

by: at Least Six Possums in a Trench Coat

Editors Note: Forest Park is a public municipal park in the Tualatin Mountains west of downtown Portland, Oregon

As we walk up the BPA Trail into Forest Park, we realize that we have never actually heard what a northern red-logged frog sounds like. We walk past wetlands where we know the frogs live – wetlands that Portland General Electric (PGE) would have permanently altered to build a new 1400-ft power line as part of the “Harborton Reliability Project” – and kneel beside a stream. We’re quiet for a moment, listening to the rain falling on the leaves of the big-leaf maples, dripping down white trillium petals and the bell-like flowers of salal, which have just started to bloom. We learn later that the frogs usually make their soft, chuckling calls during their breeding season, between January and March. It’s May already, so we missed our window. But we can come back next year, and try again, to hear them.

This section of Forest Park, these 400 trees, some of whom are between 170 and 500 years old, are safe from PGE’s clearcut. For now. On May 7, Portland City Council voted in a 12-0 unanimous decision against PGE’s Harborton Reliability Project, (a proposal for power line infrastructure in the northernmost stretch of Forest Park) reversing a previous project approval granted by a City Hearings Officer. Over 1,100 people submitted written testimony, and hundreds more testified in person demanding that City Council oppose the project.

This marked an important win, but this is not the end of Harborton. Next, PGE could try to appeal City Council’s decision to the Land Use Board of Appeals, or it could lobby to change the Forest Park Natural Resources Management Plan to pave the way for City approval, or it could try to lobby for a bill amendment in the Oregon Legislative Session, or it could submit a new application to the City, possibly proposing a

different route outside of Forest Park, etc etc. Basically, the system will keep system-ing, and it's hard to say how much success PGE will have with any of these pathways.

But no matter what PGE throws at us next, and whether or not it tries to build Harborton Reliability outside Forest Park, our goal remains the same: to stop these power lines no matter what. Because stopping these power lines means delivering a blow to multiple industries within the larger beast of techno-industrial capitalism – from 'renewable' energy schemes to semiconductor companies like Intel – that are profiting from ongoing genocide, colonization, and ecological destruction.

PORTLAND GENERAL ELECTRIC'S LIES

Before diving deeper into what the project is actually about (hint: it's main purpose is to serve tech giant Intel and the broader Silicon Forest), let's take a step back and look at what PGE is claiming about the project. This is an exercise to better understand PGE's messaging and political strategies so we can better combat them, and so that we can better understand the evolving capitalist playbook.

PGE claims that Harborton Reliability is meant to improve the reliability of the energy grid. PGE claims the project will protect us from power outages by supplying energy to meet demand and resolving a bottleneck in the grid, help prepare us for climate catastrophe, and improve local access to energy. PGE presents itself as a benevolent utility, a paternal figure offering a necessary service that we wouldn't have access to otherwise. PGE is just another entity with control over a resource that is creating barriers to accessing that resource while trying to claim they're a provider we couldn't live without.

Utilities like PGE are essentially regulated monopolies. While they technically have to abide by regulations, utilities can get away with a lot when it comes to setting price points and

manufacturing reliance on their products. They set the rules, and they reap the benefits. In recent years, PGE has been subjecting residential customers to dramatic rate hikes, with average residential electric bills rising by over 40% since 2021. Meanwhile, PGE is turning over record profits, with PGE CEO Maria Pope taking home an annual salary of \$7.5 million in 2024 (as opposed to her \$7 million salary in 2023).

PGE's marketing team claimed that if the company wasn't allowed to build power line infrastructure through Forest Park (the cheapest route, it claimed), then it would be forced to raise residential customer rates even further. This is a classic fear tactic, an either-or fallacy based on a lie meant to obscure the real reason why PGE wants to build these power lines: to serve Intel and the Silicon Forest (and, you know, to make money). Last year, PGE predicted that Hillsboro data centers like Intel would use 2.2 million megawatt-hours of electricity throughout 2025, which is nearly the equivalent of every single home's projected energy use in Washington County, combined. While PGE is scrambling to expand its grid to cover and profit from the rapid growth of the tech industry, residential customers are bearing the cost.

In growing metros like Portland, utilities can obscure their true motivations by claiming that they are building out infrastructure to meet 'growing demand' (and meanwhile, they are dutifully playing their part in the larger capitalist apparatus that is driving those increases in demand). But their true motivation is for profit. Utilities profit when they invest in, transport, and sell energy. And PGE is currently investing huge amounts of money in 'renewable' false solutions energy projects while expanding their electrical grid to transport and sell it.

