



VIGILANTE ELECTRIC COOPERATIVE

A Touchstone Energy® Cooperative 

P.O. Box 1049, Dillon, MT 59725-1049
(406) 683-2327 or (800) 221-8271

Web site: www.vec.coop
E-mail: contact@vec.coop

Court's latest spill order: massive misuse of people's dollars and no help to salmon

Most folks don't know what spill is — and why should they? Because spill — the water “spilled” through massive gates raised at federal hydropower dams in the Northwest — hits all of us right in our wallets, through our electric bills.

The federal hydro projects on the Columbia and Snake rivers already spill 30 to 40 percent of the water in those rivers, which together drain a land area as large as France. Literally billions of gallons of water are spilled over the dams instead of generating more carbon-free energy that could help power our economy, keep electric rates low and our skies clean, and back up less-constant energy sources, such as wind and solar.

Why we spill

The water spilled at the dams helps young salmon migrate more quickly and easily downstream, from the rivers to the ocean. If spill helps salmon, then a lot more spill should help a lot more salmon. Right?

Unfortunately, it's not that simple. But that's what the so-called fish advocates argued in the latest chapter of their 20-year litigation campaign against the federal dams and agencies. Persuaded by their arguments, U.S. District Court Judge Michael Simon this month approved an experimental plan that requires spilling additional water at each of the eight large federal projects — all the way to the maximum level allowed under state water-quality laws, from April through mid-June.

Models show little impact

Here's the rub: There is no proof that more spill will be better for fish. In fact, modeling by National Oceanic Atmospheric Administration Fisheries shows that more spill will have little to no impact on fish survival.

Estimates project an increase in survival rates of 1 percent for Chinook and 2 percent for steelhead. That's less than decimal dust in a complex river system where survival of young salmon migrating downstream varies year-to-year from 35 to 70 percent — due to a range of potential factors unrelated to spill, including water temperatures, spring runoff timing and volumes, fish health, sea lions and other predators. The models show an even smaller impact on adult salmon returns of 1/100th percent.

The pro-spill groups claim that their modeling tells a different story, but they have yet to provide data that would allow for a full and accurate comparison of results.

Massive misuse of customers' money

Spill costs money, and the ones who pay are Northwest families and businesses. Spill costs are wrapped into the fish and wildlife costs that make up a major part of every residential or commercial electric bill.

More spill will cost more money — an estimated \$40 million more per year, according to Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), which is poised to implement a “spill surcharge” on the power it sells from the dams to Northwest utilities and their customers. Regardless of the final total, electric bills will likely go up. This is a massive misuse of people's hard-earned dollars that will do little to nothing to help endangered salmon.

The new spill costs come on top of a 5-percent rate hike this year, and rate increases totaling nearly 30 percent over the last several years. One of the Northwest's prime economic advantages has been its traditionally low-cost electricity. But repeated rate increases are eroding that competitive advantage, and BPA's historic position as one of the region's lowest-cost energy providers.

More spill may harm fish — and the environment

Over and above the financial case is the harm that more spill may pose to the very fish that spill proponents say they want to protect. Too much spill produces dangerous levels of gas in the river, which can give young fish “the bends,” similar to divers who rise up from deep seas too quickly. Churning waters at the dams from spill also prevents returning adult salmon from ascending the dams' ladders to reach their home rivers, where they spawn.

What's more, BPA estimates that the increased spill will result in another 840,000 tons of carbon added to Northwest skies — because carbon-emitting natural gas is likely to replace the carbon-free hydropower that will be lost to spill. That's a 1.7 percent increase in Northwest electricity sector emissions, at a time when state legislatures are grappling with proposals to reduce carbon emissions.

Judge Simon approved the experimental spill plan on January 8, declaring the science in this area “settled.” Obviously, it isn't. The federal agencies agreed to the proposal “under protest,” but are appealing the order, along with RiverPartners, tribes, Idaho and Montana, to the 9th Circuit Court of Appeals.

Based on the NOAA models, we already know how this latest court-approved spill order is likely to turn out. It's a

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Commercial Sector EE

Vigilante Electric Cooperative, in collaboration with Bonneville Power Administration (BPA), provides a broad array of incentives to members who do efficiency upgrades. Incentives are divided into the following sectors: agricultural, commercial, federal, industrial and residential. Over the years we have communicated quite a bit of information regarding agricultural and residential sectors. Here I would like to focus some attention on the variety of incentives available for commercial improvements.

