Central Washington University (Steve DuPont)

Central Washington University is a leader in the State of Washington with regards to our endeavors and future aspirations for harnessing geothermal energy. Due to a warm water aquifer located directly below the main campus in Ellensburg, CWU has secured two state capital budget appropriations from the Climate Commitment Account to construct two geothermal wells for heating and cooling campus buildings. The CWU Strategic Capital Master plan calls for expanding these HVAC-only geothermal modules campus-wide, converting existing buildings, and reducing reliance on the natural gas plant. The goal is to reduce or ultimately eliminate our need for natural gas and geothermal is the centerpiece of our long-term decarbonization plan.

It appears that the scope of Ecology's Legislative Update is focused on utility-scale geothermal energy resources, which is CWU's long-term goal. CWU owns vacant property in the City of Ellensburg being held for future building and currently being leased out for agricultural purposes. Furthermore, there is a city-owned substation on the property, which means if high enough temperature water is available at that location to generate electricity, accessibility to transmission will be already in place. The three focus areas in the report do not include any information about the availability of transmission at those locations.

Past exploration by oil companies in the 1980s has shown that hot water is present at deeper depths in Kittitas County than CWU has currently drilled. However, those locations were not on the valley floor and so further exploration is necessary to determine feasibility. As stated in the report, this kind of exploration is costly, but CWU is committed to seeking a funding source to do so. We believe that there is potential that a geothermal power plant could generate enough electricity to power the entire campus and generate surplus electricity to sell to local utilities.

Since your report seems to inventory known opportunities in the State of Washington, CWU requests that information about CWU's geothermal endeavors and future aspirations be included in the Legislative Update. We are a state agency and seek to collaborate with the Department of Ecology regarding geothermal progress from now on. As we also seek funding opportunities and strategic partnerships, we believe working closely with the Department of Ecology would be in the best interests of the state.

Furthermore, CWU is listed in the draft report's appendix that we are an entity that was engaged in the collaborative process. However, nobody in CWU administration is aware who was contacted and what information they might have shared on behalf of the university. We request that you please provide that information about who was consulted at CWU.

Please find attached a copy of our one-page summary of geothermal activities and plans at CWU.

CWU | Central Washington University

GEOTHERMAL ENERGY INFRASTRUCTURE PLAN

Kittitas County faces a power generation capacity constraint that is limiting economic development. CWU's geothermal exploration could unlock a new source of clean, firm, baseload electricity—enough to power the entire campus with surplus to sell to local utilities—while advancing Washington's mandate for 100% clean energy by 2045.

Proven Foundation: Campus Geothermal Already Underway

In 2021, CWU discovered a large warm water aquifer directly beneath the Ellensburg campus at approximately 800 feet below ground, with year-round water temperatures in the upper 60s to lower 70s°F. With funding from the Washington State Legislature in 2023–2025, CWU excavated two geothermal wells and built infrastructure to capture the water temperature for building heating and cooling—**replacing natural gas combustion with a clean, renewable source.**

The state has already invested in this vision. Commerce Director Mike Fong toured the CWU campus geothermal project in 2025, and the Department of Commerce awarded CWU $970,834 through the State Project Improvement (SPI) grants program for an air handler upgrade designed to integrate with the geothermal system. CWU's Strategic Capital Master Plan calls for expanding these HVAC-only geothermal modules campus-wide, converting existing buildings, and reducing reliance on the natural gas plant.

The Bigger Opportunity: Deep Geothermal for Power Generation

The shallow wells confirm that geothermal resources exist beneath the CWU campus. The critical question is whether higher-temperature water at greater depth—potentially in the Cascade Range volcanic geology that lies beneath Ellensburg—can support electricity generation**.**

If viable, the impact would be transformative:

- Clean, renewable, baseload electricity—available 24/7, unlike intermittent solar and wind
- Enough generation potential to power CWU's entire campus with surplus available for local utilities
- Direct relief for Kittitas County's power capacity constraints, which are currently stalling economic development projects
- Advancement of Washington's Clean Energy Transformation Act (CETA) goals for 100% clean electricity by 2045

The obstacle: deep exploratory drilling costs millions of dollars that CWU does not have. A single well of 3,000–6,000 feet runs $3M–$6M in drilling costs alone, plus geothermal resource company oversight, instrumentation, and analysis. The other major obstacle is the lack of comprehensive data below the Columbia River Basalt that exists throughout the region. This subsurface formation is a critical part of the proposed exploration that will benefit all stakeholders.

Why This Matters for Washington State

- Washington has no operating geothermal power plants despite significant resource potential along the Cascade Range—this project could help change that
- SB-6039 (2024) directed multiple state agencies, including Commerce, to support geothermal resource identification—
  CWU's exploration directly advances that mandate
- Kittitas County's power capacity constraints are a documented barrier to economic growth—geothermal generation could unlock stalled development
- If the resource is confirmed, future phases could attract tens of millions in private and federal investment to the region