



## •EDITORIALS

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## Cutting greenhouse gases is a no-brainer

### *Energy efficiency is the watchword*

The Pacific Northwest has become accustomed to being overshadowed by California - the 900-pound gorilla of the West Coast. But occasionally it is beneficial to remind writers in the rest of the country that we are here too.

In a column on this page, New York Times columnist Paul Krugman debunks the assumption that serious attempts to curb greenhouse gases will require drastic changes in the way we live. Krugman argues the assumption is false.

"Let me tell you about a real-world counterexample: an advanced economy that has managed to combine rising living standards with a substantial decline in per capita energy consumption, and managed to keep total carbon dioxide emissions more or less flat for two decades, even as both its economy and its population grew rapidly. And it achieved all this without fundamentally changing a lifestyle centered on automobiles and single-family houses.

"The name of the economy? California," Krugman writes.

The declining per capita use of electric energy and carbon emissions that Krugman accurately observes is not a California phenomenon. It is a West Coast phenomenon made possible by an adroit system of sharing the West Coast's electric power production.

The Northwest's peak power use is in winter to heat homes and businesses. California's peak power use is summer to air condition. But the peak electric generating capacity of Northwest hydroelectric dams comes in the spring and summer as the snow pack melts, just as our region's need for electricity declines.

About four decades ago, the Bonneville Power Administration began building the North-South Intertie - a high capacity powerline from the Columbia River at The Dalles south to a terminal near Los Angeles.

In the spring, summer and fall, Northwest hydroelectricity flows south to power California air conditioners. In the winter, electricity from otherwise idle gas and coal-fired generating plants in the Southwest flows north to heat Northwest homes and businesses.

This symbiotic arrangement produces more efficient use of power generated in both regions and reduces the number of fossil fuel-fired power plants than would otherwise be needed. That's a major reason West Coast carbon emissions have been flat for about two decades despite the soaring population growth.

This existing generating capacity has been stretched by aggressive conservation measures: beefed up building codes, more energy efficient appliances and industrial processes for new construction and widespread "weatherization" of existing homes, built when electricity was cheaper.

The steady growth of the West Coast economy, despite cyclical ups and downs, makes it hard to argue these successful conservation measures have reduced the standard of living or even altered the West Coast's post-World War II lifestyle very much.

Significant changes in the way we live and work, travel and plan and build the communities we live in are far more likely to be triggered by higher prices for petroleum as the era of cheap petroleum ends than by serious efforts to curb greenhouse gases.