

## **Garfield County, PSE and WDFW break ground on Habitat Fund**

A \$165,500 fund to protect wildlife habitat in Garfield County has been created under an agreement between Puget Sound Energy, Garfield County and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. The endowment, administered by Blue Mountain Community Foundation, is called the Puget Sound Energy Lower Snake River Wind Habitat Project Fund.

Establishment of a long-term fund to preserve and enhance wildlife habitat is the brainchild of Grant Morgan, public works director for Garfield County. Morgan saw the fund as an opportunity to create an enduring asset for Garfield County – not unlike PSE’s new Lower Snake River Wind Facility. Anne Walsh, PSE’s senior environmental and communications manager in Southeast Washington, suggested that Blue Mountain Community Foundation manage the fund. The 2009 WDFW Wind Power Guidelines provided the framework to develop the mitigation strategy that ultimately resulted in the Puget Sound Energy Lower Snake River Wind Habitat Project Fund.

“By using mitigation funds from PSE’s Lower Snake River facility for an endowment,” Walsh said, “we can support environmental projects over the life of the wind project and beyond.”

The habitat endowment is designed to provide grants to local projects in Garfield County for the benefit of wildlife and the county’s citizens. Blue Mountain Community Foundation will invest and administer the fund.

The primary purpose of grants will be for stewardship—management, monitoring, restoration, enhancement, protection from degradation—of high-value habitat in Garfield County. Environmental mitigation for large construction projects traditionally involves a one-time investment, such as acquisition and preservation of an environmentally sensitive tract of land. Never before had the Department of Fish and Wildlife seen mitigation take the form of a long-term endowment.

“During my tenure, this is the most novel and innovative approach to using mitigation funds,” said Mike Ritter, WDFW Mitigation Biologist. “WDFW’s mission is to preserve, protect and perpetuate ecosystems. With an endowment, we have created a way to conserve habitat for generations in Garfield County.”

“Blue Mountain Community Foundation is delighted about this fund for a couple of reasons,” noted Foundation Executive Director Lawson Knight. “We say we serve Garfield County and this fund joins others that benefit Garfield County and demonstrate our commitment to serving the County. Another reason is we invest for a Healthy Community, which includes the environment. This is the most significant fund for the environment in the Foundation’s history.”

The Fund’s executive committee, composed of representatives from Puget Sound Energy, the Garfield County Board of Commissioners, and the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife, is developing grant guidelines and will seek project proposals. A project committee, including executive committee

members along with a representative from a wildlife-oriented organization and an at-large member, will review grant requests and select recipients.

More information on the Puget Sound Energy Lower Snake River Wind Habitat Project Fund can be obtained by calling the Blue Mountain Community Foundation at 509-529-4371 or by visiting its website at [www.bluemountainfoundation.org](http://www.bluemountainfoundation.org).

###

## **CONTACT:**

- Anne Walsh, Sr. Environmental/Communications Manager, PSE, (509) 382-2043
- Grant Morgan, P.E., Director of Garfield County Public Works and County Engineer, (509) 843-1301
- Mike Ritter, Wind Mitigation Biologist, WDFW, (509) 543-3319
- Lawson Knight, Executive Director, Blue Mountain Community Foundation, (509) 529-4371

## **About Puget Sound Energy**

Washington state's oldest local energy utility, Puget Sound Energy serves 1.1 million electric customers and more than 750,000 natural gas customers in 11 counties. A subsidiary of Puget Energy, PSE meets the energy needs of its customers, in part, through cost-effective energy efficiency, procurement of sustainable energy resources, and far-sighted investment in the energy-delivery infrastructure. PSE employees are dedicated to providing great customer service that is safe, dependable and efficient. For more information, visit [www.PSE.com](http://www.PSE.com).

## **About Garfield County**

Garfield County is located in southeastern Washington with the Snake River Canyon in places descending well over 1,000 feet to the river. The Oregon state line marks Garfield County's southern border with elevations rising to the Blue Mountains. Agriculture has dominated Garfield County's economy with farms occupying two-thirds of the county. Wheat is the main crop, though other grains such as barley and bluegrass are also grown. Now, the County has begun harvesting wind. At 712.80 square miles which encompasses a portion of the Umatilla National Forest, Garfield County is the seventh-smallest county in the state. As of 2000, the population is 2397, making it the least populous in the state. The county seat is at Pomeroy, the county's only city.

## **About Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife**

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife mission is to preserve, protect and perpetuate fish, wildlife and ecosystems while providing sustainable fish and wildlife recreational and commercial opportunities. With six regional offices spread across Washington State, the Region 1 office (Spokane) is responsible for conservation and protection of native fish and wildlife in Eastern Washington State, including Garfield County as well as providing sustainable fishing, hunting and other wildlife-related recreational experiences.

## **About Blue Mountain Community Foundation**

Since 1984, the Blue Mountain Community Foundation has served donors who care about Blue Mountain area communities, including Washington's Garfield, Columbia and Garfield Counties, as well as the Northeast section of Umatilla County in Oregon. Through this generosity, BMCF grants in excess of \$1.6 Million each year. It has grown to over \$30M in assets in 250 component funds. Several Foundation funds benefit Garfield County including the Lawrence and Margaret Slater Scholarship Fund for Pomeroy High School graduates and the Garfield County Health Foundation Fund.