Another of PGE's arguments for building these power lines is to bring 'clean, renewable' energy to the Portland metro. And that narrative is sort of true, actually. These power lines would become a critical connection point routing electricity

from 'renewable' sources, as well as from coal and natural gas, through the Harborton Substation (near the confluence of the Columbia and Willamette rivers) to Hillsboro and the surrounding area. **PGE's lie is that any of this energy, or where it's going, is 'clean.'**

WHERE IS THE ENERGY COMING FROM?

Solar panels, wind turbines, and the batteries used to store their energy are all made using rare earth materials like lithium, cobalt, and nickel. Companies mining lithium from Mapuche, Aymara, and Quechua lands in South America as well as in Paiute, Shoshone and Bannock lands in so-called Nevada and the "lithium valley" are continuing colonist legacies by violating Indigenous communities' rights, breaking treaties, and destroying the land. Multinational corporations mining 70% of the world's cobalt in the Democratic Republic of the Congo are exploiting hundreds of thousands of people through slave labor, and nickel mining goes hand in hand with human rights abuses and environmental devastation in the Philippines and Indonesia. Solar panels and wind turbines also require microchips to function, which are made using pit-mined silicon and refining processes that use extreme amounts of water and energy.

In Oregon, 35% of Oregon's electricity comes from hydropower, largely from dams in the Columbia River Basin. While sold as 'renewable' energy, hydropower is just another false climate solution. Oregon's hydropower industry has a one hundred+ year legacy of decimating over a dozen native fish populations, driving some to extinction. The Oregon government intentionally used dam creation on the Columbia as a colonist tool to harm Indigenous communities by attacking salmon populations, and that legacy continues.

These 'clean' energy false climate solutions are being created to serve ever-increasing profits under capitalism through the same genocidal, colonial methods used to mine fossil fuels,

just under a different name. Portland – and Portland General Electric – is playing a major role in moving all this ‘clean’ energy from other regions in the Pacific Northwest to tech hubs like the Silicon Forest, which are currently consuming energy faster than it can be generated. PGE is gladly leaning into the ‘renewable’ industrial revolution because of a key principle of utility business models mentioned earlier: utilities make money by investing in infrastructure.

In addition to purchasing from third-party energy providers and wholesale markets, PGE owns or co-owns massive wind, solar, and hydro projects, many of which it has acquired within just the last few years. PGE has also been investing in battery facilities to store this ‘clean’ energy, and in 2023 it procured one of the largest lithium battery storage projects (based in North Portland and Troutdale) owned by a utility in the US. PGE also recently acquired the Evergreen battery energy storage system (in Hillsboro) and Clearwater, the largest wind project in Montana. “From Clearwater to Evergreen,” said PGE CEO Maria Pope, “Portland General Electric is building Oregon’s clean energy future.”

Within a capitalist system reliant on genocide, colonization, and extraction on stolen land, there is no such thing as ‘clean’ energy. Unfortunately, most ‘progressives’ champion false climate solutions. This holds true for many of Portland’s new City Council members.

“In upholding this appeal, we might very well be making a disastrous decision for our quality of life, for our economy and for reaching our climate goals,” Portland City Councilor Steve Novick said at the May 7 hearing. “Unfortunately, I don’t think PGE has left us much choice. My vote is based almost entirely on PGE’s failure to demonstrate a need for this project.”

Novick ultimately joined other City Councilors in voting to oppose Harborton Reliability at the hearing. Councilors

largely basing their decision on PGE's failure to demonstrate residential demand for the project and because the proposed route through Forest Park is in conflict with the Forest Park Natural Resources Management Plan. But if PGE moves the route outside Forest Park and PGE continues to market Harborton as critical for climate 'solutions,' will City Council still oppose the project? This is just something to bear in mind about the state of progressive politics in Oregon as we see what happens next, and what other tricks PGE tries to pull.

WHERE IS THE ENERGY GOING?

PGE wants to build these power lines to provide energy for Intel's new microchip plant expansion in Hillsboro – MSB2 – and for a multitude of data centers expanding or setting up shop in the Silicon Forest. The Silicon Forest is a cluster of high-tech companies in Hillsboro, Beaverton, and the surrounding area that make up one of the biggest hubs for tech and microchip companies in the so-called US. In fact, semiconductors are Oregon's biggest export, and the industry is growing rapidly.

According to PGE's projections, these data center expansions will increase regional energy demand by 44% annually. While PGE isn't saying it to our faces, it's pretty clear that Harborton Reliability is primarily meant to provide energy for Intel and other data centers (also PGE announced the Harborton project the same month that Intel announced their microchip expansion plans, another clear connection between the projects).

Intel is a critical player in the US's scramble for world dominance in the semiconductors arms race. Semiconductor technology is a major limiting factor in the evolution of high-tech, offering building blocks for AI, smartphones, smart grids, data center servers, and military electronics for state-of-the-art killing and surveillance technology.

