

MONTANA CURRENTS



Winter 2009



Colstrip plant marks record-setting year

When all the numbers were tallied, 2008 turned out to be a truly record year for the Colstrip power plant in eastern Montana.

“As one of the largest power plants in the West, Colstrip produces safe, dependable and increasingly needed power for business, industry and residents,” said Neil Dennehy, plant manager. “When the plant is performing at its best, it means people are getting the power they need when they need it at the best possible price.”

The coal-fired plant, operated by PPL Montana, posted 38 separate all-time operational records, including 17,044,090 megawatt-hours of energy generated in 2008, breaking the previous record of 16,535,739 megawatt-hours.

One megawatt powers about 1,000 average homes in Montana.

“All of the Colstrip employees are to be commended for the tremendous job they do to work safely and keep the plant well-maintained and operating reliably

and safely day after day,” Dennehy said. “We set a high standard for safety and operational excellence, and we continue to achieve it.”

About 120 miles east of Billings, the Colstrip plant operates four coal-fired generating units capable of producing a total of 2,094 megawatts of electricity. PPL’s share in the plant’s generating capacity is 529 megawatts.

The plant also set all-time records for available net megawatt-hours and fewest number of outages, among other categories.

In October 2007, the plant became one of only three industrial sites in Montana to hold Star certification in the U.S. Occupational Safety and Health Administration’s Voluntary Protection Program. PPL Montana operates five power plants with VPP Star designations.

The plant is owned by PPL Montana as well as Puget Sound Energy Inc., Portland General Electric Company, Avista Corporation, PacifiCorp and NorthWestern Energy. About 360 people work at the plant.

Get to know the PPL Montana Community Fund Advisory Board members

Montana Currents is introducing members of the PPL Montana Community Fund Advisory Board, a group dedicated to making a difference in the lives of Montana families and their communities.

Twice a year, PPL Montana's Community Fund awards grants to non-profit groups to address quality-of-life issues related to education, the environment and economic development.

As a major corporation with 500 employees in Montana, PPL Montana is committed to working with Montana communities and this board to improve the quality of life for today and tomorrow.

Meet Marilyn Watson

Marilyn Watson is a purchasing agent and a real estate broker for PPL Montana. She's lived in Colstrip for most of her life and held several different positions at the Colstrip power plant during her

30-year career. She joined the PPL Montana Community Fund Advisory Board in January.

How do you see the role of the advisory board?

The advisory board sets personal views aside to achieve a fair, neutral, independent result. I look forward to lending my expertise to this valued program, not just as an employee of PPL, but as a reassurance for the state of Montana that support will be given in a prudent, fair manner.

What do you hope to accomplish during your term on the board?

It's my hope that the experience I gain by participating on the board will bring an opportunity for me to share with other organizations. I understand the importance of non-profits and organizations that work to create a more comfortable life in our communities. My approach will be to



see what others are doing so I can share that information.

What are your other interests when you're not working with Community Fund grants?

My favorite pastime is spending time with my sons. My oldest son lives in Colstrip, and my youngest son returned from a U.S. Army tour of duty in Iraq in May 2008 and is now enrolled in college. I love to brag about them. I also love to garden, spend time with my friends and read.

Hauser Dam project honored for excellence by Contractors' Association

A recent maintenance project at PPL Montana's Hauser Dam north of Helena has won an "Excellence Award" from the Montana Contractors' Association.

"We're honored to have received this award, which is a reflection of the hard work, skills and dedication of Montana's building and construction trades people," said David Hoffman, director of external affairs for PPL Montana.

"The work at Hauser was part of PPL Montana's comprehensive program to make sure all of its dams — valuable resources for clean power generation — stay in good working order and remain safe," Hoffman said.

Winning in the "Water/Sewer/Utilities" category, the project involved making repairs to a concrete pier and extending areas adjacent to the south side of the dam.

Helena Sand and Gravel, the concrete and precast supplier for the project, used 160 cubic yards of mass concrete and 15 cubic yards of structural concrete.

Another 1,700 cubic yards of tremie concrete, a name given to the method of placing concrete under water, were also part of the work. Seven trial batches were mixed in a laboratory, and four of them were used for field trials to determine a mix that met all of the concrete properties needed for use



under water at Hauser.

"The project was chosen based on criteria including best use of concrete, quality and durability, project design, complexity and difficulty, and concrete techniques," said Keith Ouzts, training and education director for the Montana Contractors' Association.

The judges included civil engineering professors at Carroll College in Helena and Montana State University-Bozeman as well as a representative from the National Ready Mix Concrete Association.

