



# INDIAN COUNTRY SNAPSHOT:

## Yakama Nation

In the early 2000s, Yakama Nation relied entirely on outside utility companies to provide power to the tribal government, tribal businesses, and reservation residents – a situation producing “no value” for the Yakama people.<sup>1</sup> In response, the Yakama Tribal Council created Yakama Power (YP) to “provide low-cost electric power”<sup>2</sup> to reservation power users. Serving 132 customers when it launched in 2006, today YP provides electricity to more than 3,000 customers (roughly a third of the reservation market), and in 2024 it became the first tribal entity to sell renewable energy directly to the federal government.<sup>3</sup> Driving YP’s remarkable growth over the past two decades is its formal commitment to employ as many Yakama tribal members as possible to advance the “construction, management and operation of providing electric power.”<sup>4</sup> To train them, YP established a nationally renowned apprenticeship program for journeymen and linemen primarily using revenues generated through its operations and supplemented by philanthropic funding.<sup>5</sup> To ensure the “highest quality of workers,” the program requires its apprentices to achieve an academic standing of 80% in all courses, which is higher than the industry standard of 70%.<sup>6</sup> Of the 21 apprenticeship program graduates to date, 19 subsequently gained employment with YP, earning high-paying, prevailing wages that “don’t exist elsewhere on the reservation” and are competitive with surrounding utilities, which helps to explain the utility’s incredibly low staff turnover rate.<sup>7</sup> Of YP’s 34 employees, 28 are Native (including 22 enrolled Yakama members), and the utility features two all-Native line crews with a third in the works.<sup>8</sup> Showing the community the return on the Nation’s investment, YP purposefully schedules its line crews to perform line and pole repairs along reservation roads during tribal members’ morning and evening work commutes so they can observe firsthand tribal self-sufficiency in action – Yakama providing for its own.<sup>9</sup> To advance Yakama Nation’s renewable energy priorities, YP is doubling the size of its apprenticeship program to train tribal members to become low-voltage electricians specializing in renewable energy and then hire them.<sup>10</sup>

**CONNECT:** Ray Wiseman, General Manager, Yakama Power, [ray@yakamapower.com](mailto:ray@yakamapower.com)

### **RELATED RESOURCES**

[Yakama Power website](#)

[Yakama Power Apprenticeship Announcement](#)

[2018 Tribal Energy Webinar Series: Evaluating Tribal Utility Authority Opportunities \(video\)](#)

[An Enterprise of the Yakama Nation: Yakama Power](#) (2018 PowerPoint presentation)

[NCAI “Building Tribal Economies” Toolkit](#) (Page 33)

[Yakama Tribal Solar Canal & Hydro Project](#)

[Northwest Public Broadcasting: Yakama Power looks to alternative energy storage projects](#)

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- <sup>1</sup> Yakama Power (YP), “Yakama Power: An Enterprise of the Yakama Nation,” PowerPoint presentation, June 27, 2018, slide 6 ([https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2018/06/f53/Wiseman\\_6\\_27\\_YP.pdf](https://www.energy.gov/sites/default/files/2018/06/f53/Wiseman_6_27_YP.pdf), accessed October 16, 2024).
- <sup>2</sup> Yakama Nation Tribal Council, “Charter of Yakama Power,” Resolution T-169-04, October 12, 2004, p. 1. Yakama Power has fulfilled this affordability charge, offering its customers a lower kilowatt hour charge (\$.0702) than the three other power providers on the reservations (who range from \$.0783 to \$.0997) as well as the lowest basic monthly charge for service connection (YP, *General Council and Consumer Report for FY 2023*, 2023, slide 14).
- <sup>3</sup> Ray Wiseman, General Manager, Yakama Power, Conversation with NCAI, February 24, 2025; YP, *General Council and Consumer Report for FY 2024*, 2024, p. 20. YP’s “lease contract for 20 years with the Indian Health Service is the first of its kind” (Ibid.).
- <sup>4</sup> This is one of the enumerated purposes delineated in the Yakama Power’s charter (Yakama Nation Tribal Council, “Charter of Yakama Power,” Resolution T-169-04, October 12, 2004, p. 2); Yakama Power, “About Us,” Yakama Power website (<https://www.yakamapower.com/about-us/>, accessed October 16, 2024).
- <sup>5</sup> Wiseman, Conversation with NCAI, January 24, 2024.
- <sup>6</sup> Wiseman, Conversation with NCAI, June 7, 2024. YP apprentices “must be able to pass all training and tests with a score of 80% or better. If any of these requirements are not met [they] will be dropped from training” (Yakama Power, “Apprenticeship Program – Lineman Announcement,” February 26, 2024 (<https://www.yakamapower.com/Linesman%20Job%20Announcement%202-26-2024.pdf>, accessed October 16, 2024). According to Wiseman, setting the standard this high ensures that those who graduate from the program “are keepers” (Conversation with NCAI, February 24, 2025).
- <sup>7</sup> Wiseman, Conversation with NCAI, January 24, 2024; Wiseman, Conversation with NCAI, February 24, 2025. It takes a journeyman apprentice five years and a lineman apprentice four years to complete the program (Wiseman, Conversation with NCAI, January 24, 2024). A YP lineman earns \$61 per hour on average, with apprentices starting out at \$36/hour (Wiseman, Conversation with NCAI, February 24, 2025). According to Wiseman, “Wages here for a lineman, with overtime, on a yearly basis, exceed \$100,000.00, and those wages just do not exist on this reservation, and yet now we have multiple people with those types of wages” (Office of Indian Energy Policy and Programs, “Transcript for 2018 Tribal Energy June Webinar: Evaluating Tribal Utility Authority Opportunities,” June 27, 2018 (<https://www.energy.gov/indianenergy/downloads/2018-tribal-energy-june-webinar-evaluating-tribal-utility-authority>, accessed October 16, 2024)). YP monitors, adjusts, and pays industry prevailing wages “to compete with other area employers for the high-demand talent we train” (Wiseman, Conversation with NCAI, January 24, 2024).
- <sup>8</sup> YP, *General Council and Consumer Report for FY 2024*, 2024, slide 3. As Wiseman explains, when we “design, capitalize, and launch new utility projects, we first hire established labor, and then backfill with apprentices once they complete our program” (Conversation with NCAI, January 24, 2024).
- <sup>9</sup> Wiseman, Conversation with NCAI, January 21, 2020. Pursuant to a Yakama Tribal Council resolution, Yakama Power also “embraces a buy-from-your-own approach, using the Tribal Transportation Program and other tribal subcontractors for construction jobs, and purchasing fuel from Yakama’s gas stations and lumber from Yakama Forest Products” (NCAI, “Yakama Nation,” *Building Tribal Economies: A Decision-Framing Toolkit*, 2023, p. 33 (<https://cdn.sanity.io/files/raa5sn1v/production/3994200080fd1b4ce8873abf62abdd573ac29cbf.pdf/NCAI-Tribal-Economies-Toolkit.pdf>, accessed February 26, 2025)).
- <sup>10</sup> Wiseman, Conversation with NCAI, June 7, 2024.