

Liberty Utilities to ax coal from power supply

By Kathryn Reed

Liberty Utilities is removing coal from its power portfolio.

On April 24 it filed a request with the California Public Utilities Commission to change its allocation from NV Energy. This came one week after it filed paperwork to add solar.

“... as of Jan. 1, 2016, the resource portfolio available to serve Liberty Utilities’ California customers will be exclusively from hydroelectric, natural gas, or geothermal facilities and, importantly, no longer include any coal-fired generation,” the document says.

Today, Liberty buys all of its power from NV Energy.

In 2011, Liberty bought NV Energy’s service area that includes about 49,000 customers on the California side of the Lake Tahoe Basin, in Truckee, Alpine County and other areas of Northern California. The service agreement expires at the end of the year.

Liberty and NV on April 21 reached an agreement on another contract that calls for the elimination of the coal plant. This will mean Liberty will be paying NV Energy about \$2.34 million less per year. That contract is good through 2022. It is up to the California Public Utilities Commission to approve the service agreement.

“Given NV Energy’s pursuit of non-coal fired energy sources as well as Liberty’s, we believe we will be able to meet our customers’ future demands in an economic fashion without the dependence on coal-fired energy,” Rich Salgo, vice president of operations for Liberty, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

Liberty is also asking for the CPUC to approve the solar projects. It plans to buy and operate two solar plants that combined are 65 megawatt facilities. These facilities will more than replace the coal.

If the solar plants have a glitch, NV will supply the requisite amount of power to Liberty. The contract says Liberty could purchase up to 30.5 percent of its renewable energy from NV if the solar plants are not available.

With all the changes, Liberty expects to save \$200,000 per year.

California law mandates that sellers of electricity must have 33 percent of their load be serviced with renewable energy by 2020. This will help Liberty reach that mandate. As of September 2014, the latest data available, the mix NV supplied Liberty was 52.44 percent natural gas, 21.7 percent renewable, 20 percent coal, 4.45 percent hydro, 1.4 percent nuclear and 0.01 percent oil.

“We will continue to pursue energy sources that will enable us to meet California’s increasing renewable energy requirements through 2020,” Salgo said.

NV in 2013 said it would begin eliminating coal immediately. However, the Valmy plant in Humboldt County, Nev., is expected to be online through 2025. That plant as of next year will not be supplying Liberty customers, assuming the CPUC approves the proposals.

Earlier this month the Tahoe Area Sierra Club had a talk focused on Liberty’s use of coal and the desire to have the power company change its practices.

“We are impressed with the groundswell of local support we have seen for this initiative to go coal free. Liberty was cooperative throughout our discussions and we congratulate them for coming to a good decision – good for Tahoe, Liberty

and the warming planet,” Grace Anderson, lead volunteer for the Sierra Club Beyond Coal Campaign Tahoe Basin, told *Lake Tahoe News*.

The national conservation organization had been putting pressure on the utility to discontinue using Valmy. Sharing the Sierra Club’s point-of-view were the local chapter as well as the Mother Lode and Toiyabe chapters, South Tahoe Citizens Climate Lobby, and Sierra Nevada Alliance.