

Wildfires and Utilities in the Northwest

April 3, 2025

About the NW Energy Coalition

The NW Energy Coalition advances clean, equitable, and affordable energy policies by leveraging our analytic expertise and convening a broad alliance of people and organizations.

www.nwenergy.org

We are looking to hire a new Executive Director!



Engaging with Us on Zoom

- Be respectful of presenters and attendees
- Keep chat on topic and respectful
- Put questions in the chat for Q&A
- Stay muted unless called on

**This will be recorded and posted on our YouTube channel*



NW **Energy** Coalition

Introductions

- Alessandra de la Torre (she, her) *Policy Associate*
- Soumya Keefe (she, her) *Policy Intern*
- Lauren McCloy (she, her) *Utility & Regulatory Director*

Special thanks to Kat, Charlee, and Jill on our team for tech support!



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Agenda

Planning and implementation of utility wildfire mitigation strategies

Community impacts and solutions: preparedness, resiliency & affordability

2025 Legislative sessions

Ways to stay connected

Q&A



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We have and will continue to live amongst fire.

We have the responsibility to keep each other safe and invest in real solutions for both forest and community resilience.

We are all in this together.

Planning and Implementation of Utility Wildfire Mitigation Strategies

Utility Wildfire Mitigation Plans - Background

- Last few years have introduced electric utility wildfire mitigation plans (WMPs) in the northwest.
- WMPs roughly 100+ pages
- Updated annually, every 2, or every 3 years
 - In Oregon and Washington these plans are required by state law
 - In Idaho and Montana not required but some utilities have been creating plans and there is current legislation that may require WMPs

2023 Avista Utilities Wildfire Resiliency Plan



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Common Strategies and Investments

1. Grid Hardening
2. Enhanced Vegetation Management
3. Asset Inspections
4. Sensitive settings or Enhanced Fire Settings
5. Public Safety Power Shutoff (PSPS) and De-energization
6. Increased staffing for situational awareness, system monitoring, community outreach, and program operation



Highest Costs for Strategies/Investments Across Utilities

- Grid/System Hardening
- Vegetation Management
- Situational Awareness
- Asset Inspection

**Not included:* Cost of Insurance and Cost of borrowing



Avista Wildfire Mitigation Cost Example

Avista Wildfire Resiliency Programs	Actual			Projected							Total
	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	2029	10-Yr. Total
Capital											
Grid Hardening	\$3,189,758	\$17,319,560	\$23,661,431	\$24,850,000	\$30,100,000	\$30,100,000	\$30,100,000	\$30,100,000	\$30,100,000	\$30,100,000	\$249,620,749
Situational Awareness	\$231,188	\$2,056,300	\$2,404,251	\$2,150,000	\$3,650,000	\$5,150,000	\$5,150,000	\$5,150,000	\$5,150,000	\$5,150,000	\$36,241,739
TOTAL CAPITAL	\$3,420,946	\$19,375,860	\$26,065,682	\$27,000,000	\$33,750,000	\$35,250,000	\$35,250,000	\$35,250,000	\$35,250,000	\$35,250,000	\$285,862,488
O&M											
Grid Hardening	\$315,604	\$592,867	\$971,215	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$700,000	\$6,779,686
Risk-Based Vegetation Management	\$1,789,817	\$6,552,956	\$15,562,969	\$16,435,000	\$15,265,000	\$13,987,000	\$12,836,800	\$11,551,620	\$10,419,958	\$9,481,462	\$113,882,582
Situational Awareness	\$0	\$0	\$40,717	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$75,000	\$565,717
Wildfire Planning	\$324,457	\$456,550	\$697,824	\$480,000	\$496,800	\$514,188	\$532,185	\$550,811	\$570,089	\$590,043	\$5,212,947
TOTAL O&M	\$2,429,878	\$7,602,373	\$17,272,726	\$17,690,000	\$16,536,800	\$15,276,188	\$14,143,985	\$12,877,431	\$11,765,047	\$10,846,505	\$126,440,932
GRAND TOTAL	\$5,850,823	\$26,978,233	\$43,338,408	\$44,690,000	\$50,286,800	\$50,526,188	\$49,393,985	\$48,127,431	\$47,015,047	\$46,096,505	\$412,303,420



