

PSE wildfire preparedness community meeting summary report

Community of Greenwater

Report date | October 2022

Overview

Wildfires are a growing public safety concern for much of the Western United States. Although wildfires start for many reasons, many of which we have no control over, Puget Sound Energy (PSE) has facilities and equipment throughout our region that could be impacted by a wildfire. Thus PSE is taking a comprehensive approach to wildfire mitigation that will help keep our customers safe while maintaining the reliable delivery of energy.

PSE's latest [Wildfire Mitigation and Response Plan for 2022](#) outlines the year-round efforts to prepare for and help prevent wildfires in our service area. Many of PSE's wildfire-related actions also help protect our system from other hazards, like high winds and winter storms.

A series of meetings for communities at higher risk for wildfires are planned for 2022. As part of this effort, the residents of Greenwater met virtually and in person on July 20. At the community meeting, PSE shared current activities to mitigate wildfire risk and tools available for potential use in the future. Future tools include proactively turning off power during high-risk weather conditions — a practice known as Public Safety Power Shutoffs, or PSPS. During severe high-risk weather conditions debris, such as tree limbs, can damage electric lines which can cause energy to be released in the form of heat and sparks. A utility may shut down select power lines to help avoid this.

The purpose of the community meeting was to:

- Share information about PSE's wildfire planning our active planning and preparation.
- Communicate the ongoing and evolving coordination with other partners regarding wildfire planning and response.
- Seek information from participants about Public Safety Power Shutoffs concerns, considerations, and questions.

PSE is in the early planning stages of developing a Public Safety Power Shutoff wildfire mitigation plan and does not intend to use a Public Safety Power Shutoff in 2022. If implemented in the future, PSPS would be one of several tools in our wildfire mitigation and response toolkit and would be a tool used as a last resort.

Feedback received, summarized in this report, will help shape the way PSE plans for and uses Public Safety Power Shutoffs in the future.

Community meeting notification

To encourage participation of community members served by the identified higher wildfire risk electric distribution circuits, PSE shared information in myriad ways.

- Two direct-mailed pieces to all customers served by the higher wildfire risk circuits.
- Two emails to all customers served by the higher wildfire risk circuits with an email address listed on their PSE account.
- A factsheet on wildfire mitigation and response, which was sent to customers via mail and posted on the wildfire webpage, pse.com/wildfirepreparedness.
- Shared information with local community groups, key stakeholders, fire response agencies, and elected officials with a request for them to share information through their established communications channels.
- Issued a media release to local publications in PSE's service territory.

To minimize barriers to participation, PSE held the community meeting virtually and in-person, while providing other learning and feedback-sharing opportunities, including one-on-one conversations with PSE's Wildfire Task Force team members and sharing thoughts via an online comment form, email or phone. We also encouraged people to let us know if they have accommodation needs to fully participate in the community meeting so that we may address their needs. Knowing internet access can be an issue in the community, PSE held an in-person session at the Greenwater Community Center.

Community meeting attendance

The community meeting was attended by PSE customers, PSE staff, and wildfire mitigation state and local partners including the Washington Department of Natural Resources, the Greenwater Fire Department, Crystal Mountain, Washington Refuse and Recycling Association, and Pierce County Emergency Management. Due to the remote nature of Greenwater, many do not have reliable access to internet and attending the virtual town hall was a barrier to participation. PSE worked with the Greenwater Community Center to provide internet access at the center. In total, 66 community members participated in the town hall; 12 individuals attended in-person and approximately 54 attended the online event.

Meeting date	In-person attendees	Virtual attendees
July 20, 2022	12 Community members	54 Community members

Community meeting details

The town hall began with a 30-minute presentation led by PSE staff. Michelle Boll, Wildfire Mitigation Program Manager, presented PSE's Wildfire Mitigation and Response Plan for 2022. Kishan Mistry, Asset Management Electric System Planning Supervisor, provided information on PSE's situational awareness methods and tools, as well as proactive infrastructure projects to mitigate wildfire risk and improve electric service reliability in Greenwater. Ryan Murphy, Director of Electric Operations, discussed fault reduction and protection, and operational procedures and emergency response. Ryan also shared a conceptual Public Safety Power Shutoff timeline of events and the process to restore power.

Following the presentation, PSE held a question-and-answer session. Then, attendees broke into small group discussions and large group report outs. The community meetings concluded with a second question-and-answer session.

Additional information detailed below summarizes the town hall date, location, and target audience.