The semiconductor industry owes its initial growth to the arms race of the Cold War, with the Department of Defense (DoD) investing in leading-edge semiconductor development to get ahead of the Soviet Union in weapons technology. Since the end of the Cold War, the US has been falling behind in the global market for semiconductors, with Taiwan pulling ahead to produce nearly all of the most advanced processors and a third of the world's new computing power. Now, the DoD is invested in creating a domestic semiconductor supply chain for military technology and national defense, and it is relying heavily on Intel. Intel received \$8.5 billion in 2022 through the Biden administrations' CHIPS and Science Act, as well as an additional \$3 billion in 2024 as part of the Department of Defense's "Secure Enclave" program to make leading-edge semiconductors for weapons systems.

And Intel is happy to deliver. In 2020, Intel signed a deal with the US government allowing the DoD to more directly access Intel's semiconductor plants in Arizona and Oregon. In 2023, Intel delivered its first multi-chip package prototypes to the DoD and BAE Systems, a key supplier of F-35 fighter jets that Israel is using to commit genocide in Palestine. Since 2021, Intel has also been producing custom circuits for the DoD and 'defense customers' like Boeing and Northrop Grumman. Intel's new focus on supplying to some of the world's most blood-soaked genocidal weapons manufacturers comes as no surprise, as the company has deep ties to so-called Israel (occupied Palestine). Intel's Israel facility is one of its largest outside of the US, and the company is heavily invested in (and profiting from) Israel's US-backed ethnic cleansing project in Palestine.

To support all this new semiconductor innovation and production, Intel has earmarked \$100 billion for building and expanding chipmaking plants in Ohio, Arizona, New Mexico, and Oregon over the next five years, including the new MSB2 project in Hillsboro. MSB2 expands on the existing D1X factory

in Hillsboro, which is already Intel's largest site for technological development and manufacturing in the world.

Oregon ranks 3rd in the US for number of semiconductor company headquarters, and is looking to lure more semiconductor companies to its doorstep by offering them land, water, and energy. Governor Kotek has been at the helm of this effort. In 2022, Governor Kotek partnered with Senator Wyden and PGE CEO Maria Pope to lead the Oregon Semiconductor Competitiveness Task Force, whose explicit goal was to change land zoning codes to create two sites, each 500 acres or more, to attract more semiconductor companies to Oregon.

Which is all to say – Oregon is a critical cog in the techno-industrial machine, and is playing its part in manufacturing ongoing genocides, colonization projects, and extractive industries across the globe, all with the dedicated support of local politicians and utilities.

IN CONCLUSION

So what should we do? Of course, no one person or organization has the answers, and there is no singular next step or point of attack. Harborton Reliability is an intersection point between multiple genocidal states, industries, and corporate elites, and it is just one example of where we can jam the machine. Right now, we're happy that PGE is going to have a much harder time trying to clearcut Forest Park. Every tree and every creature is worth saving. But PGE's desire to clearcut trees in Forest Park is just one way the company is aiding and abetting destruction of human and non-human life. There are numerous entities upstream and downstream of the project to fight – from corporations and politicians peddling false climate 'solutions,' to Intel and all those supporting genocides in Palestine, the Congo, and elsewhere. It is critical that we act in genuine solidarity across all these interconnected struggles.

And it is helpful to know our shared enemies – their vulnerabilities, their power structures, their desires. Our enemies are the corporations, states, and elites that are profiting on genocide and the blood of children, from colonization and the decimation of the earth. Our enemies are tirelessly dedicated to the destruction of all that we hold dear in this world: all that is human, wild, and free. Our enemies love mono-culture, sameness, and white supremacy, and they are terrified of their own mortality. Our enemies have an insatiable hunger for resources and energy, and they are reliant on the veins through which the energy flows.

These veins – pipelines, highways, railroads, power lines like Harborton Reliability, connecting points across oceans and rivers and airways – are all points of vulnerability in the body of the machine. And as much as our enemies love to think they are immortal, it's important we remember that they are as interconnected and fallible as the rest of us. They can be revealed for who they really are. They can be cut off from each other, and from the resources they exploit. They can be destroyed.

Honorable mentions of destructive projects to keep an eye on that are connected to Harborton Reliability, PGE, and the Silicon Forest):

- T2 Mass Timber Innovation Hub – The Port of Portland is redeveloping the former Marine Terminal 2 in Northwest Portland along the Willamette into a “mass timber innovation hub.”
- The Cascade Renewable Transmission project – A plan to bury an electric line under 100 miles of the Columbia River, connecting the BPA Big Eddy Substation in The Dalles, OR, to the Harborton Substation in Portland.
- Collins Aerospace (Raytheon) is partnering with Common Energy, with support from Portland General Electric, to

create four new community solar projects across the Portland Metro.

- List of semiconductor companies in Oregon, many of which explicitly specialize in military and weapons technology.