Grant County
PUBLIC UTILITY DISTRICT

Powering Our Way of Life.

BY ELECTRONIC FILING

November 30, 2022

Kimberly D. Bose, Secretary
Federal Energy Regulatory Commission
Mail Code: DHAC, PJ-12
888 First Street, N.E.
Washington, D.C. 20426

RE: Priest Rapids Hydroelectric Project No. 2114-204 License Compliance Filing – Article 410 – Wildlife Habitat Monitoring, Information, and Education Plan – 2022 Annual Report

Dear Secretary Bose:

Please find enclosed Public Utility District No. 2 of Grant County, Washington's (Grant PUD's) 2022 Wildlife Habitat Monitoring, Information, and Education annual report consistent with the requirements of Article 410 of the Priest Rapids Hydroelectric Project License.

On October 12, 2009, Grant PUD filed its Wildlife Habitat Monitoring, Information, and Education Plan (Plan) pursuant to Priest Rapids Project (P-2114) License Article 410[1], which was modified and approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) on September 8, 2010[2]. As identified in the Plan, Grant PUD is to: 1) monitor recreation effects on wildlife and sensitive wildlife habitats; 2) provide signage, educational outreach, etc. to educate the public about the potential adverse effects of dispersed recreation on sensitive habitats; and 3) identify and implement corrective actions to control recreation impacts and to rehabilitate wildlife habitats. The Plan also requires Grant PUD to file with FERC an annual report that describes the results of the habitat monitoring efforts and status of the information and education program by December 31 of each year following FERC approval of the Plan.

Grant PUD continued its Information and Education (I&E) Program in 2022 through maintenance and enhancement of its website content where Grant PUD strives to educate the public about responsible recreation practices and the potential adverse effects of irresponsible dispersed recreation on sensitive habitats. Grant PUD biological staff also developed an informational pamphlet in collaboration with the Wanapum of Priest Rapids to highlight priority habitat and species found around Priest Rapids. This pamphlet was distributed to staff working on the Priest Rapids Right Embankment Project. Additionally, the 2022 Archaeology Days celebration was held on October 25-26, during which Grant PUD biological staff was on site at

[1] 123 FERC ¶ 61,049 (2008)
[2] 132 FERC ¶ 62,154 (2010)

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the event to illustrate the importance of responsible recreation. The Wanapum Dam Visitors Center located in the Hydro Operations Building (HOB) reopened to the public in 2022 following the COVID-19 pandemic closure, where visitors were again able to experience the interactive wildlife and wildlife habitat related displays aimed at educating the public on the importance of maintaining a healthy ecosystem throughout the Project. Finally, in 2022 Grant PUD continued to review and select appropriate I&E program media and distribution locations, as well as reviewed provided services, including interpretive talks, and field trips.

FERC staff with questions or comments, please contact Tom Dresser, Grant PUD Fish, Wildlife and Water Quality Manager, at 509-754-5088, ext. 2312.

Sincerely,

Shannon Lowry

Shannon Lowry
License Compliance and Lands Services Manager

Cc: Patrick Verhey – Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife
R.D. Nelle – U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service
Chris Parsons – Washington State Parks
Todd Welker - Washington Department of Natural Resources
Rebecca Doolittle – U.S. Bureau of Reclamation
Clayton Buck – Wanapum
Diane Priebe – U.S. Bureau of Land Management
Myra Barker – Washington Recreation and Conservation Office
LeRoy Adams, Jr. – Yakama Nation

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Priest Rapids Hydroelectric Project (FERC No. 2114)

Wildlife Habitat Monitoring and Information and Education Program

2022 Annual Report

License Article 410

Public Utility District No. 2 of Grant County, Washington

December 2022

Executive Summary

On October 12, 2009, Public Utility District No. 2 of Grant County, Washington (Grant PUD) filed its Wildlife Habitat Monitoring, Information, and Education Plan (WHMIEP) pursuant to License Article 410, which was modified and approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) on September 8, 2010. Grant PUD began implementation of the WHMIEP in 2011, which included: 1) monitoring recreation effects on wildlife and sensitive wildlife habitats; 2) providing signage, educational outreach, etc. to help educate the public about responsible recreation practices and to help minimize potentially adverse effects of dispersed recreation on sensitive habitats; and 3) identifying and implementing corrective actions to help reduce recreation impacts and to rehabilitate wildlife habitats. The WHMIEP also requires Grant PUD to file with FERC an annual report that describes the results of the habitat monitoring efforts and status of the information and education program by December 31 of each year following FERC approval.

