

# Initiative 937 Sets 15% By 2020

BY DESTON NOKES

As voters in Washington state went to the polls on November 7 to decide on Initiative 937 (I937), they weighed the consequences of mandating how energy is generated in the state. I937 directs Washington's larger utilities to acquire 15% of their power from clean, renewable sources by 2020. Washington voters showed their support for this goal by passing the initiative. Washington joins 20 other states and the District of Columbia in requiring that utilities obtain a specific percentage of their overall power from renewable sources.

Many of I937's backers also support removing dams. Voting to mandate renewable power – yet advocating for the removal of dams – is damaging to the region's affordable energy supplies. Hydropower is not an eligible renewable resource

under I937 even though it produces no waste and no pollution. Furthermore, clean, low-cost hydropower accounts for more than 60% of the electricity generated in the region.

Without the support of hydropower, Washington's wind industry would be disadvantaged. The wind turbines dotting the landscape in eastern Washington and northeastern Oregon rely on the Columbia and Snake River dams to ensure reliable, renewable electric generation.

Since January 2005, structures that produce a total of more than 970 MW of wind power have been completed or are under construction in the Northwest, and structures that will produce another 660 MW of wind generation are expected to be built within the next two years. According to the Bonneville Power Administration, wind project developers

have requested integration services and facilities to add more than 3,000 MW of wind power in the region over the next several years.

Even with increasing costs for fish mitigation, hydropower remains one of the most inexpensive and efficient sources of electricity in the region. In the Northwest, for example, electricity from hydropower typically costs about \$10 per MWh to produce. Comparatively, a recent staff report from the Northwest Power and Conservation Council says that the “cost of new wind projects has risen substantially.”

Today, the projected cost of near-term wind energy projects is between \$72 and \$98 per MWh. Just two years ago, the Northwest Power and Conservation Council estimated new utility-scale wind power projects to cost between \$42 and \$53 per MWh. **NWP**