

## **Your PUD: Looking Ahead to 2026 With Purpose and Gratitude**

As we wrap up another year, and my first as your PUD's General Manager, I find myself reflecting on what matters most: family, friends, neighbors, and the place we are fortunate to call home. At Pend Oreille PUD, we do the same. This season brings gratitude for the year behind us and a renewed focus on the work ahead.

In 2025, we finalized a comprehensive Strategic Plan to guide our decisions through 2030 and beyond, and our Board recently approved the 2026 budget. Next year's budget addresses the needs of our Electric, Box Canyon Production, Community Network, and Water systems, with the majority of costs dedicated to power purchases.

This budget and our Strategic Plan together provide a roadmap for where we invest our resources, prioritizing safety, affordability, reliability, and responsible stewardship of the systems our community depends on. They are the tools that allow us to strengthen your community-owned utility while keeping rates as low and predictable as possible.

### **Investing in Safety and Reliability**

In the coming years, we will continue strengthening the foundation that keeps the PUD running safely and reliably. That includes updating aging infrastructure, maintaining equipment, advancing wildfire mitigation efforts, and expanding the tools and training available to our employees.

These efforts do not always make headlines, but they matter, especially when a windstorm rolls through in the middle of the night, as it did last week, or when a cold snap pushes the system to its limits. Reliability does not happen by accident. It is the result of careful planning, ongoing maintenance and wise investment.

Safety remains the cornerstone of everything we do. As a former lineman, I know firsthand the risks our crews face, and we work hard every day to protect the community we serve, both in the field and in PUD offices. The well-being of both our employees and the residents who depend on our system comes first, because without either, none of the rest is possible.

### **The Value of Public Power**

Looking toward 2026, it is worth recognizing one of our community's greatest assets, the fact that Pend Oreille County is served by a Public Utility District. Public Power is more than a governance model; it is a real advantage for residents.

Local control means decisions are made here, by people who live in and care about this community, not shareholders or executives in far-off cities. Every dollar collected through rates stays in Pend Oreille County, reinvested in the system that keeps our homes and businesses running.

It also means we have a responsibility to protect that model. As state policies continue to shift in Olympia, we will work, at all costs, to guard Public Power from government overreach and keep local voices at the center of decisions.

Most importantly, Public Power means when customers speak, we listen. That responsiveness is built into our DNA and has kept our PUD strong for nearly 90 years.

### **Planning for Long-Term Stability**

Good stewardship requires looking beyond next year. Our 2026 budget reflects small, careful investments that maintain system reliability while keeping pace with rising costs. Delaying necessary upgrades would cost more, so we plan ahead to balance affordability with reliability.

We know affordability matters, especially in a rural county where families see costs rising in many areas of daily life. Our goal is to keep rates as low and predictable as possible while making investments that protect service, safety, and the community's long-term energy independence. You can be confident that every decision that affects your family is weighed carefully and made with transparency, because many of us at the PUD are your neighbors and ratepayers too.

### **A Season of Gratitude**

This year brought meaningful conversations across the county, at public hearings, community events, and everyday interactions with customers. Those conversations shape how we plan and serve. Thank you for asking questions, sharing perspectives, and staying engaged.

As we enjoy the holiday season, I want to express my appreciation to the people who make this work possible: our employees, who show up in all conditions; our commissioners, who provide thoughtful leadership; and you, our customers, who entrust us with an essential service every hour of the year.

The holidays are a time of connection and reflection, and this community embodies both. We look forward to 2026 with optimism and a steady commitment to strengthening the systems that power, heat, and connect Pend Oreille County.

From all of us at Pend Oreille PUD, thank you for your trust, partnership, and support. We are honored to serve you and wish you and your families a safe, warm, and joyful holiday season.

**Chris Jones**

**General Manager, Pend Oreille PUD**