Pacific Power Oregon Wildfire Mitigation Cost Example

Program Category	2023 Actuals	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	5 Year Total
Asset Management	\$0.75	\$1.22	\$1.22	\$1.22	\$1.22	\$1.22	\$6.10
<i>Patrol Inspection</i>	\$0.31	\$0.47	\$0.47	\$0.47	\$0.47	\$0.47	\$2.35
<i>Detail Inspection</i>	\$0.21	\$0.45	\$0.45	\$0.45	\$0.45	\$0.45	\$2.25
<i>Infrared Inspection</i>	\$0.23	\$0.30	\$0.30	\$0.30	\$0.30	\$0.30	\$1.50
<i>Drone Pilot</i>	-	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD
Vegetation Management	\$19.04	\$25.26	\$21.46	\$21.46	\$21.46	\$21.46	\$111.10
<i>Inspections and clearing</i>	\$11.79	\$16.95	\$16.95	\$16.95	\$16.95	\$16.95	\$84.75
<i>Pole Clearing</i>	\$3.23	\$4.51	\$4.51	\$4.51	\$4.51	\$4.51	\$22.55
<i>3yr Cycle Transition</i>	\$4.02	\$3.80	-	-	-	-	\$3.80
Grid Hardening	\$0.47	\$1.71	\$1.81	\$1.83	\$1.84	\$1.86	\$9.06
<i>Fault Indicators</i>	\$0.13	\$0.25	\$0.35	\$0.37	\$0.38	\$0.40	\$1.75
<i>Fast Trip Fault Indicators</i>	-	\$1.12	\$1.12	\$1.12	\$1.12	\$1.12	\$5.60
<i>Facility Lease</i>	\$0.34	\$0.34	\$0.34	\$0.34	\$0.34	\$0.34	\$1.71
Situational Awareness	\$1.76	\$2.12	\$2.36	\$2.44	\$2.50	\$2.53	\$11.95
<i>Meteorology Department</i>	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.14	\$0.70
<i>Weather Forecasting</i>	\$1.26	\$1.35	\$1.49	\$1.50	\$1.51	\$1.52	\$7.37
<i>Weather Stations</i>	\$0.36	\$0.58	\$0.68	\$0.75	\$0.80	\$0.82	\$3.63
<i>Detection Cameras</i>	\$0.00	\$0.05	\$0.05	\$0.05	\$0.05	\$0.05	\$0.25

