

PG&E halts cloud seeding program for this winter

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By Charlie Unkefer

McCloud, Calif. - PG&E announced last week that it plans to cancel its Pit-McCloud Cloud Seeding Program for the rest of the 2009 season. PG&E representative Paul Moreno said, "Due to the lateness of the season and the fact that the generators are not yet in operation, we thought it best to stop for now."

Moreno noted that winter cloud seeding season is half over and current drought conditions have resulted in few "seedable" storms. He said PG&E does not feel that it has been missing out on any great opportunities.

Mount Shasta resident Angelina Cook, who has been actively involved in the opposition movement to the project, said, "While nature is the primary entity to thank for this development, our incredible grassroots response certainly helped."

PG&E does plan to continue the project in the fall of '09, Moreno said. When asked if the mounting citizen opposition had anything to do with their recent decision, he said no. "It is simply not feasible for us to continue right now," he said. "We were late in getting some of the seeders in place and then got hit with a few of those earlier storms which has made access a little more challenging." Asked how PG&E plans to address the concerns of the many southern Siskiyou County residents who have spoken out against the program, starting back in October when the Notice of Intent to begin the project first appeared in the Mt. Shasta Area Newspapers, Moreno responded, "We are aware (of the issue) and we are continuing to work with the county."

Asked if PG&E would be formally addressing the concerns addressed by area residents, Moreno stated, "We have been very open throughout this process and made project manager Byron Marler's phone open to the public... We've spoken with many people and have done our best to help them understand the benefits of our program."

When the issue was brought to the County Board of Supervisors last November, several community members made public comment, urging the board to look into the legality of the proposed project. Many called for the County to initiate a CEQA environmental review process, citing a variety of concerns from air and water contamination, to the potential negative side effects of weather modification.

"Although PG&E is planning to reignite their project in Fall 2009, this minor victory gives us time to get really clear on what we envision for this area and formulate a strategy to preserve and enhance our natural heritage," said Cook. In their original Notice of Intent for the Pit-McCloud project, PGE announced that it would be conducting its weather modification program for a five-year period, ending in May of 2013.

Moreno was unclear as to whether or not this year's cancellation would have any effect on the overall termination date for the project.

Meeting scheduled

A meeting to discuss the ongoing issue is scheduled for Feb. 11 at 7:30 p.m. at the Flying Lotus in Mount Shasta. The meeting agenda is as follows:

- 7:30 - 8:00 – Information on PG&E's updated plans and a brief presentation on the effects and implications of weather modification.
- 8:00 - 9:00 – Review and clarification of discussion about various local policy options and requirements, based on the "Community Rights" information presented by Shannon Biggs of Global Exchange and Ben Price, an attorney from the Community Environmental Legal Defense Fund.
- 9:00 - 9:30 – Decide whether or not to facilitate a Mount Shasta Democracy School and form sub-committees as appropriate.