meet most of our new electricity “load growth” through energy

efficiency and conservation measures rather than building new generating facilities.

The afternoon of Tuesday, May 6, the Council will hear first from Robert McCullough of Portland-based McCullough Research, which was engaged by the Task Force on Nuclear Power at the Physicians for Social Responsibility (PSR) to conduct an economic analysis of the Columbia Generating Station. Mr. McCullough concluded that Northwest utility ratepayers could save about \$1.7 billion over the next 17 years if the CGS nuclear plant on the Hanford Nuclear Reservation in eastern Washington state is eventually decommissioned, which would also address safety concerns. The Council will then hear from Larry Makovich of Cambridge Energy Research Associates (CERA) in Massachusetts, which produced a report for Energy Northwest that argues ratepayers would benefit from the plant's continued operation. Energy Northwest sought its analysis to try to determine whether the 30-year-old nuclear power plant should continue to operate up to its extended license period or whether it should be shut down for good upon its next scheduled refueling in 2015. The plant's operating license was first scheduled to expire in 2023, but has been extended to 2043.

McCullough's report for Physicians for Social Responsibility portrays the Columbia Generating Station as an economic disaster. According to its analysis, the Bonneville Power Administration paid \$419 million to run the plant in 2013, while it could have secured the same amount of energy elsewhere for about \$219 million. The difference of \$200 million-plus could have reduced BPA rates by more than 10 percent, McCullough's report notes. Customers of Idaho Power are not impacted by the WPPSS debacle, but customers of Idaho's two dozen cooperative and municipally owned utilities, including the one in Idaho Falls, are.

The May 6-7 Power Council meeting will also include presentations by John Chatburn of the Idaho Office of Energy Resources and Virgil Moore of the Idaho Department of Fish and Game. The entire 2-day meeting is open to the public. You can learn more about the Power Council and see the full agenda for the Boise meeting at www.nwcouncil.org



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