



# ENLOE DAM

## Okanogan PUD looks to the past for future power generation

By Dean Boyer

**T**he Okanogan Public Utility District is hoping to go back to the future to provide additional hydroelectric power for the region.

From 1906, when the Similkameen Power Company built the first hydroelectric facility at Similkameen Falls, until 1959, when Okanogan PUD shut down an aging powerhouse at Enloe Dam, the communities of Nighthawk, Oroville and Tonasket relied on the Similkameen River for their electricity.

Now, if all goes well, the PUD will build a new powerhouse just below the Enloe Dam on the east bank of the river to provide power to the region.

The Okanogan PUD has applied to the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission to relicense the 87-year-old Enloe Dam as a hydroelectric facility, producing about 8.6 megawatts of electricity.

“Our county is growing and so is the demand for power,” said Okanogan PUD Manager Chuck Berrie. “By the time this project is done, we’re going to need that electricity. It’s a good project: in-county generation from an existing dam at the very end of our distribution system.”

The PUD expects to file a final application with FERC at the end of 2007. Dan Boettger, PUD Director of Regulatory and Environmental Affairs, said that would put the utility on track to complete the Enloe hydroelectric project in 2009.

He said the project would provide about 5 percent of the PUD’s electricity, and about 40 percent of the load in the Oroville area.

This is the third time Okanogan PUD has attempted to relicense Enloe Dam since decommissioning the old powerhouse in 1959, after the Bonneville Power Administration extended its transmission lines into the Okanogan Valley.

The Office of Electric Power Regulation issued a 50-year license for Project No. 2062 in 1983, but FERC rescinded the license in 1986 because of concerns over fish passage at the dam.

The PUD tried again in 1991, and after the utility completed an environmental

assessment, FERC issued a license for a 4.1 megawatt project in 1992. That license was rescinded in 2000 after the National Marine Fisheries Service (now NOAA Fisheries) demanded that the project include the installation of fish ladders, which the PUD said would make the operation uneconomical.

Boettger is hopeful those issues have been resolved.

British Columbia and the Okanogan First Nations have long opposed fish passage, arguing that the 20-foot high Similkameen falls (also known as Coyote Falls), is a historic, natural barrier to salmon migration. They also argue that opening the river above the falls to salmon would threaten indigenous Canadian species, including the Umatilla

dace, chizelmouth, and mottled sculpin, which are on a provincial conservation list, and a thriving recreational fishery for rainbow trout.

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**CHUCK BERRIE**  
*Okanogan PUD Manager*

And, although NOAA Fisheries has not made a formal commitment, Boettger said there now seems to be general agreement that fish passage is not warranted.

Scott Carlon, a fish biologist with the NOAA Fisheries who has been working on the Enloe project, agreed “the word out there informally is that we won’t be requiring (fish ladders). Our neighbors to the north, particularly the tribes, are not supportive of fish passage.”

However, Carlon said there has not been a staff recommendation and no official policy decision.

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Although going on 90 years old, Boettger said the 315-foot wide, 57-foot high concrete dam is still in good condition.

The Okanogan Power Company sold the hydroelectric project to the Washington Water Power Company, now the Avista Corporation, in 1922. The Okanogan PUD purchased the dam and powerhouse in 1945.

The old powerhouse, about 800 feet downstream of Similkameen Falls, is now on the National Register of Historic Places, and while picturesque, Boettger said it is no longer suitable for a modern hydroelectric operation.

Instead, the PUD is proposing to build a new facility. Boettger said building a new powerhouse on the east side of the river

would also provide easier access by county roads. A suspension bridge, now long removed, used to provide foot-access to the old powerhouse.

Okanogan County is the largest county in the state, covering 5,281 square miles. Only about a third of the county, however, is in private ownership.

The county knows a little about dams. One end of Grand Coulee Dam, one of the largest concrete structures in the world and the largest electricity producer in the country, is in Okanogan County, the other in Douglas County. Operated by the U.S. Bureau of Reclamation, electricity produced by Grand Coulee Dam is marketed by the Bonneville Power Administration. ■

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