The flagship of the commercial offering is lighting, and according to the Small Business Administration, lighting could be 20 percent to 50 percent of your annual bill. However, with upgrades and good lighting design, energy consumption from lighting can be drastically reduced, while maintaining or improving lighting quality. Proper lighting also supports the building's occupants. Studies indicate that a building's lighting directly affects the comfort, mood, productivity, health and safety of its occupants.

Upgrading standard fluorescent lighting to LED is one of the most cost-effective upgrades you can make. The quality of today's LED lighting is quite remarkable. They last longer, are more durable and offer comparable light quality at a fraction of the energy. Plus, the incentives are very attractive, paying up to 70 percent of the installed cost.

In our climate zone, heating and cooling account for the largest portion of a business' energy bill. One way to improve the efficiency of your HVAC system is to upgrade to heat-pump technology. Heat pumps move heat rather than generate it, and can provide a majority of the space conditioning for about a quarter of the cost of operating conventional heating or cooling systems. In conjunction with BPA, incentives are available for air-source and ductless systems.

Ductless heat pumps are ideal for use in buildings without ductwork. They use variable-speed compressors to continuously match the heating and cooling requirements, avoiding the on/off cycling of conventional heating systems that result in fluctuating temperatures and high-energy consumption. Ductless heat pumps also allow the user to control each heating/cooling zone independently so they are a great option for use in a server room.

For larger commercial facilities with roof-top HVAC,



there are incentives for advanced rooftop controls (ARC). Supply fan controls account for more than 80 percent of ARC retrofit energy savings. ARC retrofits can reduce fan speeds up to 60 percent during the first stage of heating and cooling, and up to 40 percent when no heating or cooling is needed. ARC retrofits reduce supply fan speeds to pre-determined levels during heating, ventilating and air-conditioning modes.

On a more generic level, commercial incentive opportunities exist for connected thermostats, shell improvements (e.g. insulation and windows), electric water heaters, refrigeration, kitchen and food-service equipment, commercial clothes washers, smart power strips, generator engine block heaters and vehicle engine block heaters ...the list goes on.

Like all the energy-efficiency incentives offered through Vigilante Electric, these offerings have conditions that need to be met before any incentive is paid. The opportunities are there so if you have a commercial upgrade in mind, get it started right by contacting us first.

On the Job Clint Begger

Vigilante Electric Cooperative would like to take this opportunity to introduce our newest employee, Clint Begger.

Clint is a journeyman lineman working out of our Townsend shop. He is a native of Montana, raised in Wibaux. Prior to working for us, Clint spent the last 15 years as a lineman at Mor-Gran-Sou Electric Cooperative in Mandan, North Dakota.

Clint's family includes wife Jada, and children Ella (12), Gavin (8) and Josie (6). Clint and Jada enjoy team roping and numerous other outdoor activities. Their children are also active in rodeo and all school sports.

We would like to welcome Clint and his family to our organization. We look forward to a long association.



Touchstone Energy Cooperative

A National Alliance

Vigilante Electric Cooperative is part of several alliances that help us serve our membership. Most of them work on our behalf to help us keep true to our mission of providing reliable power and the lowest possible costs. Our alliance with Touchstone Energy Cooperatives (TSE) is particularly beneficial. While Touchstone Energy signifies our national alliance and identity, its products and services are designed to help us better serve our membership by keeping our members informed, engaged and saving money.

Touchstone Energy Cooperatives form the largest utility network in the country. It is an alliance of more than 750 electric cooperatives in 46 states, representing more than 32 million members. While all electric cooperatives are autonomous, Touchstone Energy cooperatives are committed to four core values that are the foundation of every service we provide our members — integrity, accountability, innovation and commitment to community.

Touchstone Energy first and foremost helps us fulfill our commitment to you by providing valuable services that we would be hard pressed to provide on our own. TSE provides us with a powerful but easy to use web platform with online help and troubleshooting. It provides a wide variety of training opportunities and produces high quality educational and outreach materials. There are also TSE programs that engage members directly through the Touchstone Energy website and the Co-op Connections program.

