



Ilona A. Kerby
Executive Director

PROGRAMS:

- Captured Treasures Boutique Clothing & Retail Training
- Community Jobs
- Emergency Services
- Employment Assistance
- Energy Assistance
- Family Asset Building
- GFO Grounds for Opportunity Cafe & Training Kitchen
- Help Warehouse
- Homeless Housing
- Housing Rehabilitation
- Meals on Wheels
- Medicaid Rides
- Rental Housing
- RUOK? - Daily check-in service
- Rural Public Transit-Weekday 1-5 Van Service
- Self-Help Housing
- Senior Community Lunches
- Senior Rides
- USDA Surplus Commodities
- Weatherization

May 2, 2025

Gary Huhta, General Manager
Public Utility District No. 1 of Cowlitz County
PO Box 3007
Longview, WA 98632

RE: Cowlitz PUD Northwest Service Area Grid Resiliency Federal Funding Request

Lower Columbia Community Action Partners is pleased to support Cowlitz PUD's request for FY 2025 Congressionally Directed Spending for its proposed Northwest Service Area Grid Resiliency project.

Lower Columbia CAP administers the federal LIHEAP energy assistance and weatherization programs for Cowlitz County and serves Cowlitz PUD's customers served by the electric distribution feeder that is the subject of this funding request. One of our primary missions is to ensure our client families and households have reliable access to utility service to sustain their health and safety. Completion of this resiliency project will drastically reduce the instances of electric service outages that the Ryderwood community, in particular, experiences as a result of frequent severe winter storms. Many senior citizen residents of this isolated rural community have limited mobility and are dependent on electricity for their home heating, cooking needs, and medical devices.

Lower Columbia CAP appreciates our partnership with the PUD in keeping the lights on and heat running for low-income families and vulnerable households in Cowlitz County. This is a worthy project that will enhance the protection and resiliency of some of the county's more rural communities.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Ilona Kerby".

Ilona Kerby, Executive Director
Lower Columbia CAP



DEPARTMENT OF PUBLIC WORKS

1600 – 13th Avenue South
Kelso, WA 98626
TEL (360) 577-3030
FAX (360) 636-0845
Washington Relay Service 711 or (888) 833-8633

www.co.cowlitz.wa.us/publicworks/

Board of County Commissioners

Arne Mortensen	District 1
Dennis P. Weber	District 2
John Jabusch	District 3

November 8, 2022

Cowlitz County Public Utility District No. 1
Attn: Gary Huhta, General Manager
P.O. Box 3007
Longview, WA 98632

**SUBJECT: FEMA BRIC Grant Application
Ryderwood Electric Reliability Improvements Project**

The Cowlitz County Public Works Department (Public Works) expresses its support for the Cowlitz County Public Utility District No. 1's (Cowlitz PUD) proposed Ryderwood Electric Distribution Reliability Improvements Project and application for FEMA funding through the 2022 FEMA Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) Program.

As the public water and wastewater utility serving the Ryderwood 55+ community, Public Works is keenly aware of the risks and impacts to public safety and health when electric service is frequently lost for extended periods during severe weather events. Replacement of the existing overhead feeder with an underground line will ensure some of the County's most vulnerable and isolated residents, along with the water and sewer systems that support them, have reliable electric service when severe weather strikes.

We appreciate Cowlitz PUD's pursuit of FEMA funds to mitigate the natural hazards that threaten rural, vulnerable populations in the unincorporated communities of Cowlitz County. As climate change results in warmer temperatures and longer, drier summers, the hardening of essential utility infrastructure located in forested areas becomes a more urgent priority. We believe this project aptly aligns with the priorities of the 2022 BRIC Program and addresses specific mitigation actions that are listed in the County's 2022 Hazard Mitigation Plan.

Please let us know where we can be of assistance as your application undergoes review.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Mike Moss", is written over a horizontal line.

MIKE MOSS
Director

ec



**STATE OF WASHINGTON
MILITARY DEPARTMENT
EMERGENCY MANAGEMENT DIVISION**

*MS: TA-20 Building 20 ■ Camp Murray, Washington 98430-5122
Phone: (253)512-7000 ■ FAX: (253) 512-7205*

March 14, 2025

To Cowlitz PUD,

I am writing on behalf of the Washington State Emergency Management Division (WA EMD) to express support for Cowlitz PUD's Ryderwood Electric Distribution Reliability Improvements project. As needed, WA EMD is prepared to act as the administrative agent for the project. Cowlitz's proposal generally meets eligibility criteria for the Building Resilient Infrastructure and Communities (BRIC) grant program as described in FEMA's programmatic guidelines.

Cowlitz PUD's project proposal involves undergrounding electric infrastructure to mitigate severe weather and wildfire disruption risk in a service area that includes underserved and vulnerable communities. The area is susceptible to high winds and includes areas of Wildland-Urban Interface with increasingly high risk for wildfires. The proposed work will increase the power grid's resilience and improve the reliability of critical infrastructure for Ryderwood's large population of senior citizens.

