



Pend Oreille County Public Utility District

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Pend Oreille PUD Returns to Normal Operations as Wildfire Risk Decreases

PEND OREILLE COUNTY, Wash. - With cooler autumn weather settling across the region, Public Utility District No. 1 of Pend Oreille County (PUD) has returned its electrical system to normal operating settings after another demanding wildfire season.

The PUD has operated in Fire-Safe Mode since June as part of its wildfire mitigation strategy. Fire-Safe Mode changes how the electric system responds following an outage. Instead of equipment attempting to automatically restore power, the line remains de-energized until crews patrol the area for fire danger and safely restore service. While this approach can lead to more frequent or longer outages, it significantly reduces the chance that damaged equipment or vegetation contact could spark a wildfire.

During periods of extreme fire danger, when the National Weather Service issued Red Flag Warnings, the PUD moved into Elevated Fire-Safe Mode. This mode increases the sensitivity of protective equipment to its highest setting and requires crews to fully inspect lines before power can be restored following certain types of outages.

This year, the PUD responded to eight Red Flag Warnings issued for Pend Oreille County. Each warning brought an increased risk of rapid wildfire growth due to the combination of dry fuels, wind and low humidity.

“Eight Red Flag Warnings is a significant number, and it put our system and our crews through a lot of challenging conditions this summer,” said Michael Schleich, Director of Engineering & Operations for the PUD. “Our Fire-Safe procedures are designed to give us another layer of protection during those periods when wildfire risk is at its highest. We appreciate our customers’ patience this summer, because these settings can sometimes mean longer outages while crews inspect the system before restoring power. We know that can be frustrating, but we’ve all seen how devastating wildfires can be, including just down the road in Spokane. We take these precautions seriously because we want to do everything we can to reduce the risk of our electrical system contributing to a wildfire here at home.”

As weather conditions improve, the PUD has returned to normal operating settings, allowing the electrical system to respond more quickly to brief interruptions. However, the PUD is not considering wildfire season completely over and will continue monitoring weather and fire conditions closely.

“We’re in a better spot than we were a few months ago, but we’re not going to let our guard down,” said Rick Hughes, Operations Superintendent for the PUD. “Our crews will continue

closely watching conditions, inspecting the system and responding when needed. Our goal is to be prepared if conditions turn around again.”

Fire-Safe Mode is one part of the PUD’s broader wildfire mitigation program, which also includes year-round vegetation management, system inspections, equipment maintenance and other efforts to reduce wildfire risk around the electrical system.

The PUD thanks its customers, employees, local fire districts, emergency responders and community partners for their cooperation and support throughout the summer.

Customers can find outage information, safety resources and other preparedness materials at www.popud.org.

About Pend Oreille County Public Utility District

Pend Oreille PUD was established in 1936 and began operations in 1948. The PUD is governed by three locally elected Commissioners. A General Manager and staff operate the utility within policies set by the Board of Commissioners. The PUD has four operating systems: The electric system distributes electricity to the county, the production system produces power from the Box Canyon Hydroelectric Project, the water system consists of nine individual water distribution subdivisions, and the community network system provides wholesale broadband