Five habitat areas within the Priest Rapids Project (Project) were surveyed in the spring and fall of 2022 identifying potential dispersed recreation effects on wildlife and sensitive wildlife habitats. These locations were selected in 2011 because they were identified by the Washington Natural Heritage Program (WNHP 2010) to contain one or more state and/or federally listed plant species or were identified as priority habitat by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) database (WDFW 2008). In addition to the condition of the habitat at the site, the proximity of the site to public access, recreation occurring at or near the site, and the potential for recreation impacts at the site in the future was also considered during the selection of the monitoring locations. In total, approximately 12 miles of Wanapum Reservoir shoreline and 3 miles of Priest Rapids Reservoir shoreline were surveyed in 2022.

Grant PUD continued its Information and Education (I&E) Program in 2022 through maintenance and enhancement of its website content. Grant PUD strives to help educate the public about responsible recreation practices and the potential adverse effects of irresponsible dispersed recreation on sensitive habitats. Additionally, Grant PUD conducted the following activities to support its I&E program:

- Biological staff developed an informational pamphlet in collaboration with the Wanapum of Priest Rapids to highlight priority habitat and species found throughout Priest Rapids. This pamphlet was distributed to staff working on the Priest Rapids Right Embankment Project.
- Grant PUD biological staff was on site at the 2022 Archaeology Days celebration October 25-26 to convey the importance of responsible recreation.
- The Wanapum Dam Visitors Center located in the Hydro Operations Building (HOB) reopened to the public in 2022 after a long-term closure associated with the COVID pandemic. Visitors were again able to experience the interactive wildlife and wildlife habitat related displays featuring the importance of maintaining a healthy ecosystem throughout the Project.
- Grant PUD continued to review and select appropriate I&E Program media to be used, such as signs and kiosks (roadside and at key sites), brochures, pamphlets, audio tours, nature trails, newsletters, etc., as well as prioritizing sites where the media will be located, and review services to be provided, such as interpretive talks, and field trips.

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1.0 Introduction

On October 12, 2009, Public Utility District No. 2 of Grant County, Washington (Grant PUD) filed its Wildlife Habitat Monitoring, Information, and Education Plan (WHMIEP) pursuant to Article 410, which was modified and approved by the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) on September 8, 2010. Grant PUD began implementation of the WHMIEP in 2011, which includes: 1) monitoring recreation effects on wildlife and sensitive wildlife habitats; 2) providing signage, educational outreach, etc. to help educate the public about responsible recreation practices to help minimize potentially adverse effects of dispersed recreation on sensitive habitats; and 3) identifying and implementing corrective actions to help reduce recreation impacts and to rehabilitate wildlife habitats. The WHMIEP also requires Grant PUD to file with FERC an annual report that describes the results of the habitat monitoring efforts and status of the information and education program by December 31 of each year following FERC approval of the WHMIEP.

2.0 Monitoring Recreation Effects on Wildlife and Sensitive Wildlife Habitats

In Year 1 of the WHMIEP, Grant PUD identified five habitat areas to be monitored bi-annually (three on Wanapum Reservoir and two on Priest Rapids Reservoir). The five locations monitored in 2022 included: 1) West Bar (7 miles); 2) Babcock Bench (3 miles); 3) Quilomene Bar (2 miles); 4) North of Lake Geneva (2 miles); and 5) South of Lake Geneva (1 mile). Monitored habitat areas are illustrated in Figure 1 and Figure 2. Provisions and criteria for identifying and implementing corrective actions to control impacts and to rehabilitate habitats were identified in the WHMIEP.

These sites were selected because they contain one or more state and/or federally listed plant species or were identified as priority habitat by the Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife Priority Habitats and Species (PHS) database (WDFW 2008); in addition to the condition of the habitat at the site, the proximity of the site to public access, recreation occurring at or near the site, and the potential for recreation impacts at the site in the future were also considered during the selection of the monitoring locations.