Community meeting date and time	Community meeting location	Community meeting target audience
July 20, 2022 5:30 – 7:30 p.m. PST	Virtual and in-person at the Greenwater Community Center; 59707 WA-410; Greenwater, WA 98022)	Customers in the Enumclaw to Crystal Mountain area

Community dialogue key findings

To effectively collect feedback from customers during the community meeting, PSE facilitated small group discussions. Groups of no more than eight customers were presented three scenarios and asked a series of questions based on those scenarios. Each group had a PSE or consultant table host that supported walking through the questions and gathering feedback. Following each round of small group discussion, groups shared main themes and concerns with the larger group. The scenarios, questions asked, and key findings are summarized below.

Small group discussion: round 1

Scenario

It's hot, really hot out. You can't remember the last time it rained. And now the winds have started to pick up. You know that this is a recipe for wildfire, and it's time to be aware and prepared.



Questions asked

- Looking back to previous emergencies or wildfires you may have experienced, where would you typically get news or updates?
- Are there local organizations or services that provide emergency information?
- How would you want to get information about wildfire risks or other emergencies?

Key findings

- **The Greenwater Fire Chief, Paul Sowers, is the most trusted source of information during emergencies. The fire station/community center is a lifeline to the community. Chief Sowers posts information to the Greenwater Fire and Greenwater Community Facebook pages frequently.**

Key findings

- Residents receive information from the PSE app, PSE website, email and text alerts, local social media pages, Pierce County notifications and alerts, and the National Weather Service and Department of Natural Resources websites. However, these modes of communication rely on internet and cell service, both of which become unavailable during power outages.
- Word of mouth, checking in on neighbors, visiting the fire station and other local gathering places, and road-side signs placed on State Highway 410 become the primary methods of sharing information during power outages. Some drive to Forest Service Road 70, a known cell service spot to access mobile internet. An idea was shared that a partnership could be established with Crystal ski resort to utilize message board to share community information.

Small group discussion: round 2

Scenario

Think about the possibility of having the power turned off from anywhere from a few hours to a few days during high wind periods. The purpose of these proactive power shutoffs is to prevent trees and other debris from damaging electric lines and potentially causing wildfires.



Questions asked

- What steps do you already take to prepare for emergencies or power outages?
- What would worry you about having power turned off?
- How much notice do you need before an emergency power shutoff, knowing that alerts will be based upon unpredictable winds and weather?

Key findings

- Residents in the Greenwater area are familiar with extreme weather conditions and frequent power outages. They are prepared by having food stores on hand and have flashlights and other supplies ready and available year-round. However, there are a lot of vacation rentals in Greenwater, and renters are often unaware of the risks and how to receive information during emergencies.
- Top concerns when having the power turned off include loss of cell service and internet access, isolation, and water availability.

Key findings

- **Many concerns around generators were discussed and identified. They include:**
 - Access to water from wells that rely on electric pumps during hot weather conditions was a concern, as not all residents have generators, and for those that do, generators typically can't power well pumps and air conditioning.
 - The availability and ability to have enough fuel on hand to fuel generators for an extended period of time was discussed.
 - Running generators during dry, hot, and windy conditions brought up the concern of the added fire ignition risk from the generators themselves.
- State Highway 410 is the only road in and out of Greenwater. During storms, the road can be closed because of downed trees and power lines, snow, or other issues.
- The community requested a minimum of 24 hours' notice but having 48 to 72 hours' notice would be helpful. Residents would need enough time to make supply runs. Enumclaw is the closest location with sufficient groceries and supplies. Neighbors often coordinate supply runs and time would be needed to do this.

Small group discussion: round 3

Scenario

Now imagine that the power is off, but there is NOT an active wildfire right now. Think about where you are, what you need, and how you're going to stay informed.



Questions asked

- Think about your family and your community – who might need resources or assistance during a power outage?
- How could PSE and its partners help you and your neighbors when the power is out?
- How do you want to receive information during an outage?
- How frequently would you want to receive updates on the outage?

