Darcy Mitchem

see file

Re: Geothermal Power Comments

I have not attended any previous workshops or other meetings regarding geotherm electrical production in Washington state. However, I am quite familiar with several of the locations under review. I've spent most of my life in Toutle, Washington near Mount St. Helens, but I also lived near Mount Baker.

I submit the following comments:

High Lakes: (The area north of Coldwater Lake)

This area should be removed from consideration of geothermal development.

Although the land is currently privately owned, most of the area is within the boundary of the Gifford Pinchot National Forest. Traditionally, this area was crisscrossed with public trails and provided the main access route to the Mount Margaret Backcountry. The lakes and trails were very popular for camping, hiking, hunting, fishing, boating, backpacking, trailbike use and horseback riding. With stunning views of the volcano, five lakes, significant wetlands, and a history of public use, obviously the land should have been included in the National Monument, but because it was mostly privately owned and had valuable blowndown timber, it was left out. Even after the eruption, the five lakes here provided a key recreation destination for my community which had lost so much. In fact, my family recreated here, camping, fishing, hunting, and boating, until Weyerhaeuser sold the land and it was closed to public access.

When Weyerhaeuser sold the land, the value to the community became even more obvious, and several groups tried to buy it back. Both the Forest Service and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife have applied for grants to acquire the property. The Forest Service still has a long-term goal of acquiring this land for the public. Mount St. Helens Strategic Investment Plan (MSHNVMStrategicInvestmentPlan.pdf) calls acquisition of the High Lakes a Key Action and "game changer" for recreation (pg. 36-37). "If the High Lakes were acquired, that area offers some of the most desirable of potential campground locations in the Coldwater area." (pg. 16)

Although the property is now being used to grow noble fir boughs, the key public assets—lakes, views, access to Mount Margaret—are untarnished. A geothermal plant would change the nature of the area forever.

In addition to tarnishing the recreation potential of the High Lakes, a geothermal plant here would be dangerous on several levels. According to the graphic in Ecology's presentation, the fault system that would be tapped for geothermal energy connects with faults on Harry's Ridge, where the Spirit Lake outflow tunnel is located. This tunnel is the only structure preventing Spirit Lake from overflowing and causing catastrophic flooding. The tunnel is chronically affected by rockfalls and slippage due to this fault system. The Army Corps of Engineers is currently finishing up an EIS that is analyzing additional measures to repair, refurbish, or construct an additional tunnel outlet. Geothermal drilling that may cause seismic activity that

could disrupt the current tunnel or any future tunnel modifications. All of this is in addition to the fact that the site sits dangerously close to Mount St. Helens, which has an obviously violent and active history. The very spot under consideration was utterly devastated in 1980 and no structure nor person could survive there in a similar, or even less violent, eruption. Seismic activity and recent studies suggest the volcano is "recharging" with magma (usgs.gov).

The site is 4000-5000 feet elevation with heavy snow and fierce winds, and is inaccessible in the winter because plowing stops miles from the site. The High Lakes lacks power infrastructure and quality roads. For these reasons the High Lakes should be removed from consideration.

Mount Baker and South Mount St. Helens: Many of the same concerns with the High Lakes are also present at the Mount Baker and Southern Mount St. Helens locations: Harsh winter conditions with months of inaccessibility, location next to a known explosive volcano, high recreation use, and the potential for earthquakes caused by geothermal drilling to impact engineered structures, but in these cases aging hydroelectric dams.

Columbia River Gorge: This location is probably the safest place to even consider a geothermal plant because it is further from an active volcano and further from structures that may be susceptible to increased seismic activity. The area is popular with recreational users of all stripes and near the Scenic Area.

Thank you for a chance to comment.

Darcy Mitchem

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