This project is supported by Cowlitz PUD's own Hazard Mitigation Plan annex, as well as Cowlitz County's Hazard Mitigation Plan, and it also aligns with the State's Enhanced Hazard Mitigation Plan. Furthermore, the proposal contributes to building a disaster ready and resilient Washington State—which is WA EMD's core mission.

If you have any questions, please contact me at 253-533-1260 or tim.cook@mil.wa.gov.

Sincerely,

Tim Cook
State Hazard Mitigation Officer
Washington Emergency Management Division



PO Box 128 ~ Kelso, WA 98626-4195
Administration Annex ~ 207 4th Avenue N ~ Kelso, WA 98626-4195
(360) 577-3041 ~ Fax (360) 214-3425 ~ www.cwcog.org

May 2, 2025

Gary Huhta, General Manager
Public Utility District No. 1 of Cowlitz County
PO Box 3007
Longview, WA 98632

RE: Cowlitz PUD Northwest Service Area Grid Resiliency Federal Funding Request

Dear Mr. Huhta,

On behalf of the Cowlitz Wahkiakum Council of Governments (CWCOG), I am pleased to support the Cowlitz Public Utility District's Northwest Service Area Grid Resiliency request for FY 2025 Congressionally Directed Spending.

The CWCOG serves at the Economic Development District for the two-county district including Cowlitz and Wahkiakum and develops a Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region. The CEDS includes a number of references to resiliency and clearly recognizes the importance of projects like undergrounding electric utilities.

The Ryderwood community and surrounding residents in Cowlitz and Lewis counties regularly experience electric service outages during severe weather and windstorms that bring trees and limbs into contact with the power lines that serve the area. Grid resiliency improvements such as this project are critical as a changing climate increases the instances of severe weather and the threat of wildfire. The CWCOG supports efforts to underground electric infrastructure that helps protect rural communities and vulnerable senior citizens from natural hazards and ensure reliable utility service when it's most needed.

Thank you for your work on this important initiative and making the safety and well-being of our residents a top priority.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'William A. Fashing', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

William A. Fashing
Executive Director

March 15, 2025

Steve Taylor, Dir. of Regulatory & Regional Affairs
Public Utility District No. 1 of Cowlitz County
PO Box 3007
Longview, WA 98632

Dear Steve:

As President of the Ryderwood Improvement and Service Association (RISA), and on behalf of our community's elderly and vulnerable population, I would like to express our appreciation for Cowlitz PUD's ongoing efforts to obtain federal and state support to underground the power lines that provide essential electric service to Ryderwood. We were delighted to hear that Rep. Gluesenkamp Perez, with support from Senators Murray and Cantwell, secured funding for the project in the federal appropriations bills for 2025, but understand that Congress has yet to finalize or approve new spending for this year.

We all appreciate Cowlitz PUD's pro-active approach to improve electrical service to our community and others in our area as you pursue funding to replace overhead electric line with underground cable. Doing so would reduce risk of wildfire as well as lengthy electric service outages that occur every season due to downed power lines. Ryderwood residents regularly endure these outages when severe weather hits—as recent as the last week of February 2025.

I am sharing, below, examples of the impacts, fears, and concerns of the electric service outages expressed in recent conversations with our elderly residents.

By way of background, Ryderwood is a former logging community which is now home to an elderly population of 55+ residents. The median age according to the last census is almost 77 years of age. Ryderwood is located in northern Cowlitz County, in SW Washington State, about nine miles west of Interstate 5, at the very end of State Route 506. There is only one way in and out of our small town. Our community is surrounded by forest lands owned by Sierra Pacific and Weyerhaeuser. The two-lane state route has many bridges as well as large, and at times, leaning trees near the entire roadway, which do come down during heavy wind, flood events and ice storms.

Despite the community's high median age, Ryderwood's residents are resilient and look out for each other. Most are resigned to the frequent outages, and they are generally prepared with flashlights, batteries, and extra blankets. Some have generators, but those that do can still have difficulties operating them.

Medication that requires refrigeration is common with residents. Oftentimes, affected households won't open their refrigerator doors during outages to keep their expensive medication from spoiling.

Many residents use CPAP devices for sleeping. Partners of CPAP users recounted losing sleep during outage events keeping vigil over their partners' breathing. Batteries for the devices do not typically last through the required duration of use. Power lift chairs are common, and one resident shared that if a power outage is anticipated, he'll place his chair in the "half-way" position to ensure he has the ability to rise from it when there's no electricity.

Most of the community's homes are heated with electricity, but given their age, they are not the most energy efficient. As a result, the homes go cold quickly without electricity. Some residents have fireplaces, but in many cases, the residents are not physically capable of moving the wood and completing other tasks to maintain a fire for heating or cooking.

Use of flame-based lighting (candles, lanterns) by elderly residents within a community served by a volunteer fire department also presents serious safety concerns. Disruption to phone service (both landline and mobile) during these times only increases safety risks.

During severe weather, the residents are grateful for the shelter that's offered at the Ryderwood Community Café where they can get warm and charge their electronics and medical devices through the building's generator. However, many residents have limited mobility, especially when there may be snow, ice, or fallen trees, so they will make due at home.

However, the residents remain generally upbeat through their shared adversity, and the most common inconvenience expressed is having to go without coffee when the power is out.

