



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

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE
June 15, 2026

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

Pend Oreille PUD Preparing for Increased Wildfire Risk This Summer

NEWPORT, Wash. - With forecasts calling for hot, dry conditions this summer, Public Utility District No. 1 of Pend Oreille County (PUD) is preparing for wildfire season and encouraging customers to do the same.

As part of its ongoing wildfire mitigation efforts, the PUD is closely monitoring weather conditions, maintaining vegetation clearances around power lines, and preparing to adjust system operations if fire danger increases later this summer.

"Wildfire risk is a reality we face every year, and preparation is one of the most important things we can do," said Joe Hathaway, Public Information Officer for Pend Oreille PUD. "We take steps year-round to reduce risk, and we want our customers to understand what to expect if conditions become more severe."

One of those tools is Fire-Safe Mode, which the PUD may activate during periods of elevated wildfire danger. Under normal conditions, the electric system automatically attempts to restore power after a brief interruption. But during hot, dry weather, even a small spark can have serious consequences.

Fire-Safe Mode changes how the system responds. Instead of automatically turning the power back on after a fault, the line remains de-energized until crews can inspect the area for any fire danger and safely restore service. While that approach can result in more frequent or longer outages, it greatly reduces the chance that damaged equipment or a downed tree branch could create sparks and start a wildfire.

"Think of it like a circuit breaker in your home. If something trips the breaker, you wouldn't keep flipping it back on over and over without first checking to see what caused the problem," said Hathaway. "Fire-Safe Mode applies that same philosophy to our electric system during wildfire season."

During extreme fire weather conditions, including Red Flag Warnings issued by the National Weather Service, the PUD may implement Elevated Fire-Safe Mode. This is the most cautious setting used by the utility during wildfire season. The system becomes even more sensitive to potential problems. During extreme fire weather conditions, PUD crews must inspect power lines in person before power can be restored to make sure there is no risk of a fire starting when power is turned back on. These additional safety measures greatly reduce wildfire risk during the most dangerous conditions, but they can also result in more frequent and longer outages.

While the PUD has not yet activated Fire-Safe Mode, officials are closely monitoring conditions across the region. Additional communications will be provided if Fire-Safe Mode or Elevated Fire-Safe Mode are implemented later this summer.

Unlike Public Safety Power Shutoffs used by some utilities, neither Fire-Safe Mode nor Elevated Fire-Safe Mode involves proactively turning off power to customers. Pend Oreille PUD does not intentionally shut off electricity because of wildfire risk. Instead, these settings change how the system responds after an outage occurs.

"Customers sometimes hear about measures being taken by neighboring utilities and wonder if we're planning to shut off power in advance," Hathaway said. "That's not what we're doing. Our goal is to keep the lights on while reducing the risk that our system could contribute to a wildfire."

Pend Oreille PUD has used Fire-Safe Mode seasonally for years and continues to invest in vegetation management, system improvements, and emergency preparedness as part of its broader Wildfire Mitigation Plan.

"Safety remains our top priority," Hathaway said. "These operational changes are designed to protect our communities, homes and natural resources during periods of extreme wildfire risk."

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>.