Figure 1 Habitat monitoring areas for the Wanapum Reservoir.

Figure 2 Habitat monitoring areas for the Priest Rapids Reservoir.

2.1 West Bar

West Bar is located on Wanapum Reservoir directly across the river from Crescent Bar, Grant PUD's most heavily used recreation area. This site was selected for monitoring because (1) it is listed as priority habitat for mule deer and elk in WDFW's PHS database (WDFW 2008), (2) it is readily accessible to the public, (3) it is located near Crescent Bar, a known and established recreation site, and (4) the habitat at the site is currently in good condition.

2.2 Babcock Bench

Babcock Bench is located on the east bank south of Crescent Bar and is readily accessible by boat from both the Crescent Bar and Sunland boat launches. This site was selected for monitoring because (1) it is listed as priority habitat for chukar in WDFW's PHS database (WDFW 2008), (2) it is readily accessible to the public, (3) it is located near Quilomene Dune, Crescent Bar, and Sunland, all known and established recreation sites, and (4) the habitat at the site is currently in good condition.

2.3 Quilomene Bar

Quilomene Bar is located on the west bank just north of Quilomene Dune. Quilomene Bar is readily accessible by boat from both Crescent Bar and Sunland boat launches. This site was selected for monitoring because (1) it is listed as priority habitat for mule deer and elk in WDFW's PHS database (WDFW 2008), (2) it is readily accessible to the public, (3) it is located near Quilomene Dune, Crescent Bar, and Sunland, all known and established recreation sites, and (4) the habitat at the site is currently in good condition.

2.4 North of Geneva Lake

Lake Geneva is a large cove located on the east bank of Priest Rapids Reservoir. North of Lake Geneva is a popular area for hunting and fishing. This site was selected for monitoring because (1) it is listed as priority habitat for urban natural open space in WDFW's PHS database (WDFW 2008), (2) it is readily accessible to the public, (3) it is commonly used by both hunters and fishermen, and (4) the habitat at the site is currently in good condition.

2.5 South of Lake Geneva

Lake Geneva is a large cove located on the east bank of Priest Rapids Reservoir. South of Lake Geneva is a popular area for hunting and fishing. This site was selected for monitoring because (1) it is listed as priority habitat for urban natural open space in WDFW's PHS database (WDFW 2008), (2) it is readily accessible to the public, (3) it is commonly used by both hunters and fishermen, and (4) the habitat at the site is currently in good condition.

3.0 Results

In total, approximately 12 miles of Wanapum Reservoir shoreline and 3 miles of Priest Rapids Reservoir shoreline were surveyed twice in 2022. Monitoring occurred prior to the peak recreation season in June and again following the recreation season in September. Monitoring methods, impact ratings, action triggers, and corrective action options are described in the WHMIEP and were implemented in 2022.

3.1 West Bar

West Bar was surveyed for dispersed recreation on May 11, 2022. Litter was found at multiple locations and removed. In addition, three fire pits were found and dispersed at separate locations.

Fall surveys were performed on September 7, 2022, that found two fire pits that were removed as well as a small amount of trash. There was no evidence of human-caused tree disturbance on either survey.

3.2 Babcock Bench

Babcock Bench was surveyed for dispersed recreational effects on May 11, 2022, and no dispersed recreation sites or dispersed recreation impacts were found. Previous seeding efforts continue to be successful throughout the site and there was no noticeable damage to trees or human-caused trails. The fall survey was conducted on September 7, 2022, and a small amount of trash was removed. No other dispersed recreation impacts were found.

3.3 Quilomene Bar

Quilomene Bar was surveyed for dispersed recreational effects on May 11, 2022. Two fire pits were removed, and litter was picked up during the survey. The fall survey was conducted on September 7, 2022. Two fire pits were once again dispersed, and a small amount of trash was removed. Native wildlife continues to use this location as game trails detected in previous years surveys remain prevalent and wild turkeys, mule deer, and elk were again present during site visits. No signs of disturbed human usage were present beyond the shoreline area.

3.4 North of Lake Geneva

North of Lake Geneva was surveyed for dispersed recreational effects on May 10, 2022, and September 8, 2022. A small amount of trash was removed in the fall survey believed to have been blown into the area from the river as there were no other signs of human usage. No dispersed recreation sites or any signs of dispersed recreation impacts were found on the fall survey.