Key findings

- **The Fire Department is knowledgeable about who might need help during an emergency.**
- **PSE needs to work closely with the Fire Department to share information, coordinate notifications, and ensure public safety was discussed widely.**
- **The need for communication support was heard across all conversations. Many requested that PSE ask Lumen to upgrade communications to the Greenwater community and to coordinate with cell service providers to have back-up generators at cell towers.**
- **The need for PSE to communicate with Washington State Patrol and Washington State Department of Transportation to coordinate the closure of State Highway 410, the only road in and out of Greenwater. This route often closes during storms because of downed trees/power lines, snow and other situations.**
- **To some degree, there was a request that PSE provide a gas stipend, credit to customers' accounts, or otherwise reimburse customers for expenses (at least some expenses) to obtain supplies and fuel during a PSPS.**
- **Many requested notifications be sent every four to eight hours, even if there were no updates, and sooner if there were updates. They also requested transparent information be provided pertaining to the status updates. For example, if an estimated time to reenergize lines is extended or shortened, they would want to know why.**
- **Due to the lack of internet and cell communication, residents requested that PSE communicate information and updates through the Fire Chief.**
- **If electronic notifications are used (PSE app, text, email, etc.), time stamp the notices and let people know when they can expect the next notification so that they can travel to areas with cell service.**
- **Other ideas were identified to work around the lack of cell and internet service included setting up road-side signs with important information.**

Question and answer recap

Following small group discussions, PSE facilitated a question-and-answer session. A summary of the questions asked, and the responses provided are included below.

Q: What is your statistical instance of fire starts in the Greenwater area?

A: PSE doesn't have the statistics of starts, or even small-scale events. This year (2022) we have a new tool that tracks ignition events.

Q: Will crews be on standby to inspect during PSPS, or will dispatch be in competition with greater Puget Sound area events?

A: PSE will have qualified electrical workers dedicated to areas impacted by a PSPS.

Q: Have you contacted landowners about extending the right-of-way near land lanes to create a larger buffer around lines?

A: Expanding legal rights is challenging. PSE has a program to identify hazard trees on private property. In that case PSE works with the landowners to remove the trees that are at risk of failure due to their health. As far as expanding the right-of-way, this is a large legal undertaking, and PSE staff attending the town hall could not speak to the issue.

Post-Meeting Follow-Up from PSE:

PSE has not contacted landowners about extending right-of-way and has no plans to do so at this time. The existing program to identify hazard trees on private property helps meet vegetation management needs.

Q: Has a system-wide analysis been done to look at the rolling implications during power outages? Have you considered the issues of food storage, water availability, indoor air quality, the fire risk increase with the number of personal generators being used, and lack of communication?

A: Research hasn't been done to assess generator use and increased fire risk, but this will be considered in the planning process. PSE can also work with other utilities to pull best practices. Communications implications are on PSE's radar, and we are exploring solutions (e.g. Cell on Wheels (COW) which are portable cellular devices). These will be important considerations during the thoughtful planning process.

Q: Have you contacted Lumen and cell companies? A generator could be supplied by them.

A: PSE has not contacted local telecommunication companies yet. We acknowledged that collaboration and coordination with communication companies will be considered in the planning process.

Q: For those that need a generator, can PSE help the community get a generator? Contactors don't want to come out to install generators.

A: PSE has a program that can support in some degree around contractor vetting but we will need to look into more details.

Post-Meeting Follow-Up from PSE: PSE can provide guidance regarding generator safety, purchase, applications or installation. Please see our webpage about generators for more information: [PSE | Generators for Homes and Businesses](#) or call 1(800) 562-1482.

Q: What is the trigger for a PSPS? Is there data from last year that would suggest how many times a PSPS would have occurred?

A: If the trigger for a PSPS were red flag conditions paired with extreme wind gusts in approximately the 50/60mph range, PSPS would have been used zero times last year (2021).

Q: Do you know what the specific plan is for this area for tree maintenance? Do you have the staff power/plan to trim what needs to be cut? Have you considered changing the bylaws about tree maintenance?

A: PSE's normal vegetation management cycles in the Greenwater area occur every three years for transmission lines and every six years for distribution lines. Since identifying Greenwater as a higher risk area for wildfire, PSE will patrol transmission lines and distribution lines every year prior to wildfire season and mitigate any areas of concern with respect to vegetation. PSE is properly resourced to address the needed vegetation work, and also has the capability to add resources if needed. PSE generally will not attempt to make changes to community rules and regulations, although we may seek to partner with the community in addressing vegetation of concern in specific situations.

Q: Does PSE have data of people who rely on the power for medical equipment?

A: PSE only has data on people who rely on power for medical equipment if they self-identify that information. Customers can call 1(888) 225-5773 to self-identify if they rely on medical equipment and add a medical flag to your account.

Q: How much of the rate increase is being directed towards fire mitigation? What can we expect in future mitigation that isn't a PSPS?

A: We do not have that information here and will follow-up with you after the meeting.