While many of our residents do their best to adapt to these challenges, we are excited about the PUD's power line undergrounding project and the potential elimination of these impactful outages on our community. I hope this letter can help tell our story and highlight the vital importance of reliable electric service to our vulnerable neighbors.

Thank you, and please let us know how we can help further.

Sincerely,



Bridgette Bagoy, Board President
Ryderwood Improvement and Service Association

Lewis County

PUBLIC UTILITY DISTRICT

P.O. BOX 330 CHEHALIS, WA 98532 • 321 N.W. PACIFIC AVENUE CHEHALIS, WA 98532
(800) 562-5612 • (360) 748-9261 • FAX (360) 740-2455 • www.lcpud.org

February 15, 2025

Cowlitz County Public Utility District No. 1
Attn: Gary Huhta, General Manager
P.O. Box 3007
Longview, WA 98632

RE: Ryderwood Electric Reliability Improvements Project

Lewis County PUD is pleased to extend its support for Cowlitz PUD's request for Congressionally Directed Spending to fund electric distribution system improvements serving the Ryderwood community and residents in rural Lewis County.

The proposed replacement of the existing Vader-to-Ryderwood overhead distribution line with underground cable will eliminate virtually all of the outages resulting from frequent severe storms. The distribution feeder primarily serves vulnerable low-income and senior residents in both utilities' service areas. Residents lose power for extended periods multiple times a year during severe weather events until Cowlitz or Lewis PUD crews can respond. Undergrounding the line will help keep the lights on and the heat running when elderly and housebound residents need this essential service most.

As a joint owner of the Vader-to-Ryderwood line and partner agency in response, Lewis PUD supports your efforts to obtain funding for this improvement and stand ready to participate in its implementation once an award is announced.

Sincerely,



David Plotz
General Manager





Cowlitz County Sheriff's Office

Department of Emergency Management

312 First Avenue SW
Kelso, Washington 98626
Telephone 360.577.3130



BRAD THURMAN
Sheriff

Serving with Honor, Pride and Integrity

LARRY HEMBREE
Director, Emergency Management

May 2, 2025

Gary Huhta, General Manager
Public Utility District No. 1 of Cowlitz County
PO Box 3007
Longview, WA 98632

RE: Cowlitz PUD Northwest Service Area Grid Resiliency Federal Funding Request

Cowlitz County Department of Emergency Management is writing in support of Cowlitz PUD's request for federal funding of its proposed Northwest Service Area Grid Resiliency project. DEM has assisted with the PUD's previous efforts to obtain grant funding for this important hazard mitigation project.

Projects that underground and harden electric distribution and transmission infrastructure are consistent with the County's consolidated Hazard Mitigation Plan and are effective enhancements for rural community resiliency during extreme weather events and potential wildfires. Access to reliable electric service is critical for isolated communities and vulnerable senior citizen populations when facing severe weather and temperatures.

We applaud the PUD's efforts to prioritize grid resilience in the northwest Cowlitz County and assist DEM's mission to mitigate hazards that can result in injury or fatalities among our vulnerable citizens residing in the county's more isolated areas.

Cowlitz DEM appreciates our partnership with Cowlitz PUD, and we fully support the deployment of federal resources to harden the electric grid.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads "Larry W Hembree". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke at the end.

Larry W Hembree
Director – Cowlitz County Emergency Management



Washington State Senate

Olympia Address:
108 Legislative Modular Building
PO Box 40419
Olympia, WA 98504-0419

Senator Jeff Wilson
19th Legislative District

Telephone:
(360) 786-7636
Toll-Free: 1-800-562-6000
E-mail: Jeff.Wilson@leg.wa.gov

May 3, 2025

Gary Huhta, General Manager
Public Utility District No. 1 of Cowlitz County
PO Box 3007
Longview, WA 98632

RE: Cowlitz PUD Northwest Service Area Grid Resiliency Federal Funding Request

I am pleased to express my support for Cowlitz PUD's Northwest Service Area Grid Resiliency federal funding request.

The proposed project will bolster reliable electric service for residents of the 19th Legislative District from the Town of Vader to the 55+ retirement community of Ryderwood. These are communities which provide lower-than-average cost housing in a rural area, and as such their capital improvements are not easily obtained.

The residents and vulnerable populations of these rural communities are frequently impacted with service outages during extreme weather events when electric power is needed most. This grid-hardening project will reroute and underground the electric distribution feeder that's presently located within a heavily forested former railroad corridor. Once completed, the residents and community infrastructure served by this line will no longer be burdened with lengthy outages during extreme weather, and the hard-working PUD line crews can more quickly restore power in other impacted areas of the county.

I believe that the investment in infrastructure is one of the most important things we can do to secure a better future for the next generation. Projects such as this are essential to ensuring a reliable electric grid for our vulnerable senior citizens and rural residents.

I am grateful that the PUD is working with this kind of foresight, and I supported this project at the state level. I hope that the federal funding will be forthcoming. It would mean power security for the seniors in the region, but also opportunity for the next generation.

Be kind, be safe!

Jeff Wilson, Senator