The Touchstone Energy website provides a wealth of information. At www.touchstoneenergy.com, you can learn what makes electric cooperatives different and the advantages of being a Touchstone member. This site provides valuable energy insights and information on electrical safety, solar energy and electric vehicles. The best part of this website is that it provides information on using energy wisely.

“Together We Save” is one of the original Touchstone Energy campaigns. This is an amazingly interactive feature. It starts with a “Home Energy Adventure,” where you put in some base information and the website takes you through ways to save energy in the home. If you want to delve deeper into home energy savings, visit the Home Efficiency Analysis Tool (H.E.A.T.). After creating an account, the H.E.A.T. tool will break home energy usage into five cate-

gories and give you tips on saving energy in each one. The Touchstone Energy site is also filled with videos and articles to help you become more educated on home energy use.

Touchstone Energy also administers the Co-op Connections program. Co-op Connections is designed to provide members with valuable discounts on goods and services. The most notable discount is through the Healthy Savings prescription discount program.

By using the Co-op Connections card (provided by Vigilante Electric), members can

access discounts on prescription drugs of 10 percent to 85 percent at more than 60,000 national and regional pharmacy chains. Over the last five years, we have used these pages to track the savings our members have secured on their prescriptions. As of the end of March, our members saved over \$24,000 on prescriptions, a savings of more than 43 percent.

Also worth checking out are the national deals available through Co-op Connections. There is a vast array of discounts available — too many to cover here. If you are interested in travel deals, Co-op Connections has arranged discounts for lodging, car rentals, cruises and more. Plus, all of the discounts are with companies that you probably already know and use.

The content on both Touchstone Energy sites is extensive, but well worth the time. As you explore, you will see why we are different and the advantages of being a Touchstone Energy member.



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spill order

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bad plan that will cost families and businesses, do little to help and may even harm protected salmon, and add tons of carbon to our air. It only makes sense if you want to increase the costs of operating the hydro dams because your true aim is their removal, which happens to be the goal of many of the so-called fish advocates.

We can all agree that the Northwest cares about our region’s iconic salmon. But we shouldn’t throw good money at a bad plan.

Electrical Safety Lessons for Kids

By Meghaan Evans

We all know electricity plays a major role in our everyday lives and is a powerful resource that should be respected. Unfortunately, our children often do not understand the dangers of electricity. At Vigilante Electric Cooperative, we encourage you to share electrical safety tips and lessons with your little ones as often as possible. We also understand their attention spans run short, so here are a few creative ways to get them involved.

Depending on the age of your child, consider designating an “electronics deputy.” The deputy should be responsible for pointing out electronics in your home that are not in use and keeping appliances safe from liquids. Reward your deputy for pointing out overloaded outlets or other potentially dangerous situations.

Emphasize the importance of fire prevention with your children and create a family fire drill plan as an extra precaution. Incentivize your children by rewarding those who followed the plan and made it safely out of the home.

While it is fun and engaging to turn safety into a game, it is important to ensure your children understand the risks

they are facing if they do not practice electrical safety.

One of the most important safety tips you can give your kids is to avoid any downed power lines. In fact, it is best to avoid power lines, transformers and substations in general. A downed power line can still be energized and it can also energize other objects, including fences and trees. Make sure your kids understand the potential dangers of coming in contact with a downed power line or low-hanging wire. If they encounter a downed power line, ask them to tell you or another adult to call Vigilante Electric immediately.

Here are a few other safety tips you can share with your kids:

- Never put metal objects in outlets or appliances.
- Do not overcrowd electrical outlets.
- Never mix water and electricity.

Additional resources can be found on our website at www.vec.coop. On the homepage you will find a link to the Electrical Safety Foundation International (ESFi). ESFi is the industry leader in electric safety education, and on their site you will find some amazing safety content geared toward kids.

No matter how you choose to get your kids interested in staying safe around electricity, we are here to help.

Affordable. Innovative. Member Focused.

It's hard to predict the future, but one thing seems certain—**new government regulations will increase the cost of electricity.**

We want to work with you to keep your electric bills **AFFORDABLE**. We're controlling costs and no matter what the future holds we'll continue to put you, our members, **FIRST**.



*Vigilante Electric
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Find out how we're *Looking Out for You* at
www.vec.coop



Looking Out
for You