

December 16th, 2015

Council Members
Northwest Power and Conservation Council
851 SW 6th Avenue, Suite 1100
Portland, OR 97204

Dear Council Members:

The BlueGreen Alliance of Washington State, a partnership between labor, environmental, and community groups across our state, would like to submit the following comments on the draft 7th Power and Conservation Plan for your consideration.

Working families in the Northwest can benefit from cleaner power and lower electric bills under the draft 7th Power Plan. The key is its call for significant investment in energy efficiency -- our cheapest, surest, most climate-friendly and most job-creating new power resource.

The BlueGreen Alliance supports the energy efficiency goal of at least 4,500 average megawatts of new energy savings over the next 20 years. We encourage the Council to look for ways to garner even more energy efficiency, to ensure the most benefit to workers and ratepayers.

Job creation can result from energy efficiency gains, and these jobs can come from industries directly involved in supplying energy efficiency, as well as services and other industries that benefit from the lower utility bills that result from energy efficiency measures. The economy grows when consumers spend their utility bill savings on other things. According to the Council, that spending will create more than 40,000 new jobs throughout the economy over the life of the plan. We urge the Council to support any measures that help ensure that these jobs are protected by strong labor standards -- including apprenticeship utilization -- and pay family sustaining wages. Properly executed project labor and community workforce agreements will help to ensure that workers and communities receive the greatest benefits from needed conservation work.

We encourage the Council to assure low-income families their share of energy efficiency savings. The draft plan rightly emphasizes serving low-income consumers and other "hard-to-reach" segments, all of whom pay for efficiency programs in their bills. This could be strengthened by committing not just to reach these groups of people but to prioritize reaching people with low incomes who will benefit the most from the cost savings resulting from energy efficiency measures. This should include implementing innovative strategies that help renters to access energy efficiency upgrades, such as on-bill programs and other approaches.

We also agree with the draft plan findings that there will be little need to construct new gas-fired power plants in the region for at least the next 10 years. Using demand response to help meet peak power needs by changing when people use power enhances reliability and avoids gas-fired generation. A 700 megawatt target for demand response was dropped from the draft. The final 7th Plan should specify a 700 to 1,100 megawatt target.

Finally, we feel the draft is shortsighted in calling only for those renewables already required by Northwest states. Several renewable resources are as cheap as new natural gas plants, and the Council should study how emerging technologies and other developments such as improved markets can impact how clean renewables contribute to peak power demands.

The BlueGreen Alliance is committed to the goal of addressing today's environmental challenges in ways that create and maintain quality jobs in a clean energy economy. We commend your work to ensure that energy efficiency and other job-creating tools are used to the utmost, to ensure that efforts to address regional power needs and global environmental considerations are also supporting a stronger and fairer economy.

Thank you for your consideration of our comments.

Sincerely,



Stephanie Celt
Washington State Policy Coordinator, BlueGreen Alliance

Signed by Washington State BlueGreen Alliance Executive Committee members:



Jeff Johnson
President, Washington State Labor Council, AFL-CIO



KC Golden
Senior Policy Advisor, Climate Solutions



Robin Everett
Organizing Representative, Sierra Club Washington State Chapter



Steve Garey
President (retired), United Steelworkers Local 12-591



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