Froze to Death Plateau favorite hiking destination for PPL Montana employee

The Great Falls Tribune is featuring in its "Life Outdoors" column PPL Montana employees who describe their favorite places for outdoor recreation on the rivers, lakes and lands around the company's hydroelectric plants and other facilities across Montana. The following column is republished here with the newspaper's permission. Rodney Caldwell is an electrician and mechanic at PPL Montana's Rainbow Dam on the Missouri River near Great Falls. He grew up in Fairfield, about 30 miles west of Great Falls, and graduated from Fairfield High School. A hiker all his life, Caldwell has been a longtime advocate of the 30-mile River's Edge Trail that wanders through the Great Falls area.

I've known the vast wilderness around PPL Montana's Mystic Dam for as long as I can remember.

I worked there years ago and have known many of the guys who made their careers at this remote hydroelectric plant and heard so many inspiring stories about their adventures in the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness. Everyone who's ever been here just loves this region, about 75 miles southwest of Billings and framed by the rugged snow-capped peaks of the Beartooth Mountains and Custer National Forest.

At the Mystic Dam camp, the living quarters for PPL Montana employees working at the Mystic Dam powerhouse, you're at 6,800 feet above sea level and surrounded by slopes and ridges dark green with coniferous forests.

The lure of this high country, dominated by Montana's highest point — the 12,799-foot Granite Peak



Rodney Caldwell, electrician and mechanic at PPL Montana's Rainbow Dam, and Bounder (left) and Bryce.

— is addicting.

My favorite destination is up to the Froze to Death Plateau, at more than 10,000 feet. I've been told this seven-mile-long rock plateau got its name because if you get caught in a storm there's simply no where to go to find shelter. I've done this hike many times with my three sons, Jonathan, Wes and Tom, and always marveled at the views of bright blue lakes below and jagged mountains that rise up all around you.

I've explored this area with my hiking buddy, Matt Marcinek. He works for Fish, Wildlife and Parks as manager of Giant Springs State Park in Great Falls and is always eager for another adventure in the Beartooth Mountains. We hike at Mystic with my dog, a toller named Bounder, and Matt's black Lab, Bryce. Bounder and Bryce are great trail companions and always seem to sense when we're getting ready for another hike.

One of the most common approaches up to the plateau is from the West Rosebud trailhead, which you pick up at the end of West Rosebud Road on the grounds at PPL Montana's Mystic powerhouse. The trail leads uphill to Mystic Lake and the dam.

It's one switchback after another for about three miles. You just keep walking and chugging away. There's a reason why it's called "Switchbacks from Hell," but it's a well-maintained trail by the U.S. Forest Service.

When the trail breaks out of the timber line at the top, the views are just spectacular. The air is pure, and you feel like you can reach out and touch the rocky plateau. It's a panorama of some 29 peaks above 12,000 feet. Wildlife sightings can range from wild turkey on the lower part of the trail to elk, deer, big horn sheep and black bear around Mystic Lake.

This is where we stop, though.

It's about another seven miles across the plateau to the base of Granite Peak. We've had the pleasure of seeing off real mountaineers who continue the trek to the mountain. The clouds can turn black fast, and fierce summer storms can roll through the mountains at a moment's notice. Some of the through hikers have told me how treacherous it can be in a storm when clouds cover the windswept plateau and you lose your bearings. This is not for day hikers. If you get lost, you're in trouble.

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I always tell people interested in hiking here to be prepared. Bring plenty of water and wear sturdy boots and clothing made of fabric that wicks away moisture, like wool or polypropylene.

Once you've come back down, I always take time to look at the historic Mystic powerhouse, a reminder of Montana's longstanding commitment to renewable energy resources. When I have time, it's nice to visit the lower valley, which is also a popular spot for hiking, camping and fishing from late spring to early fall.

I feel lucky whenever I come to this place.

Access: From Fishtail, take the 17-mile Mystic Lake Road. At the end of this bumpy, dusty road, you'll find parking and the West Rosebud trailhead, which leads to PPL Montana's Mystic Lake and hydroelectric dam. From the east shore of the lake, you will pick up another trail that leads to the Froze to Death Plateau and its spectacular views. The lake and nearby areas are popular recreation destinations and provide hiking, fishing and backcountry camping opportunities. Because of its high elevation above 7,000 feet, most recreation use at Mystic Lake occurs in July and August when the trails are free of snow. Several trails from the lake lead into the Absaroka-Beartooth Wilderness, which surrounds much of the hydroelectric project. PPL Montana works with the U.S. Forest Service and other agencies to maintain and develop recreational facilities.

Montana Currents is your source of information about PPL Montana's commitment to the environment and our communities. It's just one more way we're putting our energy into Montana communities.

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