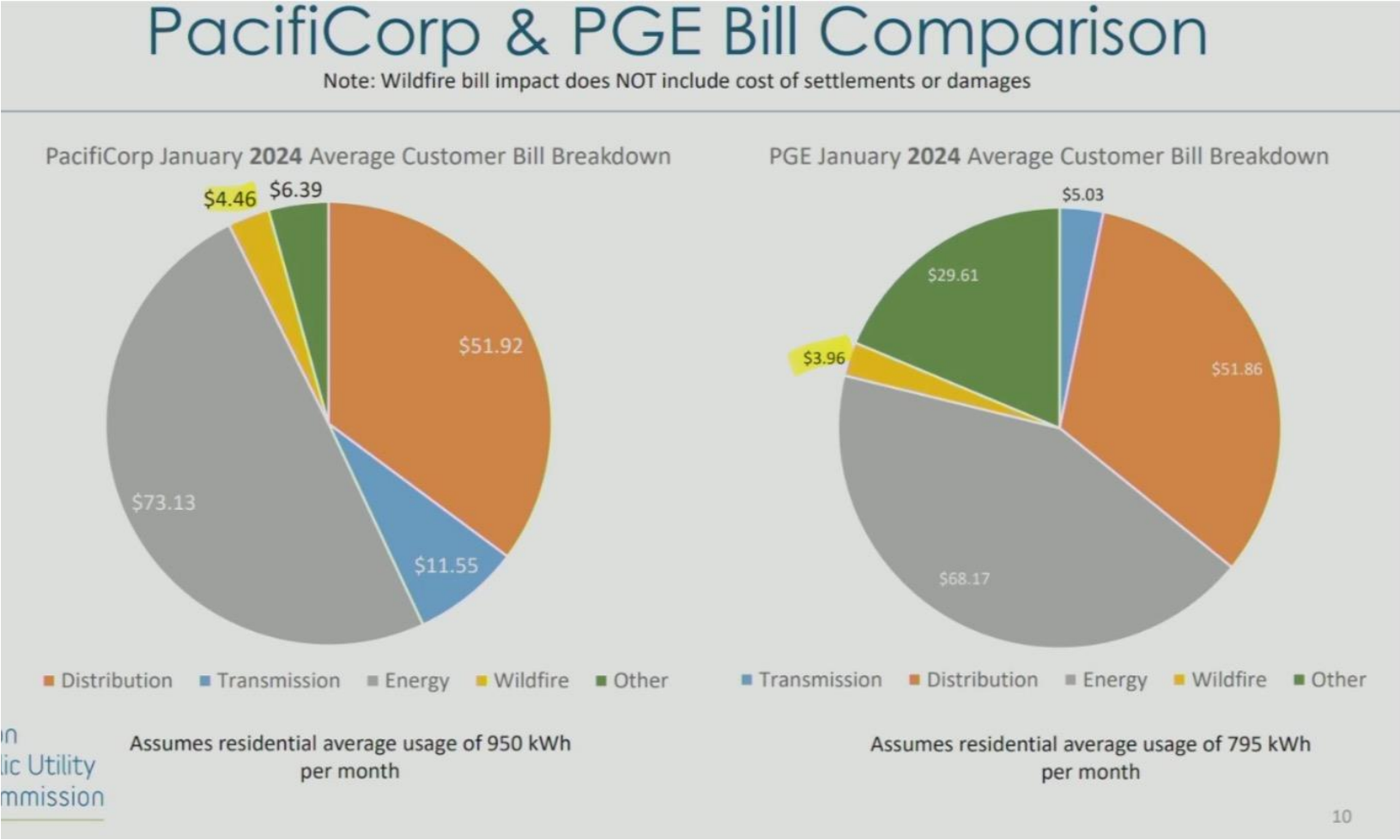


Pacific Power Oregon Wildfire Mitigation Cost Example cont...

Program Category	2023 Actuals	2024	2025	2026	2027	2028	5 Year Total
Risk Modeling and Drivers	\$1.15	\$1.97	\$2.07	\$2.14	\$2.14	\$2.14	\$10.46
System Hardening	\$45.99	\$161.29	\$151.88	\$149.25	\$151.65	\$151.65	\$765.72
<i>Line Rebuild</i>	\$22.44	\$113.75	\$113.75	\$113.75	\$113.75	\$113.75	\$568.75
<i>System Automation</i>	\$11.46	\$19.25	\$17.75	\$16.50	\$16.50	\$16.50	\$86.50
<i>Fuse Replacement</i>	\$5.73	\$17.94	\$11.08	\$10.00	\$10.00	\$10.00	\$59.02
<i>Fault Indicators</i>	\$0.92	\$0.08	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	\$0.08
<i>Early Fault Detection</i>	-	\$0.17	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	\$0.17
<i>System Allocated</i>	\$5.44	\$10.10	\$9.30	\$9.00	\$11.40	\$11.40	\$51.20
Situational Awareness	\$1.39	\$2.71	\$0.80	\$0.52	\$0.34	\$0.16	\$4.53
<i>Weather Stations</i>	\$1.08	\$0.63	\$0.43	\$0.20	\$0.13	\$0.13	\$1.52
<i>Weather Forecasting</i>	\$0.31	\$1.23	\$0.37	\$0.32	\$0.21	\$0.03	\$2.16
<i>Wildfire Detection</i>	-	\$0.85	TBD	TBD	TBD	TBD	\$0.85
Field Ops. & Practices	\$3.60	\$0.08	-	-	-	-	\$0.08
Grand Total	\$52.13	\$166.05	\$154.75	\$151.91	\$154.13	\$153.95	\$780.79



