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LRAPA Issues Construction Permit for Seneca Co-Generation Plant

After an 8-month public process, the Lane Regional Air Protection Agency has issued a standard air contaminant discharge permit that gives Seneca Sustainable Energy, LLC the go-ahead to construct an 18.8 megawatt wood-fired power plant. The plant will be located adjacent to the Seneca Sawmill on Highway 99 near Enid Road.

To ensure that the project's emissions will comply with all applicable LRAPA and federal air quality laws and regulations, the facility is subject to a number of permit conditions. These conditions are intended to ensure compliance with LRAPA, state, and federal programs. "LRAPA applies its rules and regulations to all permit applications fairly and consistently," said Merlyn Hough, LRAPA director. "This facility will be the most stringently-controlled and rigorously-monitored of its type in the Pacific Northwest, and possibly the entire country." The permit conditions require monitoring of emissions on a regular basis to demonstrate ongoing compliance. If the facility exceeds any emissions limit, the facility will be subject to enforcement action.

The project has generated intense public interest. In response, LRAPA held an informational meeting in April, as a prelude to the July formal public hearing, to give the public the opportunity to ask questions and give comments. The formal public comment period was also extended in August to give more residents an opportunity to give input. LRAPA received over 300 comments on the proposed permit. "Public participation and comment is an important part of the permitting process and some comments resulted in changes to the permit," said Hough, "We also participated in a number of stakeholder meetings so we could hear all points of view." The LRAPA public involvement process was in addition to the EWEB public meetings during February-May 2009 where many similar issues were discussed.

Concerns regarding environmental justice were raised during the permitting process. "These are very important issues much larger than any individual project. They will require environmental equity considerations beyond just the west and north Eugene areas of Eugene-Springfield," said Hough. LRAPA supports a community dialogue on environmental equity to ensure that low-income and minority populations in the metro area are not disproportionately impacted by air pollution from industrial point sources, commercial and residential area sources, and mobile sources. Support for these discussions align with LRAPA's goals of encouraging public involvement and ensuring healthful air quality for all residents of Lane County.

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