

City of Seattle
Gregory J. Nickels, Mayor

NEWS RELEASE

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Mayor Nickels Announces Settlement Over Transmission Line *Bonneville Power Administration to protect watershed during construction*

SEATTLE – Mayor Greg Nickels today announced a proposed settlement with the Bonneville Power Administration (BPA) that adds nearly 600 acres of land to the Cedar River Watershed in exchange for allowing construction of a proposed power transmission line through the Watershed. The land will help improve water quality protection, enhance security, and benefit fish and wildlife habitat.

In addition, BPA has agreed to build the line adjacent to its existing line, use construction practices that avoid or minimize environmental damage and has committed not to pursue any future right-of-way expansion in the watershed.

“While we have disagreed over the best location of this proposed transmission line, the city understands the need to provide for power transmission reliability,” said Mayor Nickels. “We are pleased that we have been able to negotiate a proposed settlement with BPA that protects this critical source of our water supply and enhances our restoration activities.”

The Cedar River Watershed is a 90,546-acre protected watershed that provides almost 70 percent of the drinking water that the city delivers to 1.3 million people throughout King County.

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The proposed settlement includes commitments from BPA that will minimize erosion during construction and requirements to replant with native-type vegetation in the right-of-way after construction is completed. Towers for the proposed transmission line will be flown in via helicopter to avoid the damage that could be caused by large trucks and cranes.

Helicopters will also be used to transport trees removed during construction. BPA is also developing new technology for special transmission tower footings that will reduce soil disturbance. Following construction, BPA is committed to maintaining right-of-way areas through the watershed to protect wildlife habitat and increase natural vegetation.

“The Sierra Club appreciates BPA acknowledging the impacts of the proposed Kangley-Echo Lake transmission line and working with the city of Seattle and others to craft an expanded mitigation package to address those impacts. We commend Mayor Nickels for insisting on increased protections for the city’s water supply, reduced effects on wildlife and to ensure we won’t be faced with another watershed transmission line proposal in the future,” said Charlie Raines, director of the Sierra Club’s Cascade Checkerboard Project. “BPA has also worked to mitigate impacts to forests and wildlife in the upper Raging River basin. Based on these commitments, the Sierra Club will drop its opposition to the proposed transmission line. We applaud BPA’s efforts to mitigate the impacts from the project and will work with BPA to insure the intent of these commitments are translated into real forest and water protection.”

In addition, BPA has agreed to purchase insurance to protect the city from harm that may arise from the construction of the proposed transmission line in the watershed. BPA will also establish a seven-year insurance set-aside fund to protect Seattle’s Habitat Conservation Plan. The city will receive all revenue from the sale of removed trees, as well as \$6 million in compensation over two years, to fund water quality and habitat enhancement activities in this pristine watershed. BPA is working with the Trust for Public Lands to purchase or transfer properties to the city.

To address other sensitive areas, especially in the Raging River Watershed, BPA also agreed to protect about 900 additional acres through conservation easements. Some of the land to be protected is located along the river near the BPA line.

"This agreement serves the public interest in three ways," said BPA Administrator Steve Wright. "It ensures that the new power line will be built and operated in a way that keeps Seattle's water supply pure; it protects and even improves the natural environment of the Cedar River Watershed and Raging River Watershed and it provides reliable electricity to meet the growing needs of the metropolitan area."

According to BPA, the proposed 500-kilovolt transmission line is needed to bolster reliability of power transmission in the local King County area, particularly during peak winter demand, and to supply power to Canada as required by federal treaty. The line will minimize the risk of having to curtail power in the Puget Sound area during extreme cold weather.

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The proposed 9-mile transmission line would connect an existing transmission line near Kangley with the BPA's Echo Lake substation near Interstate 90 at State Route 18. It would enhance power transmission both within King County and to Canada.

BPA is planning to release the final environmental impact statement for this project by July 1.

The proposed settlement is contingent upon environmental reviews and approval by the City Council. The Washington State Department of Health will also review the proposed settlement for its potential impacts to water quality. If the proposed settlement is approved, the BPA expects to start construction in August and have the transmission line in operation early next year.

For more information visit Seattle Public Utility's Web site at www.seattle.gov/util/cedarwatershed/transmission.htm

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