

## **A Strong Future for Pend Oreille PUD**

*By Chris Jones, Interim General Manager*

It is an honor to step into the role of Interim General Manager at Pend Oreille PUD, an organization that has been a part of my life from the very beginning. I grew up in Newport, where my mother worked for the PUD, and I saw firsthand the vital role it plays in our community. In 1994, I started my own career here as a lineman and later became Director of Operations, gaining a deep appreciation for the dedication of our employees and the essential services we provide - keeping the lights on, the water flowing, and the internet connected. Our community depends on these services every day, and I'm grateful for the opportunity to help lead the PUD into its next chapter.

Your PUD is in a strong position, thanks to the leadership of those before me, including my predecessor John Janney, and the hard work of our team. As I step into this role, my focus will be on maintaining and improving the high level of service our customers expect. That means investing in infrastructure, ensuring reliability, and keeping our operations financially sound.

As a not-for-profit utility, we are committed to delivering power, water, and broadband at the lowest possible cost while maintaining the quality and reliability our customers deserve, including through power generation at our Box Canyon project. That's why the Board of Commissioner's recent decision to adjust electric rates was an important step toward keeping us on solid financial footing. Like many utilities, we're facing rising costs for materials, equipment, and power supply. While we work hard to manage expenses carefully, modest rate adjustments are sometimes necessary to maintain a resilient and efficient system. The 4.25% increase in revenue approved by the Board will allow us to continue making the investments needed to keep our infrastructure strong and services reliable.

Customer input was a key part of this process. A recent community survey showed that many of you understand the importance of maintaining a reliable utility system and support necessary rate adjustments. This feedback reinforced our commitment to responsible financial management and long-term stability for our customers.

We know any rate increase impacts our customers, and these decisions are never made lightly. That's why we always strive to balance affordability with financial responsibility. The PUD exists to serve the people of Pend Oreille County, and our goal is to provide high-quality services at the most reasonable cost.

Looking ahead, my priority is ensuring your PUD remains a trusted, community-focused utility. We will continue working to modernize our grid, expand broadband access, and support programs that help customers manage their energy use efficiently. Open communication is also key - we want to hear from you and keep you informed about the work we're doing.

Pend Oreille PUD is more than just a utility - it's a partner in this community. Many of our employees are community members and ratepayers. We support local businesses and schools, strengthen our economy, and ensure that homes and businesses have reliable power, clean water, and high-speed internet. I look forward to working with our team, our Board, and you - our customers - to keep our PUD strong for generations to come.

One of the things I have always enjoyed and appreciated during my long tenure at the PUD are the opportunities to speak to the community members that make up this great county. If you have questions, concerns, or just want to talk about the future of our PUD, I encourage you to reach out.