The Nez Perce Tribe Energy Group would like to take this opportunity to introduce themselves and the work they have been doing on behalf of the Nez Perce Tribe.

The Energy Group was formed, at the request of the NPTEC, by former Water Resources Manager, Gwen Carter, in 2009 and formally sanctioned by the Nez Perce Tribal Executive Committee later that year. The original Group was made up of Gwen Carter, Jon Paisano, John Wheaton, Ann McCormack, Anthony Broncheau and Terry Kinder.

Energy Group Vision Statement: The Nez Perce Tribe is committed to developing and implementing an energy plan that will serve as the guide for the next ten years in making decisions that will make it possible to meet the energy needs of the Tribe in a sustainable manner that enhances the quality of life on the reservation.

Energy Group Mission Statement: To meet the short and long term goals, the Nez Perce Tribe will use its current guiding documents to enhance the sovereignty and protect the environment while planning, developing and implementing energy efficiency, energy conservation and energy policy.

The Energy Group has focused on several projects that will be outlined in this edition and updated in future editions of the Tribal Energy newsletter. One of the first endeavors of “The Group” was to find a leader. This became a priority after Gwen Carter left. A two year funding opportunity through the Department of Energy’s Energy Efficiency Conservation Block Grant (EECBG) provided the funds for an Energy Tech position and, after interviews, Jon Paisano was selected to be the Tribe’s energy “guru”. Jon’s longtime interest in energy conservation made for a good background to lead Tribal energy efforts.

The first thing Jon did was arrange a two day information and training workshop for employees of the Tribe, interested members of the community, power company personnel and many others. The workshop was led by Roger Taylor, of the National Renewable Energy Laboratory or NREL (who are contracted through the Department of Energy’s Tribal Energy Program) and proved to be very interesting. Mr. Taylor exhibited maps of the Nez Perce Reservation, that have been prepared by NREL, to analyze the feasibility of various forms of alternative energy including wind, solar, geothermal and in-stream hydro. The explanation of the realities of the inner-workings of the national electrical grid was also enlightening.

Soon after, the Group’s focus turned to establishing a Tribal energy plan. Funding for the project was provided by a grant from the EECBG. The Group met over the next five months to build the outline of a Strategic Energy Plan. The next step is to hand over the outline to a consultant who will complete the plan and provide an action plan. The consultant should be under contract before the end of the 2011. This will be discussed in later newsletters as we progress with the project.

While the Group was working on the Strategic Energy Plan, there was continued exploration of funding opportunities for additional energy-related projects. In 2009, Terry responded to a Department of Energy grant announcement for energy conservation projects for four of the Tribe’s main office buildings. That application was turned down because the amount requested did not meet the minimum (floor) amount. It was a hard-learned lesson but a mistake not likely to happen again. Future grants will always request at least the minimum amount offered.

At the same time, the Group, as a whole, was also pursuing funding for the exploration of alternative energy projects. A grant from the Bureau of Indian Affairs Division of Energy and Mineral Development allowed for multiple project funding and the Group centered on three feasibility study efforts: a community scale solid waste-to-energy facility, geothermal ground source heat pumps heating/cooling, and a community garbage incinerator. The grant was awarded to study the possibility of constructing a community (or reservation) size solid waste-to-energy facility. Jon Paisano is leading this effort and has a consulting firm under contract. We will report on this project as it progresses.
Another integral member of the Group is Anthony Broncheau who is the Tribe’s grants coordinator. Having Anthony on our side is like having an ace in the hole. He hunts through his many resources for funding opportunities that might fit our energy conservation, energy efficiency or energy policy needs. Once written, Anthony helps construct budgets and then submits the request on-line. It can be a tense time when Federal deadlines are often several hours earlier in the day and we’re not quite ready. Anthony is our final line of defense.

In 2010, Terry tried again for the funding of energy conservation measures for the PiNeeWaus offices (TERO and Land Services), NPTEC/OLC offices, Veteran’s Building and the Water Resource Building. The Department of Energy funded the project that will install new energy efficient windows, lighting and add insulation. The grant required a 30% savings in energy consumption and Avista Utilities worked with Terry to provide the statistics that show a potential savings of 34% in the cost of Electrical service. The work will be bid competitively and should start in January of 2012. Lighting replacement work will take place first so the new insulation blanket will not be disturbed by any wiring work in the attic areas.

In all of these efforts, Ann has been our guide and promoter. She helped in writing many of the grants and kept us all on-task. More importantly, the visionary in Ann took the basic infrastructure of the Strategic Energy Plan and broadened and extended it so that the final product will be a flexible, living document that can be amended to fit the needs of the Tribe into the future. Ann’s experience in the business world educated the other members of the Group to the fact that a strategic plan will do no one any good if it sits on the shelf. What we must also have is an Action Plan that will outline how we go about bringing energy conservation and energy efficiency to our neighborhoods.

John Wheaton has been busy working on a Tribal recycling program. In 2009 he applied to the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) for funding. The EPA consulted with Indian Health Services (IHS) and the Rural Development office of the United State Department of Agriculture (USDA). All agencies found merit in the project and this year awarded John start-up funding for the program. With this funding, John will be able to develop the existing (old box plant) building, and purchase a baler, truck, trailers and forklift. John has jump started the recycling program by establishing recycling stations in all Tribal buildings. Among other items, waste paper, cardboard, aluminum cans and plastic bottles are collected.

A good part of John’s time during the last half of 2011 was occupied with work on the Tribe’s water and wastewater utility. The Tribe and the City of Lapwai implemented a new wastewater treatment plant at the end of August 2011. It now services much of the Lapwai Valley region. It is a totally green system that treats wastewater with a membrane bioreactor technology to produce a drinkable level effluent. One of the next projects on the desks for the Tribe is a greenhouse where the treated water can be put to good use. Stay tuned for updates on John’s projects.

In mid-September, Jon Pisano and Ann McCormack traveled to Enterprise, Oregon to meet with Nils D. Christoffersen, executive director of Wallowa Resources. They toured the future site for the new heat and power plant that is co-located with the other biomass businesses in the town of Wallowa, Oregon. Two companies in Wallowa, Integrated Biomass Resources and Community Smallwood Solutions, are the primary industrial users of small pulp size logs and biomass today. They produce agriculture products, firewood, and densified fuel, in addition to chipped biomass, which is used to heat the Enterprise School.

Woody biomass supply studies conducted by Wallowa Resources and others suggest that woody biomass utilization could easily expand five to ten times from current levels. The primary biomass energy use within the county today is domestic heating in wood stoves and fireplaces. US Census data suggests that 32% of homes in Wallowa County use biomass as their primary heating fuel. With nearly a million acres of forest 25% of which is in private ownership, Wallowa County has tremendous biomass energy potential.

As Wallowa County’s energy companies grow and continue to mature, it’s possible that renewable energy jobs could increase on a steady scale. Christoffersen stated that the current energy companies in Wallowa County are touting sixteen employees but this spring, with the opening of the new plant, that will jump to as many as 35 new family living-wage jobs.

During the summer months Will Antell joined our team courtesy of an Avista internship. Will worked compiling and analyzing data on the Tribe’s electrical energy consumption. This audit information will be very useful to anyone working to lower Tribal operational costs.