Utility Dive

Washington commits $12.6M to grid modernization effort

By Robert Walton | August 22, 2016

Dive Brief:

Washington Gov. Jay Inslee (D) has committed $12.6 million in Clean Energy Fund grants to five Washington state utilities for projects focused on renewable integration and grid modernization.

The grants will fund projects proposed by Avista, Seattle City Light, Orcas Power and Light, Snohomish County Public Utility District and Energy Northwest. The state's funding will be matched by utilities and their partners.

The projects include solar installations, battery storage and microgrids. Avista's proposal would develop a "shared energy economy" allowing a wide range of grid resources to be used for multiple purposes.

Dive Insight:

Washington state's grid modernization efforts drew praise from U.S. Energy Secretary Ernest Moniz, who was on hand in Seattle for the announcement (http://www.governor.wa.gov/news-media/inslee-announces-clean-energy-fund-grid-modernization-grants) .

"Gov. Inslee and the state of Washington continue to champion clean energy innovation. Driving innovation is at the core of how our country maintains its leadership in developing clean, low-carbon energy technologies," Moniz said.

Inslee and Moniz made the announcement last week at the Northwest Regional Clean Energy Innovation Partnership Workshop. The event is jointly hosted by the University of Washington and the Pacific Northwest National Lab.

"With these awards, our leading utilities will demonstrate how to integrate battery storage with solar energy and stand-alone energy systems, train the workforce to build and maintain these systems, and lead the industry into the clean energy future," Inslee said.

While four of the utilities proposed more standard grid modernization projects, Avista is planning to pilot a "shared energy economy." According to the announcement, the project "allows various energy assets — from solar panels and battery storage to traditional utility assets — to be shared for multiple purposes, including system efficiency and grid resiliency. It will demonstrate how the consumer and utility can each benefit."

"We know the future will look different as new technologies continue to change the energy landscape," said Heather Rosentrater, Avista's vice president of Energy Delivery. "Today, customers are buying, installing and using distributed energy resources, and actually participating in the grid. We are committed to ensuring our system will be flexible enough to meet the changing expectations and future needs of consumers."

Seattle City Light has proposed a solar-powered microgrid at a designated emergency shelter, which will keep fire stations, community centers and communication networks operating during an outage.

Orcas Power & Light, (https://www.opalco.com/about-us/) a cooperative utility serving 20 islands in the San Juan archipelago, is planning to deploy a community solar system to extend the life of the its underwater supply cable. The coop buys most of its power from Bonneville Power Administration's hydro assets, and delivers it to the islands through submerged cables. It serves about 15,000 meters.

Snohomish Public Utility District has proposed a pilot to show how to leverage batteries in electric vehicles to store and use renewable energy. The provider will combine battery storage, microgrid and solar technologies, "connecting this integrated technology to the electric vehicle fleet."

And Energy Northwest will bring together its 28 utilities with labor leaders at a local union, Quanta Services/Potelco and the UW Clean Energy Institute, to create a "battery and solar competency training facility."

Recommended Reading

SeeNews: Washington utilities get USD 12.6m of grid modernisation grants (http://renewables.seenews.com/news/washington-utilities-get-usd-12-6m-of-grid-modernisation-grants-537023)

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