3.5 South of Lake Geneva

South of Lake Geneva was surveyed for dispersed recreational effects on May 10, 2022, and September 8, 2022, and no dispersed recreation sites or any signs of dispersed recreational impacts were found on either survey.

4.0 Information and Education

In 2022, Grant PUD continued to enhance, implement, and maintain the Information and Education (I&E) Program via a combination of website, signage, priority habitat and species pamphlet and visitor center information intended to educate the public about responsible recreation practices and the potential adverse effects of irresponsible dispersed recreation on sensitive habitats, as well as provide information that will help educate the public about the types of wildlife, and their importance to the environment in the Project area.

4.1 Website

The I&E website was activated in 2013 and has been coordinated with I&E provisions of Article 409, 410, and 418. Grant PUD has been providing long-term internal web development support for the program and has funded annual operation and updating as new information is collected. The recreation and wildlife information and education website were maintained throughout 2022 and includes imagery and text regarding a number of wildlife species and ecosystems within the Project area (https://www.grantpud.org/environment). Grant PUD will continue to maintain the website and explore ways to expand content in the future.

4.2 Signage

In addition to the website, Grant PUD's Environmental Affairs department has collaboratively developed posters and signage to educate the public on the importance of responsible recreation throughout the Project. There have been numerous conspicuous kiosks and wildlife-specific signage installed and maintained in 2022 at Grant PUD recreation sites and boat launches throughout the Project (Figure 3). In 2023, Grant PUD looks to continue development and installation of additional signs and kiosks within the Project for educational purposes.

Figure 3 Informational signage at Priest Rapids Recreation Area.

4.3 Public Education and Outreach

In collaboration with the Wanapum of Priest Rapids, Grant PUD staff developed an informational pamphlet titled, Priority Habitat and Species of the Priest Rapids Right Embankment Project, which highlights primary habitat zones and identifies key species found were construction related activities are occurring. The pamphlet is distributed to staff associated with the construction efforts occurring around Priest Rapids with the goal of illustrating the importance of conducting work in a manner that minimizes the impact to the area (Appendix A).

Grant PUD's Archaeology Days, celebrated October 25-26, featured a number of interactive and educational displays showcasing some of the region's key species, such as wood ducks, Pacific

lamprey and white sturgeon. Grant PUD biological staff was on site to answer questions and emphasize the importance of responsible recreational practices.

Grant PUD's Wanapum Dam Visitors Center, located in the Hydro Operations Building (HOB), reopened to the public in 2022 following a COVID-19-related closure. Since its opening on December 1, 2015, the center is visited annually by thousands of people who experience the diverse wildlife and wildlife habitat interpretative elements on display throughout the exhibit. These exhibits illustrate the importance of maintaining a healthy ecosystem as well as promote responsible recreation practices (Figure 4). Visitors can also learn where each of the recreation sites are located throughout the Project and what amenities are present at each (Figure 5).

