



Pend Oreille County Public Utility District

Administrative Offices - P.O. Box 190 • Newport, WA 99156 • (509) 447-3137 • FAX (509) 447-5824
Box Canyon Hydro Project - P.O. Box 547 • Ione, WA 99139 • (509) 446-3137 • FAX (509) 447-6790

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Media Contact: Joe Hathaway
jhathaway@popud.org / 509-447-6354

Pend Oreille PUD Bringing Aerial Saw Helicopter Operations to County for Summer Vegetation Management

PEND OREILLE COUNTY, Wash. - This summer, Public Utility District No. 1 of Pend Oreille County (PUD) will take to the skies in an effort to improve electric reliability, reduce wildfire risk, and accelerate vegetation management work across the county.

The PUD has contracted with Heli-Dunn, an Oregon-based helicopter services company specializing in aerial vegetation management for utility infrastructure. Using a specially designed helicopter-mounted aerial saw system, crews will trim vegetation along power line rights-of-way in areas that are difficult, time-consuming, or costly to reach using traditional ground crews.

The aerial saw system consists of a series of large circular blades suspended beneath a helicopter, allowing operators to safely and efficiently trim branches and vegetation near power lines while working from the air. The technology is commonly used by utilities across the country to maintain transmission corridors and reduce vegetation-related outages and wildfire threats.

The PUD says the project will dramatically speed up work that would otherwise take years to complete using conventional methods alone.

“This is going to help us cover a whole lot of ground in a short amount of time,” said Joe Hathaway, Public Information Officer for the PUD. “Some of these lines run through thick timber and rough country that can take crews a long time to work through on the ground. The aerial saw lets us get ahead of the problem and complete work in one summer that could otherwise take several years.”

Industry studies and utility operators across the country have found aerial saw operations can complete vegetation management projects in a fraction of the time required by ground crews, particularly in mountainous or heavily forested areas. Utilities have also reported long-term cost savings, improved system reliability, and reduced exposure to hazards for tree crews working near energized infrastructure.

“It’s worth the investment because you can’t put a price on safety,” said Hathaway. “This work is part of our ongoing effort to strengthen system reliability and reduce the risk of outages caused by trees and overgrown vegetation, especially as we head into wildfire season.”

Heli-Dunn, based in Medford, Oregon, has decades of experience providing helicopter operations for utilities, firefighting, infrastructure projects, and vegetation management throughout the United States. The company’s aerial saw technology was developed specifically

for work in rugged terrain and heavily forested utility corridors.

Residents may see and hear low-flying helicopters working near transmission and distribution corridors throughout the summer months. Safety personnel and ground crews will be stationed throughout active work areas, and the public is asked to maintain a safe distance from operations.

To help community members learn more about the project, the PUD will host a public event on Monday, June 1, from noon to 2:00 p.m. at the field behind Sadie Halstead Middle School in Newport.

The event will give residents an opportunity to see the helicopter and aerial saw equipment up close, meet the flight crew and vegetation management teams, and speak directly with PUD staff about the project, wildfire mitigation efforts, and ongoing system maintenance work.

The event is free and open to the public. Please call the PUD at 509-447-3137 for more information.

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 communication services. For more information visit: <http://popud.org>.