



Klickitat PUD

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www.klickpud.com

Goldendale Office
1313 S. Columbus Ave.
(509) 773-5891
(800) 548-8357

White Salmon Office
110 NE Estes Ave. • P.O. Box 187
(509) 493-2255
(800) 548-8358

Klickitat Company Town History

Back in the old days, mill towns were the backbone of the Pacific Northwest. A man could make a fair wage for a good day's work, but everything from the store where he shopped to the house where he lived belonged to the company.

That was the case for the town of Klickitat, Washington, nestled alongside a beautiful river of the same name. The J. Niels Company operated a successful timber operation in the bustling town of Klickitat. However, by the 1970s changes began. In 1975, St. Regis bought the mill, which included the entire town and all of its utilities. In 1977, Klickitat County Public Utility District (KPUD) acquired the electric, water and sewer systems from St. Regis and has owned and operated them for the past 29 years.

Klickitat's wastewater treatment plant has been in operation for more than 50 years and served the town well. However, its time has come and gone. New state standards, combined with 50-year-old technology, did not make for a favorable long-term outlook. While replacement of the wastewater facilities meant a modest increase in sewer rates, it was one the community believed was worthwhile to secure long-term economic viability, as well as maintaining the health of the river so inextricably tied to the town.

KPUD proceeded with the planning and funding for a new wastewater system. But when it was time to move into the building phase, construction costs skyrocketed due to economic prosperity and Hurricane Katrina. This meant an increase of \$1.7 million for the project—an increase that was not economically feasible for the small town of Klickitat.

The KPUD staff rolled up their sleeves, sharpened their pencils and began knocking on doors and making calls to political representatives. Although the Washington State Department of Ecology awarded KPUD a Centennial Clean Water Fund Grant for 60 percent of the cost increase, the remaining 40 percent would have to be borrowed.

With the possibility of rates being raised to more than \$100 a month just for sewer, KPUD—along with the Klickitat Community Council—set out to find more funding. The efforts were rewarded when the Klickitat County Commissioners agreed to divert funds from landfill gas payments to reduce debt on the wastewater system.

Additional funding fell into place with a bill sponsored by Senator Jim Honeyford and Representatives Bruce Chandler and Daniel Newhouse, from a special \$600,000 appropriations grant to directly fund the shortfall.

With all of the pieces finally in place, the KPUD Board of Commissioners awarded construction bids for replacement of the Klickitat plant. The project will begin early this summer, with completion scheduled for mid-2007. We hope the new wastewater treatment plant and collection system will serve Klickitat for another 50 years.

Tom Svendsen, General Manager

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