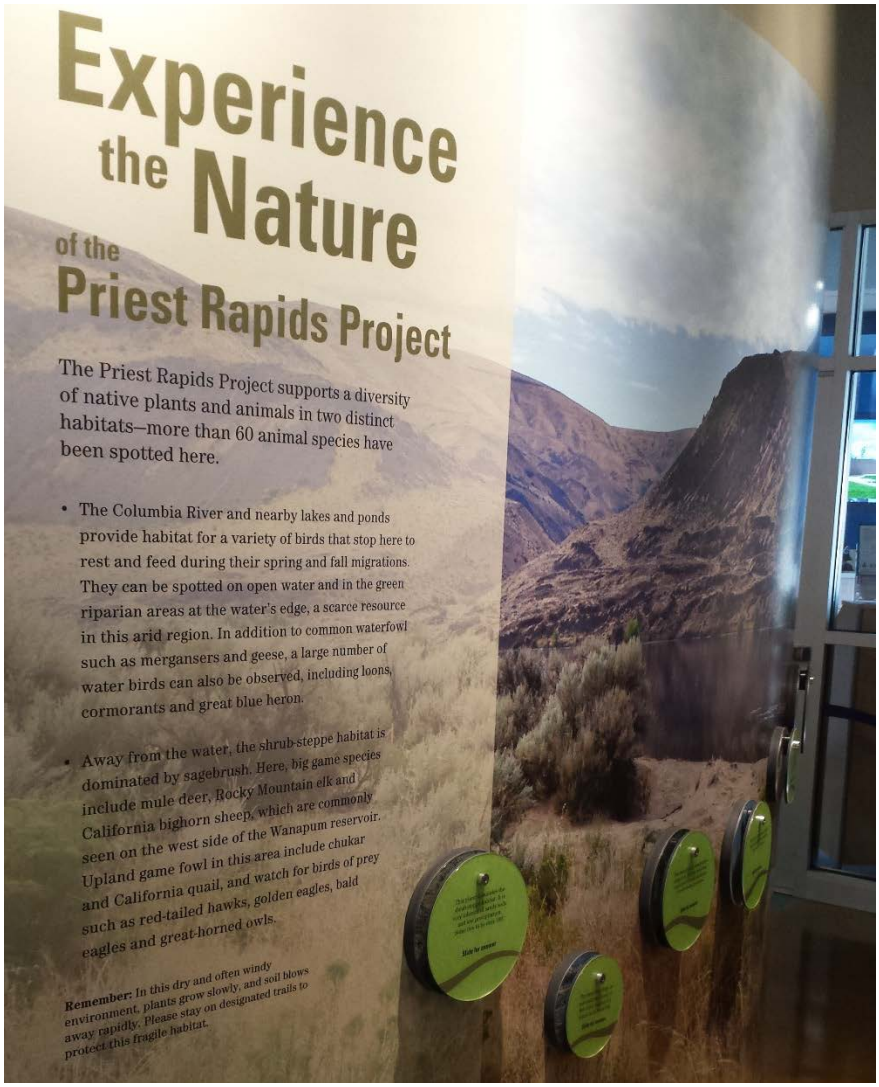


Figure 4 Habitat Information at the Visitor Center.

Figure 5 Display at the visitor center illustrating recreational sites throughout the Project.

5.0 Summary

Grant PUD completed its 12th full year of monitoring for the WHMIEP in 2022, which included:

- Surveying five habitat areas for dispersed recreational effects on sensitive wildlife habitat areas,
- Website development, maintenance, and expansion,
- Signage maintenance and installation,
- Public education and outreach

In 2023, Grant PUD will continue to monitor the five habitat areas bi-annually for dispersed recreational effects on sensitive habitat areas, once prior to recreation season and once following recreation season. Grant PUD will continue to maintain and develop its website, interpretive signage, education and outreach programs, and the Wanapum Dam Visitor's Center and report accordingly. The next annual report will be submitted in December 2023.

Literature Cited

FERC (Federal Energy Regulatory Commission). 2008. Order Issuing New License for Public Utility District No. 2 of Grant County, 123 FERC ¶ 61,049, Washington D.C.

Washington Department of Fish and Wildlife. 2021. Priority Habitat and Species List. Olympia, Washington.

Washington Natural Heritage Program (WNHP). 2010. Geographical Information Systems Data Set. Olympia, Washington. Updated 2010.

Appendix A
Priority Habitat and Species of the Priest Rapids Embankment Project

Priority Habitat and Species of the Priest Rapids Right Embankment Project

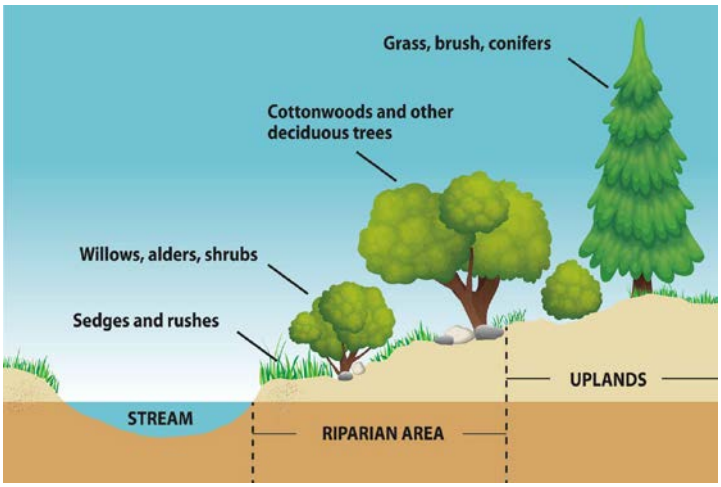
Habitat Zones

The area around the Priest Rapids Right Embankment Project is home to a variety of unique landscapes and species that depend on them. The purpose of this document is to highlight the primary habitat zones were construction related work is being conducted, identify key species found in these zones and to illustrate the importance of conducting work in a manner that minimizes the impact to the area.