Post-Meeting Follow-Up from PSE: The proposed rate increase includes investments totaling over \$130 million. These investments are for enhanced vegetation management and projects that mitigate wildfire risks in PSE's service territory. PSE is also pursuing potential grants through the Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act. These grant funds may be able to help further reduce wildfire risks while minimizing the impact to rate payers.

PSE takes proactive measures to prepare for, and help prevent, wildfires in our service area. We do this through year-round planning, infrastructure investments, training, operational process improvement, and data tracking and analysis. Specific examples include:

- Completing infrastructure projects to reduce wildfire risk. Examples of projects include:
 - Covered conductor "tree wire"
 - Undergrounding select power lines
 - Pole replacement
 - Added distribution capacity
 - Replacing copper wire
 - Recloser installation and blocking

Post-Meeting Follow-Up from PSE, continued:

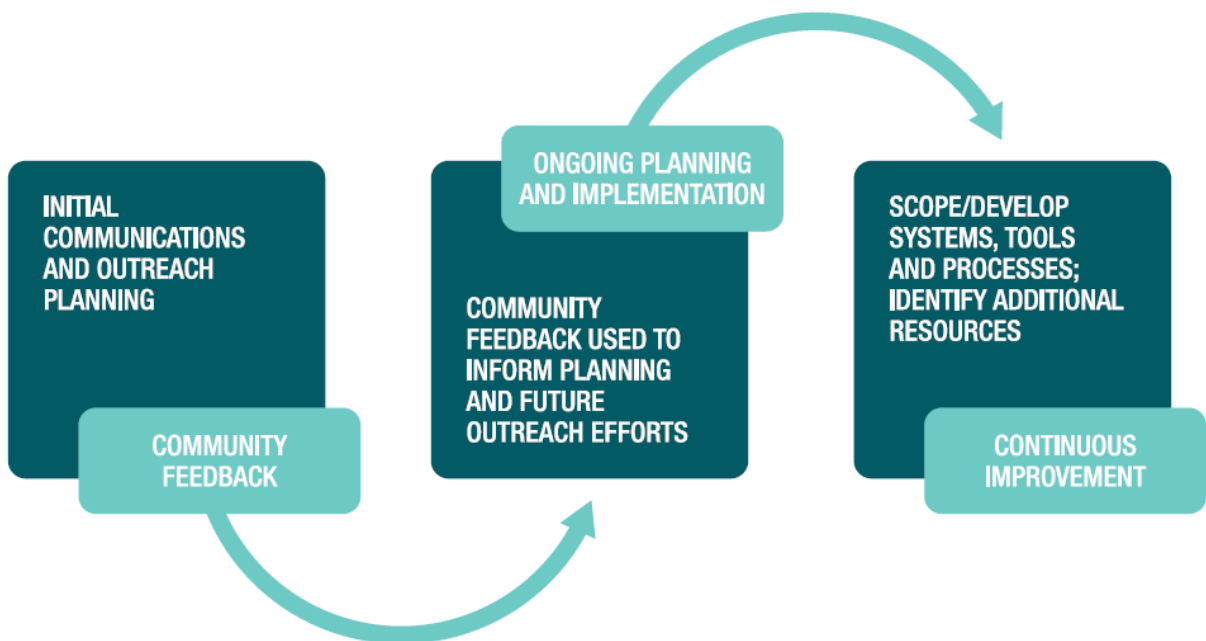
- Supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA)
 - Distribution automation
 - Transmission automation
 - Arc suppression fuses
 - Fire resistant service transformers
- Ahead of wildfire season, we proactively inspect electric equipment and complete enhanced vegetation management in higher wildfire risk areas along with our normal operations.
 - Tracking wildfire risk and fire events to help with situational awareness and continuous improvement.
 - Working with property owners to remove dead/dying trees that may fall onto power lines.

Q: Do you have a detailed cost analysis of how much it would cost to bury the lines in Greenwater and surrounding areas?

A: It is very expensive, and PSE looks at it as an option when scoping projects. Several million dollars were spent to underground 3.1 miles in Greenwater. This is something PSE will be evaluating the costs and benefits of.

Next steps

The feedback and input shared at this community meeting, and others held in other areas in 2022, will help shape the way PSE plans for and uses Public Safety Power Shutoffs in the future. PSE will proactively share updates with the community as we continue the planning process.



Additional information

To learn more about how PSE is preparing for wildfire mitigation, stay updated on our Public Safety Power Shutoff plan, and provide comments and questions to PSE staff, visit [PSE's Wildfire Preparedness webpage](#), email wildfire.response@pse.com, or call 1-888-404-8773.