WHAT WE HAVE ACCOMPLISHED TOGETHER

OCAP directed the PUC to prioritize proceedings and activities that advance decarbonization in the utility sector, and exercise its broad statutory authority to reduce climate pollution, mitigate energy burden experienced by utility customers, and ensure system reliability and resource adequacy. The PUC took important steps in 2021 to advance an equitable clean energy future for all Oregonians, including:

- Improvements to the Oregon Community Solar Program to ensure benefits are accessible by low-income Oregonians, increasing the discount for low income subscribers from 20 percent to 40 percent.

- Policies that kept the power on for vulnerable Oregonians facing pandemic hardships.

- Utilities have submitted Distribution System Planning (DSP) proposals, each with detailed community engagement strategies to include the public more in the process. This is remarkable since DSP has traditionally been the sole domain of the utilities. Now, communities have an opportunity to define how the system can benefit them.

- PUC initiated a “Natural Gas Fact Finding” proceeding (UM 2178), to gain a better understanding of how different decarbonization scenarios will impact customers in Oregon, with the goal of informing future decision-making.

Active resource adequacy docket (UM 2143), allowing a robust conversation between utilities and customers about how the utilities’ ability to provide power can be met not just according to power demands of customers but also the benefits to customers of a cleaner energy system.

Separate from OCAP’s directives, the legislature made significant progress in 2021 to decarbonize Oregon’s electricity grid and support equitable access to clean energy, by passing legislation that will:

- Transition Oregon’s electricity grid to 100% clean, emissions-free energy sources by 2040 (HB 2021).

- Reduce energy burden (HB 2475) by allowing the PUC to set different rates for lower-income Oregonians and support engagement by environmental justice advocates in PUC decision-making on utility rates.

- Provide better long-term support for energy efficiency projects through the Energy Trust of Oregon (HB 3141), and require that 25% of the funding for small-scale renewable projects be dedicated to low- and moderate-income customers.

KEY DATA

$9 million: amount NW Natural is asking Oregon customers to pay to cover bonuses for top executives.

1,000 low-income Oregonians are now subscribed to and benefiting from the Oregon Community Solar Program.
“The PUC’s staff worked hard with program partners and the community to find a way to make [the Oregon Community Solar Program] a more viable option for low-income residents. We approved their recommendation because supporting access to solar for all Oregonians is an important outcome sought by the Oregon legislature.”

– Megan Decker, PUC Chair.

OPPORTUNITIES FOR PROGRESS

Together, HB 2021 and the EQC’s newly-adopted Climate Protection Program set the path for Oregon to significantly reduce emissions from some of our top polluting sectors. However, there is much work to be done on behalf of the PUC and the legislature to ensure an affordable, equitable transition to a decarbonized future. Looking ahead to the next year, we are eager to see additional progress to:

- Better integrate the social cost of carbon and performance-based ratemaking, which will better ensure key climate and efficiency metrics are incorporated into utility planning.

- Effectively evaluate the future of fossil “natural” gas in Oregon (UM 2178) and adopt regulatory tools to ensure the most cost-effective, most prudent and least risky pathway to achieve deep decarbonization of the fossil gas sector.

- Regulate emissions from in-state fossil gas plants that export electricity or merchant-owned gas plants in Oregon, which are not covered by HB 2021 or the Climate Protection Program.

- Invest in distributed energy resources (e.g., community-owned solar), storage, and microgrid, which provide community economic benefits and help increase climate resiliency.