Riparian

Riparian habitat around Priest Rapids may only extend a short distance from the Columbia River but it provides a vital component to the local ecosystem, nonetheless. The favorable soils and moisture levels allow for a wide variety of vegetation to exist in an otherwise arid landscape, including numerous tree species, native rose, willows and chokecherry.

Numerous wildlife species depend on riparian habitat in the region including bald eagles, wood ducks, Rocky Mountain elk and mule deer. The trees that grow in the riparian zone provide ideal habitat for bald eagles to perch, roost and nest in throughout the year. These trees also provide necessary habitat for cavity nesting species such as wood ducks. Deer and elk depend on the nutrient rich grasses and forbs that grow in the riparian habitat throughout the year.



Shrub-steppe

The shrub-steppe habitat of Eastern Washington is one of the most diverse landscapes in the region and is home to some key species that aren't found anywhere else in the state. It is the dominant habitat found around Priest Rapids and is comprised of non-forested vegetation consisting of perennial bunchgrasses and shrubs. Bunchgrasses, such as bluebunch wheatgrass, provide a vital food source for deer in the spring, while shrubs like antelope bitterbrush provide nutrient rich browse and cover throughout the year.

Some of the key wildlife species that utilize shrub-steppe habitat in the region include the Greater Sage-Grouse, burrowing owls, sagebrush sparrow and the striped whipsnake. Wildfires have played a large roll in degrading shrub-steppe habitat around Priest Rapids in recent years and with a natural revegetation rate of upwards of 50 years it is imperative that we preserve what little habitat we have remaining.

Cliff/Talus Slope

Cliff and talus slopes are another important habitat found in the area. A cliff is a topographic feature that has a vertical height of 25ft or more and a talus slope is often found at the base, consisting of large rocks and rubble that have fallen and accumulated over time. Wildlife use these habitat features for perching, cover, hibernation, breeding and rearing of young. Some of the species in our region that utilize this landscape are bighorn sheep, golden eagles, peregrine falcon and chukar. Although this habitat is utilized year around, it is especially critical in the spring and summer months as it provides a safe place for nesting and lambing to occur.

Reducing Impacts

Any effort to reduce negative impacts to the area around the Priest Rapids Right Embankment Project will help to minimize the harm to vegetation and wildlife in the area. The following are some factors and how they can be minimized:

Noxious weed control

Controlling the spread of noxious weeds around Priest Rapids is a central tenant in managing for healthy vegetation and wildlife populations. Any time there is a soil disturbance it creates a perfect environment for invasive species, such as Russian thistle, to establish. Most of these invasive species establish quickly and then outcompete the native vegetation if allowed. Because of this, any effort to minimize unnecessary disturbance to the soil will result in a healthier landscape.

Russian Thistle

Dust Control

When dust is stirred up it not only creates a health risk to the workers breathing the particles, but it also negatively impacts local vegetation and wildlife. Vegetation becomes coated, thus reducing the plants ability to create photosynthesis. This in turn makes the plant less viable for food and/or shelter to local wildlife. This can be minimized by having trucks drive a little slower on the way to the job site and by utilizing a water tender regularly.

Noise Control

Constant and/or extreme noise can negatively impact wildlife in the region. It can displace a number of species including mule deer and bighorn sheep and potentially alter avian species from nesting nearby. If possible, noise should be avoided in the twilight hours of early morning and late evening in order to minimize disturbance to roosting birds. If anyone has any questions regarding the above information, or if there is any concern with wildlife and habitat while working on site, please feel free to contact Joe LeMoine at 509-764-0500 Ext. 2690 or email at jlemoine@gcpud.org