Customer Cost Increase Due to Utility Wildfire Mitigation in Oregon



Public Utility Commission

Community Impacts and Solutions: Preparedness, Resilience, & Affordability

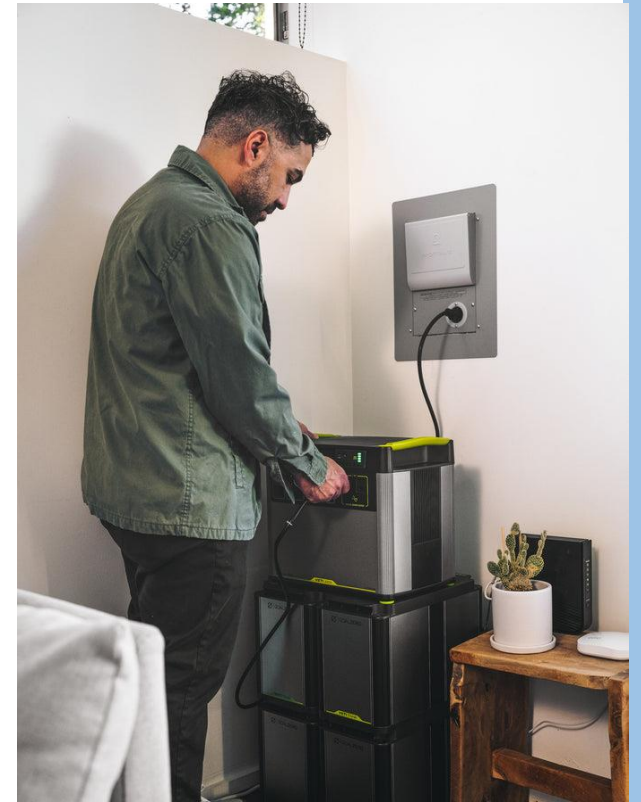
Community Impacts

- Increase in unplanned outages due to sensitive settings
 - Power outages have serious health, safety, and financial impacts
- Increasing energy bills, yet less reliable energy
- Gaps in coordination and communication with important groups such as local governments, local forest management, and community members
- Lack of on-the-ground analysis or capacity within public utility commissions and consumer utility boards to do meaningful evaluation



Utility Battery Programs Examples:

- Puget Sound Energy (WA) - Remote grid systems feasibility analysis
- Avista (ID and WA) – no cost battery back-up program for customers on life support
- Portland General Electric (OR) - no cost battery back-up program for medical certificate holders in high fire risk zones
 - 58% of eligible customers enrolled, 75% enrollment target for 2025
- Pacific Power (OR, plan to start in WA) - battery rebate program for medical certificate holders
 - 1.6% of eligible customers enrolled, **reducing** 2025 goal by 75%
- Community Resource Centers during Public Safety Power Shutoffs



Community Solutions

- Investments in distributed energy resources and battery storage, microgrids, community-based renewable energy development, transmission, and other localized solutions
- Investing in and supporting resilience hubs hosted by trusted local groups
- Improve battery programs and expand to other vulnerable groups
- Expand customer protections and programs that lower bills
 - Disconnection moratoriums, seasonal protections, community solar, bill discount programs, energy efficiency, weatherization, direct bill credits
- Utility Wildfire Mitigation Plans should include a section that details how utilities are addressing impacts on customers

Community Solutions cont...

- Improve communication mechanisms and reporting
 - Communication protocols for unplanned outages
 - Expand public safety partners to include local community-serving groups
 - Share localized reports to local government and public safety partners
- Ensure measures and investments are reducing risk and spread, while optimizing customer dollars with community benefits
 - Collect data and conduct cost-benefit analysis on risk reduction measures and wildfire investments
 - Gather scientific and ecological knowledge
 - Proactive stewardship of the land for vegetation management
 - Invest in fire hardening programs
- Increase public utility commission and consumer utility board capacity and enforcement mechanisms



2025 Legislation

Oregon: Legislative Session 2025

- **HB 3917** - the bill creates the Catastrophic Wildfire Fund to pay for property damage claims arising from catastrophic wildfires that are ignited by the facilities of a public utility
 - Fund covers 80% of property damages and caps noneconomic damages to \$100,000. Authorizes up to a 3% rate increase across all customer classes.
- **HB 3666** - would create an application process for IOUs and COUs to apply for wildfire safety certificates under the Public Utility Commission

Washington: Legislative Session 2025

- **HB 1990** - Authorizing utility companies to securitize certain costs related to disasters or emergencies to lower costs to customers.
- **HB 1522 & SB 5430** – Creating a Utilities and Transportation Commission approval process for utility Wildfire Mitigation Plans and rulemaking to implement.

Montana: Legislative Session 2025

- **House Bill 490** - Establishes a wildfire mitigation plan (WMP) approval process by a PUC, board of trustees, city/ county, or any other type of "approval authority"
 - Requires IOUs and COUs utilities to submit WMPs
 - Removes strict liability
 - Covers economic damages, and non-economic damages only if it includes bodily injury or death



Idaho: Legislative Session 2025

- **SB 1183:** Utility wildfire liability that makes the plans and Commission approval mandatory. Requires the Commission to use the state forester to review plans.
- **HB 384:** Proposes statewide wildfire insurance fund through tax dollars and donations to help property owners.
 - Since it does not impact ratepayers, NWECC is not engaging.

How to Get Involved & Stay Updated

Clean & Affordable Energy Conference



**May 7, 2025
Missoula, MT**

- Submit public comments on utility wildfire mitigation plans
- Sign up for our newsletter
- Come to our conferences!



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Q & A